A Sociocultural Approach to the Study of Motivation and Attitudes
towards the Learning of Mandarin Chinese in the U.S.:
Secondary School Students’ Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

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This qualitative case study focused on exploring non-Asian students’ and their parents’
perspectives on the students’ Chinese language learning experiences. It aimed to provide a better
understanding of what motivates secondary school level students in the U.S. to learn Chinese, as
well as their attitudes towards the Chinese language, the Chinese culture, and Chinese speakers.
The purpose of the study was to provide comprehensive pictures of what learning the Chinese
language might mean to secondary school level students.

Ten non-Asian secondary school students who were studying Mandarin Chinese in New
York City constituted the target population. The secondary target population was their parents.
The data collection methods included interviews, the review of documents, and a focus group.
Content analysis was used to analyze the interview transcripts, and the data were collected,
interpreted and analyzed by applying a sociocultural constructivist framework and the multiple-
leveled Communication Ecological Model.

The findings showed that the economic power of China and the national security
establishments of the U.S. affect the motivation and attitudes of non-Asian secondary level
school students towards learning Mandarin at the macro level. At the meso level, families,
schools, teachers, peers, extracurricular Mandarin programs, the presence of local and overseas
Chinese speaking communities, and media are found to support students’ Mandarin learning.
Overall positive attitudes towards the Chinese language, the Chinese culture, and Chinese speakers were reported by students at the micro level. Investing in learning Mandarin with the goal of communicating effectively was mentioned by all students in the present study. Parents also reported positive attitudes towards their children learning Mandarin and held positive beliefs about the necessity of learning about both the Chinese language and its culture. Students and parents all emphasized the utility of Mandarin. In terms of the interaction between the micro level and the meso level, the data showed that in the initial period of Mandarin learning, schools and parents play a significant role, thus overshadowing any student based initiative. A second finding was that across the cases of secondary students, two patterns associated with sustaining their involvement in Mandarin learning were found. I termed the first, the agentic pattern and the second, the traditional institutional pattern. In the agentic pattern, students attend Mandarin classes operated by different educational institutions, but they also exercise agency in non-instructional settings to access additional linguistic and interactional resources. In the traditional institutional pattern, despite access to spontaneous interactional resources, students continue to be mainly active in Mandarin language socialization in instructional settings.

The present study indicates that students manage to sustain involvement in Mandarin learning because the possibility of becoming a proficient Mandarin speaker is supported by the multiple communities where they have memberships. It is hoped that through its sociocultural approach this qualitative case study can contribute to the present gap in the L2 motivation and attitudes research and can provide research directions for other less commonly taught languages.
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Through the writing of this doctoral dissertation, I have gained a new perspective regarding the purpose of education and the meaning of research. This will undoubtedly help guide the directions that I will take in my future life journey.
To my father, Dr. Shengzhong Lin, with love.
Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

I have always been passionate about foreign language learning and have an ambition to acquire as many languages as possible. So far, I am trilingual and have acquired two additional languages in instructional settings. My interest in Mandarin Chinese education, however, did not start until I became a Chinese instructor while attending graduate school in the United States (U.S.). The students in my first class were mainly non-Asian. Teaching non-Asian students helped me to develop a new perspective on Mandarin Chinese. Even though I will never be able to have a non-native speaker’s perspective on Mandarin learning, as Mandarin Chinese is my mother tongue, I have acquired a new way of thinking about Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language in the context of my teaching Mandarin Chinese to non-native speakers in the U.S. I have specifically observed that Mandarin Chinese is not really easy to learn, especially when the students have no exposure to this language at home. I have seen the struggles of my students. Nonetheless, I have also felt their enthusiasm.

As a result, I developed different curricula and classroom activities to facilitate the acquisition of the Chinese language and aspects of the Chinese culture in K-16 classrooms; but while my accomplishments were recognized institutionally, I felt this was not enough. It was not enough to help students become life-long learners of Chinese solely from my interactions with the students both from the perspective of being a teacher, as well as a Chinese speaker. In my definition of being a life-long learner of Chinese, I believe life-long Chinese learning is not only about acquiring Chinese languages (Mandarin plus other dialects), but also about acquiring knowledge about all other aspects of the Chinese culture. Constantly having to use English has
enabled me to specifically develop multiple perspectives within my own life and I want to enable similar experiences for L2 (second language/foreign language) students. I want them to specifically understand others in our global community and to reflect thoughtfully on their own worlds. For those students who are truly interested in learning the language and culture, I wanted to find ways to push them further. I wanted to know who else could give them a hand along the way. Who else could be key players in this process? How could the students be supported to further their Mandarin lives in an English dominant environment? I believed students would have a lot to say concerning whose support assisted them during the L2 learning process and how this worked for them. I felt their voices would be indispensable as they are the individuals actively engaged in acquiring knowledge about and in the new language. My wondering thoughts eventually led me to conduct this dissertation that focuses on researching the meaning secondary level students ascribe to Mandarin Chinese learning, and how this can be understood both within and across each student’s sociocultural context.

**Statement of the Problem**

With ever-increasing globalization, language skills are becoming increasingly important and are highly necessary for those who want to keep pace with the global community. According to the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), learning a foreign language may help a learner to communicate in that language, gain knowledge and understanding of other cultures that use that language, connect to additional bodies of knowledge, develop insight into the nature of language and the concept of culture, and participate in multilingual communities at home and around the world (ACTFL, 1996).

In 2006, President Bush announced the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI), whose main goals are to expand the number of Americans mastering critical need languages and
to increase the number of advanced level speakers in foreign languages. The under preparation of American citizens with foreign language skills was recognized in the following way:

Deficits in foreign language learning and teaching negatively affect our national security, diplomacy, law enforcement, intelligence communities and cultural understanding. It prevents us from effectively communicating in foreign media environments, hurts counter-terrorism efforts, and hamstrings our capacity to work with people and governments in post-conflict zones and to promote mutual understanding. Our business competitiveness is hampered in making effective contacts and adding new markets overseas. (Powell & Lowenkron, 2006, para. 3)

The initiative conveys the message that foreign language skills are essential for engaging foreign governments and peoples and are also fundamental to the economic competitiveness and security interests of the U.S. To address these needs, the NSLI plans to expand U.S. foreign language education from kindergarten through university and into the workforce, with new programs and resources. These NSLI programs target the Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Russian languages and the Indic, Persian, and Turkic language families (U.S. Department of Education & Office of Postsecondary Education, 2008).

Chinese has been listed as a critical need language under the NSLI umbrella because of America’s strategic business and security interests in the Chinese-speaking world. The People’s Republic of China is the most populated nation on earth with the second largest GDP. According to United States Census Bureau\(^1\), in 2011 the U.S. exported $103,879 million dollars worth of goods to China. This amount has increased by 2,694% since 1985. In the same year, the U.S. imported $399,335 million dollars worth of goods from China, an increase of 10,340% since

\(^1\) www.census.gov
1985. To provide a meaningful comparison, America’s exports for this same period to the five nations who use English as their national language (Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, and United Kingdom) was $375,550 million dollars, this increased 565% since 1985. In 2011, the U.S. imported $420,306 million dollars worth of goods from these countries, an increase of 475%.

It is evident that China, in addition to being one of the world’s oldest civilizations, is emerging as one of the world’s largest economic entities and one of the most important social and political powers in the process of globalization. Although Chinese is still categorized as one of the less commonly taught foreign languages (LCTLs) in the U.S., student enrollment has been increasing rapidly at every level. According to a 2007 enrollment survey conducted by the Modern Language Association of America, the number of college students studying Chinese increased 51% from 34,153 persons in the Fall of 2002 to over 51,582 persons in the Fall of 2006 (Furman, Goldberg, & Lusin, 2007).


2 Less commonly taught languages is a designation used in the United States for languages other than the three most commonly taught foreign languages in USU.S. public schools: Spanish, French, and German.
A 2009 national K-12 foreign language survey conducted by the Center for Applied Linguistics reported that Chinese instruction increased from 1% in 1997 to 4% in 2008 among secondary schools that teach foreign languages and from 0.3% in 1997 to 3% in 2008 among elementary schools (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2009).

The Chinese language has a unique tonal speech system and uses logograms\(^3\) for its orthographic writing system. Variations in tone indicate different meanings even if the spoken words are virtually identical except for the tonal levels of pronunciation. The writing system is logographic, which is fundamentally different from the Western alphabetic systems. The Foreign Service Institute and Defense Language Institute have categorized Chinese as one of the most difficult languages for English native speakers to learn. The Foreign Service Institute estimates that it takes more than three times more intensive instruction to reach the same level of language proficiency that would be achieved in French and Spanish over the same time period. The Defense Language Institute states that it takes more than a three-fold degree of intensive instruction to reach the same proficiency level.

\(^3\) A logogram, in contrast to a phonogram, is a grapheme which represents a word or a morpheme (the smallest meaningful unit of language).
### Category I: 23-24 weeks (575-600 hours)
Languages closely related to English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afrikaans</td>
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<td>Danish</td>
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<td>Dutch</td>
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<td>French</td>
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<td>Italian</td>
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<td>Norwegian</td>
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<td>Portuguese</td>
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<td>Romanian</td>
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<td>Spanish</td>
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<td>Swedish</td>
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### Category V: 88 weeks (2200 hours)
Languages which are exceptionally difficult for native English speakers

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<th>Language</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
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<td>Cantonese (Chinese)</td>
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<td>Mandarin (Chinese)</td>
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<td>Japanese</td>
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<td>Korean</td>
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**Figure 2.** Foreign Service Institute Language Difficulty Ranking. Source: Effective Language Learning (www.effectivelanguagelearning.com)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Difficulty Categories</th>
<th>Duration of Instruction</th>
<th>Languages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>26 weeks</td>
<td>French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>34 weeks</td>
<td>German, Indonesian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>48 weeks</td>
<td>Dari/Persian Farsi, Hebrew, Hindi, Russian, Serbian/Croatian, Tagalog, Thai, Turkish, Uzbek, Urdu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>64 weeks</td>
<td>Arabic (Levantine, Iraqi), Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Pashto</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3.** Defense Language Institute Language Learning Difficulty Scale. Source: Association of the United States Army (www.asua.org)

From an educational viewpoint, Gardner and Lambert (1972) made a distinction between foreign languages and other school subjects. They proposed that a foreign language is affected by a range of sociocultural factors such as language attitudes, cultural stereotypes, and even
geopolitical considerations. Motivational factors can override the aptitude effect in language learning achievement. Motivation is of great importance in second language acquisition (SLA) because motivation provides the primary impetus for initiating learning, and later it provides the driving force for sustaining the long-term learning process (Dörnyei, 1998, 2005).

Given the complexity of learning Chinese for English native speakers and the overriding effect of motivational factors in foreign language learning, a learner of the Chinese language needs to be highly motivated to ensure the achievement of proficiency in a language, in addition to having the assistance of appropriate curricula and good teaching. What factors contribute towards motivating students to persist with language learning remains to be uncovered. Globalization has however, opened up greater opportunities for people to come into contact, whether face-to-face or via electronic media, and with this has come new linguistic and cultural challenges. The question “What do the experiences of learning Chinese as a foreign language (FL) mean to students in the context of U.S.?” This is the question I presently explored. My hope is that my findings will provide insightful information and suggest educational implications so that students will be better prepared for this age of globalization, particularly with respect to Mandarin Chinese learning.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was thus to explore students’ (and their parents’) perspectives concerning their Chinese learning experiences, which had been co-constructed by the stakeholders at multiple levels. By stakeholders what I mean is that children are supported by their adult world in the form of families and institutions. The stakeholders are the students, their parents, and the institutions they participate in. I explored what motivates U.S. secondary students to learn Chinese; what their attitudes to the Chinese language, culture, and
speakers would be; and how they and their parents would perceive the supports they received and what had influenced their sustained motivation to learn Chinese. I aimed to gain a variety of pictures of what it meant to them to learn Chinese.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study investigated L2 motivation and attitudes using a sociocultural constructivist’s framework. I adopted the stance that L2 acquisition could be characterized as constructive within a sociocultural context. In the worldview of social constructivism, individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences – meanings directed toward certain objects or things. The subjective meanings “are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals’ lives” (Creswell, 2007, p. 21). As Guba and Lincoln (2005) stated, “[t]he meaning-making activities themselves are of central interest to social constructionists/constructivists, simply because it is the meaning-making/sense-making/attributional activities that shape action (or inaction)” (p. 264). While constructivism views the learner as an active participant engaging in meaning-making activities, socioculturalism views the learner and learning as situated in a social plane where learning emerges within the context of cultural practices. Vygotsky (1978), who is widely recognized as the founder of sociocultural theory, asserted that learning occurs when more knowledgeable members of a group engage in social mediation to bring others into the cultural practices. According to Vygotsky (1978), “Any function in the child’s cultural development appears ... in two planes. First, it appears in the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First, it appears between people, as an inter-psychological category, and then within the child as an inter-psychological category” (p. 90). Vygotsky believes that individuals construct new knowledge as
they internalize concepts appropriated through participation in social activities. From a sociocultural perspective, learners’ cognitive processes are significantly influenced by the social interaction and cultural milieu (Komin, 1990; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Rueda & Dembo, 1995; Sue & Okazaki, 1990; Todd, 1995; Weiner, 1991; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). The interdependence of cognitive and sociocultural activities implies that learning does not occur in a vacuum. It is a multileveled process co-constructed by the learner and other individuals in the learner’s immediate and broader sociocultural context.

It is the meaning-making of engagement in cultural practices through social mediation that formed the center of my study. I specifically adopted the Communication Ecological Model (CEM) developed by Giles, Katz, and Myers (2006), which informed the way in which I collected, interpreted, and analyzed the data. The CEM is a multileveled theoretical and methodological model. At the micro level, individuals develop variations in attitudes to language through information-gathering processes. They are influenced by interpersonal networks such as family and friends, local media, and community organizations at what is called the meso level. A variety of societal influences at the macro level, inevitably affect the shape and form of various features at the local level. In between, communication action contexts exist at the meso-macro level, and comprise local features that can constrain or enable the communicative action and are a combination of certain feature types: such as the physical features of where the communication occurs, the individual’s psychological features, certain socio-economic features, and technological features. The levels of analysis here is one where a variety of factors interact with each other and their relationship is not unidirectional in that there is always “an ongoing (re)negotiation that occurs inter- and intra-individually, against a backdrop of local features and resources” (p. 42).
I also made several poststructuralist assumptions that focused on “language as the locus of social organization, power and individual consciousness” (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 282). In response to structuralism, poststructuralist theories of language reject the idea that language learning is simply a gradual individual process of internalizing the set of rules, structures, and vocabulary of a standard language. Rather, as argued by Bakhtin whose work has become very influential through the poststructuralist movement, it is a process of struggling to use language in order to participate in specific speech communities (as cited in Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 416). My specific assumptions in conducting my study were the following:

I assumed the multilingual reality of the contemporary world as a given, and saw all individuals as users of multiple linguistic resources and as members of multiple communities of practice. Instead of viewing L2 users as motivated by the desire to acculturate to a particular group, I considered L2 users as seekers of multiple memberships in multicultural communities that are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Rather than viewing them as failed native speakers, I made the assumption that L2 users are legitimate speakers in their own right. They do not play the passive role of L2 learners in their communities of practice, but construct and reconstruct their identities while using L2. They exercise their agency through social mediation as they attempt to engage themselves in communities of practice. Thus, by no longer assuming the conventional distinction between the social and the individual, I examined the links between the social and the individual to highlight their perceptions concerning access to linguistic resources and interactional opportunities.

I applied the constructs of investment and imagined communities to the analysis of my data. The concept of investment (Norton Peirce, 1995) is used to describe the practice that if learners invest in a L2, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of
symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital. Symbolic resources refer to such resources as language, education, and friendship, whereas material resources refer to capital goods, real estate, and money. The term cultural capital refers to the knowledge and modes of thought that characterize different classes and groups in relation to specific sets of social forms, according to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977). Although Norton made the connection that the return on investment must be seen as commensurate with the effort expended on learning the second language, Norton (2000) emphasized the difference between investment and instrumental motivation:

The conception of instrumental motivation presupposes a unitary, fixed, and ahistorical language learner who desires access to material resources that are the privilege of target language speakers. The notion of investment, on the other hand, conceives of the language learner as having a complex social history and multiple desires. The notion presupposes that when language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with target language speakers, but they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Thus an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner’s own identity, an identity which is constantly changing across time and space. (pp. 10-11)

Drawing on Lave and Wenger’s (1991) view that learning usually takes place as a result of the individuals’ engagement in immediately accessible communities – communities of practice, Norton (2001) expands the motivations for learning to connect the learner’s future affiliations with his/her current learning by introducing the construct of imagined communities to the field of second language learning (SLA). According to Kanno and Norton (2003), “Imagined

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4 Instrumental motivation, one prominent motivation component from Gardner’s (1985) socio-educational model, involves learning the target language for a practical purpose in order to gain a benefit.
communities refer to groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination” (p. 241). They suggested that imagined communities might even have a stronger impact on learners’ current actions and investment than those in which they engage on a daily basis. Because learners’ affiliations with imagined communities might affect their learning trajectories, I presently applied the constructs of investment and imagined communities to my examination of how student and parent participants made sense of the students’ Mandarin learning experiences.

**Research Questions**

Given the background of the steady growth in the enrollment of individuals seeking to learn Chinese and the difficulty of learning the language, this study intended to address the following questions reflecting the multiple levels involved in examining this topic:

1. How does the social context in which students live provide motivation for them to take on Mandarin Chinese\(^5\) learning?

2. What does it mean to secondary level students to learn Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language in the U.S.?
   
   2.1. What are the variations of motivation for students to learn Mandarin Chinese?
   
   2.2. How do students of Mandarin Chinese describe their attitudes towards the Chinese language\(^6\), culture, and speakers?

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\(^5\) In this study, Mandarin Chinese (shortened as Mandarin) refers to the official language of the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of China (also known as Taiwan) and one of the four official languages of Singapore. It is a standardized form of spoken Chinese based on the Beijing dialect and one of the six official languages of the United Nations. When I mean both the spoken and written forms, the term Chinese is used.

\(^6\) The Chinese language is a language or language family originally spoken by the Han Chinese in China. It refers to a language family consisting of varieties in both spoken and written forms, used by people in the Greater China Region (Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan) and by overseas Chinese communities.
2.3. How do their parents describe their attitudes towards their children learning Mandarin Chinese?

**Significance of the Study**

This study provides four significant contributions to the field. First of all, by adopting a sociocultural approach, this study contributes to the theoretical gap in L2 motivation and attitude research. Gardner and Lambert’s (1959) original research question still largely influences the way in which motivation is conceived and investigated: namely, as a measurable individual difference variable in L2 learning (Ushioda, 2001). While the components of the motivational construct and the range of relationships investigated may have evolved substantially over the years, it is Gardner’s (1985) socio-educational model that has predominantly influenced the field. As a result, even when there have been shifts of focus in the field, empirical studies have mainly examined motivation and attitudes based on an examination of individual L2 learners as the unit of analysis. Little attention has been paid, with exceptions of Bartram (2010) and Torres-Guzmán, Exteberria-Sagastume, and Intxausti’s (2011) studies, to the sociocultural context in which interpersonal processes occur. Building on their studies, this study moves beyond the individual characteristic orientation towards integrating the sociocultural context into the examination of the L2 motivation and attitudes of the sample studied. The social milieu and SLA contexts were proposed by Gardner (1985) to represent two of four classes of influential variables in the context of L2 learning. While the later research influenced by Gardner (1985) focused on the individual characteristics of the learners, the research that emerged failed to address those two variables fully. This present study attempted to illuminate the roles these two variables play in the L2 learning process and how they are related to motivation and attitudes towards L2 learning. The sociocultural approach adopted by this researcher helped to provide a
sound basis for analyzing the context in which individual learners and the social world around them were linked with regard to how the social world offered access to linguistic and interactional resources and how these resources were appropriated by the individual learners. This study was also designed to serve as a model endeavor in regards to advocating for a multiplicity of approaches in future research paradigms.

The second contribution this study made was that this study provided a forum for learners to construct their individual learning experiences, which is not easily accommodated within the dominant quantitative tradition in the L2 motivation and attitudes research. The inquiry specifically supports the benefit of conducting qualitative studies on this topic because this approach helped the researcher to gain unique knowledge of how the students in the present study made sense of their learning experiences. In order to study motivation and attitudes from the perspective of Mandarin learning as a socially mediated process, the qualitative methodology presently used thus allowed the researcher to untangle the complexity of the individual’s sociocultural histories, and to make meaning of this, which is not easily achieved through quantitative methods. This study thus moves away from the exclusive reliance on self-report questionnaires and correlational analyses and illustrates the value of qualitative methodology in the field of L2 motivation and attitudes research.

Furthermore, it contributes to the research field directly through the description and discussion of foreign language learning that was obtained, thus filling an important gap in the current literature. In addition, very few studies have been conducted to examine motivation and attitudes towards the learning of less commonly taught languages (LCTLs), including Mandarin, that are linguistically distant from English (Husseinali, 2006; Samimy & Tabuse, 1992; Sung & Padilla, 1998; Weger-Guntharp, 2006; Wen, 1997). Even when these have been conducted, the
findings have focused largely on heritage learners, resulting in there being almost no findings related to non-heritage learners. The decision to exclusively use non-Asian Mandarin learning students as a sample enabled this present study to shed light on the reasons why these learners were able to sustain their long term involvement in L2 learning. The findings of the study go beyond non-heritage learners alluding to the novelty of learning Chinese in comparison to other languages (Weger-Guntharp, 2006). Based on the perceptions of participants, the study documents the details of Mandarin related teaching/learning activities that occur in instructional and non-instructional settings, students and parents’ views on current Mandarin programs and their suggestions on how to improve them, plus their expectations of Mandarin learning, and how societal changes impact people’s choices through their interpersonal networks.

Lastly, this study provides data that have some important educational ramifications. That is, the findings provide a rich description of students and parents’ voices with respect to existing policies and strategies in promoting and implementing Mandarin programs and this may help to shed light on program development of other LCTLs. Especially regarding non-heritage learners, this study offers some insight into the rationales behind their sustained involvement. The research can hence expand the existing body of knowledge to help students, parents, teachers, school administrators and policy makers achieve a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the current L2 learning situation and ways to facilitate motivational and attitudinal development in order to sustain the learners’ involvement in language learning. It is likely to offer some implications to the teaching field as well, where the search for effective practices and strategies to build a pipeline of LCTL learning is still in an exploratory stage. As the study is likely to contribute to the development of curriculum and instruction that conform to students’ backgrounds, I hope, as a teacher, that other teachers can assist their students to become more
capable in contributing through their participation in a Chinese linguistic community to the needs of a global society.
Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following research review, the focus will be divided into three sections. The first section will provide a historical account of L2 motivation research by those with scholarly interests in the individual characteristics of learners. In the second section, research using a sociocultural lens, as an alternative approach to studying L2 motivation and attitudes will be reviewed. Studies and findings of less commonly taught languages in the setting of the U.S. will be discussed in the last section.

Focusing on Individual Characteristics of Learners:

A Historical Account of L2 Motivation Research

The Social Psychological Period

The initial impetus in L2 motivation research came from social psychologists working in Canada, most notably from Robert Gardner, Wallace Lambert, and their associates. In 1956 when they began their research it was generally agreed that learning another language involved intelligence and verbal ability. A study carried out by Gardner and Lambert (1959) demonstrated that language aptitude and motivation were both related to achievement in French among 75 Canadian English-speaking high school students. Their study showed that motivation for language learning, defined as a combination of goal-directed effort and desire, predicted language achievement at a level similar to the predictive value of language aptitude. It was one of the first demonstrations of the role of social psychology in language learning. It opened the field of L2 learning to a distinctly social psychological perspective, with a focus on attitudes, affect, intergroup relationships and motives.
Gardner’s (1985) socio-educational model, whose tenets have been studied for over 40 years, has been widely accepted in the language learning area. The empirically based key construct from this model, *integrative motive* or *integrative motivation* as it was termed in later versions of the model, has been shown to have an effect on language achievement. It consisted of three subcomponents: (a) integrativeness, (b) attitudes toward the learning situation, and (c) motivation. The first subcomponent, integrativeness, is defined by attitudes reflecting a genuine desire to meet, communicate with, take on characteristics of, and possibly identify with another group. The second subcomponent, attitudes toward the learning situation, assesses how much language students enjoy their teacher and course. The third one, motivation, was the engine that drove the system, and it was defined as the individual having a desire to learn the language, enjoyment of the task, and putting forward an effort toward learning. The first two subcomponents combine to support motivation and motivation supports the behaviors necessary to learn a language.

In order to measure the relationships between the variables proposed in his socio-educational model, the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) was developed by Gardner (1985). The validity of Gardner’s model has been put to the test using AMTB on several occasions with participants of different ages in different contexts (e.g., Baker & Macintyre, 2000; Gardner, Day, & Macintyre, 1992; Gardner, Lalonde, Moorcroft, & Evers, 1987; Gardner & Macintyre, 1991; Gardner & Macintyre 1993; Gardner, Tremblay, & Masgoret, 1997; Gliksman, Gardner, & Smythe, 1982; Masgoret, Bernaus, & Gardner, 2001; Tremblay & Gardner, 1995). In general, the AMTB has been widely tested showing satisfactory reliability and validity (Gardner & Gliksman, 1982; Gardner & Macintyre, 1993). It is a useful self-report instrument and a scientific tool both in terms of its presentation and its content. It is a “multicomponential
motivation questionnaire made up of over 130 items, which has been shown to have good psychometric properties, including construct and predictive validity” (Dörnyei, 2005, pp. 70-71).

Gardner’s theory has been highly acclaimed among researchers and practitioners. However, the popular interpretation of his theory is different from the actual theory because of its simplification into a dichotomous model. The two prominent motivation components are integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation was defined following Gardner’s (1985) model. Instrumental motivation, which is not part of Gardner’s core theory, involves learning the target language for a practical purpose in order to gain a benefit from acquiring the target language, such as getting a better job or entering a better school. This misrepresentation of Gardner’s theory as the sum of integrative and instrumental motivation has been pervasive. Ely (1986) criticized the integrative-instrumental dichotomy suggesting that it is not always easy to distinguish these two types of motivation and questioning whether the integrative/instrumental conceptualization captures the full spectrum of student motivation. The findings of motivational factors as presented in a dichotomous fashion appeared to be inconsistent. It was the dominance of the integrative/instrumental dichotomy interpretation of Gardner’s socio-educational model that led to the occurrence of the second phase of L2 motivation research.

**The Cognitive-Situated Period**

This period started with the influential article by Crookes and Schmidt (1991) followed by several other articles that mark the beginning of the so-called educational shift. Crookes and Schmidt (1991) argued that the socio-educational model had been so dominant that other approaches to the study of motivation had not seriously been considered. They sought to “encourage a program of research that will develop from, and be congruent with the concept of
motivation that teachers are convinced is critical for SL success” (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991, p. 502). In the 1990s, the main focus shifted from examining social attitudes to looking at the classroom reality, and identifying and analyzing classroom-specific motives.

Based on the discovery of a tripartite motivation construct among Hungarian EFL learners, from Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels’s (1994) study, Dörnyei (1994a) developed a three-level framework of motivation. The “language level” is primarily defined by the concepts of integrative and instrumental motivation. The “learner level” describes individual differences among learners using familiar motivational concepts such as need for achievement and self-confidence. The “learning situation level” is divided into course-specific, teacher-specific, and group-specific motivational components. It is the learning situation level that most clearly distinguishes Dörnyei’s (1994a) approach from Gardner’s (1985).

Oxford and Shearin (1994) also argued that Gardner’s socio-educational model is limited in scope and must be expanded “outward” to include a number of other motivational variables. They listed four conditions that impede the full understanding of students’ motivation: lack of consensus on a definition of motivation, the difference between second and foreign language situations, key motivational variables are missing from the models, and teachers do not understand their students’ real motivation for learning.

An interesting series of responses to the articles mentioned above (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1994a; Oxford & Shearin, 1994) appeared in the Modern Language Journal in 1994. Oxford (1994), Dörnyei (1994b), and Gardner and Tremblay (1994) each attempted to elaborate on their prior contributions and clear up misconceptions. It was clear that they all valued Gardner’s socio-educational model, but wished to explore other areas of motivation. Gardner and Tremblay (1994) and Dörnyei (1994b) made a call for empirical research to test the
hypotheses, intuitions, and potential applications of any expanded model of language learning motivation.

Self-determination theory and attribution theory were part of these cognitively-situated efforts in mainstream educational psychology. Both had an influence on L2 motivation research and translated into investigations under those paradigms. Self-determination theory focuses on various types of intrinsic and extrinsic motives. Intrinsic motivation refers to the motivation to engage in an activity because that activity is enjoyable and satisfying to do, whereas extrinsically motivated behaviors are those actions carried to achieve some instrumental end, such as earning a reward or avoiding a punishment (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Relating the various intrinsic/extrinsic components established in motivational psychology to orientations developed in L2 research, Noels, Pelletier, Clément, and Vallerand (2000) conducted a study of 159 students registered in an English psychology class at a French-English bilingual university to examine how the learners’ level of self-determination is affected by various classroom practice. It was found that the instrumental and the external regulation scales correlated in similar ways with the antecedent variables of perceived autonomy and competence, as well as the consequence variables of intention to pursue language study and anxiety. They also developed a valid and reliable measuring instrument, the Language Learning Orientations Scale, to assess the various components of self-determination theory in L2 learning. Noels (2001) applied self-determination theory to the examination of the relationship between student autonomy and the language teacher’s communicative style. The survey results from 322 lower-level Spanish learning students showed that the more controlling the teacher was perceived to be, the less the students felt they were autonomous agents in the learning process, and the lower their intrinsic motivation became.
The analysis of language attributions also appeared in the L2 motivation field in the 1990s. Attribution theory argues that subjective impressions of past successes or failures shape the motivational component of future action. Its significance primarily lies in the fact that it manages to link people’s past experiences with their future achievement efforts. Ushioda’s (1996a,1998, 2001) study of Irish learners of French revealed that positive motivational thinking involved two attributional patterns: attributing positive L2 outcomes to personal ability or other internal factors and attributing negative L2 outcomes to temporary shortcomings that might be overcome. William, Burden, and Al-Baharna (2001) conducted research on Arab students’ English language learning success and failure by collecting data from both teachers and students. Their finding further confirmed the importance of motivational-enhancing attributions in school children’s perceptions of learning. They also found that students’ cultural background played a role in forming some attributional categories that the students cited. Graham (2004) conducted a qualitative study on the attitudes of English students aged 16-19 years towards French and the reasons they felt to be behind in their level of achievement. The findings revealed that in general, students who attributed success to their effort, high ability, and effective learning strategies had higher levels of achievement. Students intending to continue French learning after age 16 were more likely than non-continuers to attribute success to these factors. Low ability and task difficulty were the main reasons for lack of achievement in French. The researcher argued that learners’ self-concept and motivation might be enhanced through approaches that encourage learners to explore causal links between the strategies they employ and their academic performance, thereby changing the attributions they make for success or failure.
The Process-Oriented Period

The additional features of motivation’s dynamic character and temporal variation began to draw researchers’ attention during this period. A process-oriented approach was called for in order to address the research issues concerning the temporal dimension of motivation, which is particularly important because of the ongoing changes of student motivation over time. In an effort to describe motivational evolution, Dörnyei and Otto (1998) developed a process model. There are three phases in this process: (a) Preactional stage: generating motivation, (b) Actional stage: maintaining and protecting motivation, and (c) Postactional stage: retrospective evaluation of how things went. This model offers a potential way to interpret the manifold motivational factors that affect the student’s learning behavior in classroom settings. However, as Dörnyei (2005) pointed out, the actional process is not easily definable and the actional process does not occur in relative isolation but involves multiple engagements at the same time in a number of different activities.

There have been several reports discussing motivational changes documented in empirical studies. Koizumi and Matsuo (1993) reported a definite decrease in attitudinal and motivational attributes of 296 English learning 7th graders in Japan. Tachibana, Matsukawa, and Zhong (1996) conducted research with 801 Chinese and Japanese students and also found that the students’ interest in learning English declined from junior to high school in both countries. Inbar, Donitsa-Schmidt, and Shohamy (2001) administered questionnaires to 1690 7th graders in Israel and found a consistent and significant small drop in motivation for all groups in all motivational dimensions over a period of five months. Williams, Burden, and Lanvers (2002) echoed the finding of a decrease in motivation with age after analyzing the data collected from 228 British students in years 7, 8, and 9 regarding learning German and French as a FL.
Masgoret, Tennant, and Mihic (2004) observed motivational changes over an academic year and found a general tendency for the scores on the measures of language attitudes and motivation to decrease from the fall to the spring among Canadian college students learning French.

Ghenghesh (2010) supported the empirical finding mentioned above that L2 motivation decreases with age in the sample of 144 Arabic learning students from grades 6-10.

From a process-oriented approach, in her already mentioned study, Ushioda (1996b) conducted a related research project for her unpublished doctoral dissertation addressing aspects of motivational change. At the qualitative end of the spectrum, the investigator’s research focus was “not on whether the more motivated students prove to be the more successful, but on how students differ in the way they value and interpret goals and how such differences in motivational thinking may affect their involvement in learning” (Ushioda, 2001, p. 97). The researcher conducted interviews with a group of Irish university learners of French twice within an interval of 16 months, between December 1991 and the spring of 1993. Only 14 out of 20 students were available for the second stage interviews. The first interview was open-ended and focused on students’ general motivation to learn French while the second was more structured and compromised nine questions related to the more dynamic aspects of language learning motivation.

Ushioda (1996a) focused on the dynamic nature of L2 motivation. Ushioda found that traditional quantitative research methods were not well suited for capturing fluctuations in motivation, and explored qualitative developments in the subject’s motivational experience over time as well as the contextual factors that influenced and shaped the dynamic concept of motivation. After realizing the binary classification of motivational gain and loss was insufficient for analyzing the information gathered through data, she adopted a new classification for this
analysis including: qualitative developments, overriding short-term incentives, clearer definition of L2-related personal goals, other priorities now affecting L2 motivation, personal crises which have affected L2 motivation, and stable motivational elements. A detailed content analysis of the data indicated that most subjects defined their motivation in terms of a positive learning history and intrinsic enjoyment. Ushioda (1998) also found that participants with more successful learning histories principally defined motivation in terms of their positive learning experiences, whereas participants with less successful learning pasts tended to define motivation in terms of short-term specific goals and intentions. Effective motivational thinking might not result in successful achievement, but in continuous involvement. The findings from Ushioda (1998) seemed to support the view that cognitive processes play an important role in shaping the relationship between learning experience and motivation. Ushioda (2001) provided a more detailed description of the various motivational classifications and provided a set of qualitative analyses. She emphasized the learners’ internal thought processes as the focus of the research and discussed how to usefully complement the predominant quantitative research tradition with a more qualitative approach. It was argued that the shape of students’ motivational thinking and beliefs affected their involvement in learning and that qualitative methods of analysis were best suited to tap into this dynamic internal process.

**Co-constructing the Language Learning Experience:**

**An Alternative Sociocultural Approach**

All of the studies mentioned above primarily focused on the individual characteristics of the learners and looked at how motivation and attitudes were related to certain language learning outcomes. There was an educational shift to direct L2 motivation research to add an account of language learning situations. However, very few studies have looked at the role of motivation
and attitudes in L2 learning through a sociocultural lens, to expand the framework in consideration of the larger context where individual learners are situated in their lives.

Rueda and Moll (1994) offered their critique by claiming that many of the studies were “limited in that they conceptualize motivation as an individual ‘in-the-head’ phenomenon, with little or no attention paid to the socio-cultural context and the interpersonal processes within which individual activity occurs” (p. 117). McGroarty (2001) similarly pointed out the importance of the sociocultural context because deciding what to do or what not to do is shaped and channeled by one’s cultural framework of beliefs and practices that are shared with significant others. Cargile, Giles, Ryan, and Bradac (1994) referred to the range and scope of factors affecting language attitudes:

Superimposed upon any immediate social situation are several other factors affecting language attitudes, and these can be characterized as ‘cultural’. … More specially, they include the political, historical, economic and linguistic realities that exert a large influence over the process of language attitude formation. (p. 226)

When Vygotsky (1978) considered the unit of analysis was no longer the individual alone, but included the child and more capable others engaged in meaningful activities, when Wertsch (1991) claimed that utterances must be understood in their sociocultural context, not as isolated features of purely syntactical or phonological interest, they made clear their arguments that learning does not happen in a social vacuum. The interconnectedness of social and cognitive activities calls for a need to move beyond the individual learner towards considering the social, cultural, economic, political, and historical milieu in which learners are raised and socialized, in order to understand what motivates a learner.
Multileveling the formation of attitudes, Bartram (2010) conducted a cross-national study to describe the nature of the learners’ attitudes to modern foreign language learning (MFLL). He used a trinational comparative survey to study learners’ attitudes to learning French, German, and English as FLs at two schools in each country – England, Germany, and The Netherlands. Focusing on learners as the unit of analysis, he conducted a multi-stage qualitative survey among 411 students, aged 15-16, in three countries, preserving in his study the interpretative nature of the inquiry. He also examined and compared the learners’ perceptions of educational and sociocultural influences in the different contexts. His qualitative research design involved three data collection instruments. The first stage of data was collected from 411 students using a written word association prompt. Then half of the students generated written accounts of their attitudes and the factors they perceived to be influential at the second stage. At the final stage, 80 students took part in 14 focus group interviews.

The findings revealed educational and sociocultural influences on students’ attitudes towards MFLL in those three languages. In terms of what happened in the classroom, the findings suggested that classroom experience did not have any effect on students’ orientation towards MFLL. The data from the three countries also revealed a fairly broad consensus on pupil perceptions of good and bad practices. The teacher’s ability to explain clearly and repeatedly, to maintain discipline and order, and to ensure lesson variety in terms of the balance of activities and media involved were particularly valued in all three national settings. Bartram suggested that the data offered no evidence that English students are subjected to inferior language teaching when compared to Dutch and German students. He explained that part of the reason why more English students referred to discipline problems and classroom disruption as important factors may be due to the potential lack of conviction regarding the utility of MFLL. By arguing that the
effects of wider societal issues may be responsible for any differences in language motivation/competence, he described and compared student perceptions of societal attitudes to learning French, German and English in those three countries. Given that English students’ responses were consistently more negative overall than Dutch and German students, Bartram suggested that this might be due to the absence of an attitudinal motor in England that can counteract the awareness of the international status of English and how both might undermine the social motivation of native English speakers to learn other languages.

Regarding parental influences, the data were collected by asking students to describe their impressions of their parents’ attitudes. The findings supported an association between parental and student attitudes. The ways in which parents contributed to the construction of their children’s understanding of language importance, utility and status were particularly important, and were viewed as a key factor in comparison to the more positive attitudes demonstrated by the German students as opposed to the more negative orientations among the English students. The extent of parental language knowledge appeared to be an important additional factor. The attitudes of parents who had multiple language learning experiences were more supportive of their children learning other languages. By examining the perceptions of 295 French and German learners from those three countries, Bartram noted that English students revealed the most negative perceptions of peer attitudes and the most negative attitudes toward French and German. Because the views of parental, family and wider social attitudes were more positively perceived than peer views in each country, and several educational factors were evaluated much more positively by English students, in spite of their more negative overall orientations, Bartram argued that the dynamics of the peer group situation exerted a powerful influence over students’ attitudes towards MFLL. More specifically, peer influence operated through language choice in
relations to students factoring linguistic utility and social considerations. Bartram’s study also suggested that gender alone did not account for the more negative overall patterning of English student attitudes.

Torres-Guzmán, Exteberría-Sagastume, and Intxausti’s (2011) study on immigrant parental linguistic attitudes in the Basque Country was another study among the few adopting a sociocultural perspective. This group re-conceptualized and investigated language attitudes and motivations. They also placed their study in the context of the linguistic revitalization of a lesser-spoken language, Euskara, a Basque language. Three hundred immigrant parents within the Spanish Basque Country were surveyed and 26 of them with children between 6 to 8 years of age were interviewed, in order to identify the linguistic attitudes and motivations of these parents towards their children’s learning Euskara.

One of the significant contributions of their study was that they conceptualized attitudes and motivations as multileveled, relational, and dynamically constructed within individuals’ immediate and broader sociocultural context, rather than solely as characteristics of the individuals. They adopted a hybrid analytical methodology that included discourse analysis and theoretically based content analysis. When analyzing the data, they utilized the communication ecological model (CEM) developed by Giles, Katz, and Myers (2006). According to Giles et al., individual variations of existing language attitudes at the micro level are heavily influenced by local interpersonal networks and community information resources at the meso level. The societal influences at the macro level, inevitably, affect the shape and form of features at the local level. Torres-Guzmán et al. (2011) expanded the use of the CEM from its application in studying social interaction within conversations to studying the negotiated language attitudes and motivations of immigrant parents towards their children’s learning Euskara. They found that the
predominant motivation among immigrant parents was the immediate utility of Euskara within
the Basque Country. The study also suggested that family networks of support and the broader
social revitalization efforts at both local and national levels played an important role in
promoting the learning of Euskara among immigrant children.

Both Bartram (2010) and Torres-Guzmán et al. (2011) perceived the interdependence of
cognitive and sociocultural activities. In their studies, L2 learning was not considered a within-
child, context-independent phenomenon. Rather, it was considered a multileveled and dynamic
process co-constructed by the learner and other individuals in the learner’s immediate and
broader sociocultural context. Their ground breaking studies have helped to serve as pioneering
works designed to investigate L2 attitudes and motivation from a sociocultural perspective, and
additionally similar empirical studies are called for, giving the primary importance attributed to
contextual factors, in order to gain a better understanding of the role attitudes and motivation
play in L2 learning.

**L2 Motivation and Attitudes Research**

**in Learning Less Commonly Taught Languages in the U.S.**

In the context of the U.S., Walton (1992) defined the less commonly taught languages
(LCTLs) from the perspective of foreign language education as “all languages other than French,
German, and Spanish” (p. 1). In 2006, President Bush introduced the National Security
Language Initiative aimed at increasing the number of Americans learning foreign languages,
particularly of the critical-need languages, such as, Arabic, Russian, Farsi, Hindi, and Chinese. In
terms of their status in the international arena, three of these five languages (Arabic, Chinese,
and Russian) are among the six official/working languages of the United Nations. In regard to
the number of native speakers, four of these five languages (Chinese, Hindi, Arabic, and Russian) are among the top five languages used in the world (Comoire, Matthews, & Polinsky, 1997).

The following section will focus on less commonly taught non-Indo-European languages, which will include Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean – languages that are linguistically distant from English. All four languages are also considered the most difficult languages for native English speakers to acquire by the Foreign Service Institute. Therefore, further research on motivation and attitudes in these four languages will shed light on how learners can approach those languages in a motivated way in the context of U.S.

An extensive review of the literature (274 articles from Education Full Text using the keywords U.S., language motivation, language attitude and/or combinations from 1983 – 2013) did not uncover many studies focusing on learner motivation and attitudes in learning these four languages compared to studies in languages such as French, German, Spanish, and English as a second language (ESL). One of the first studies in this realm was related to the Japanese language. In this regard, Samimy and Tabuse (1992) investigated the relationships between the student’s affective variables and the student’s linguistic performance. Sixty-eight American college students in their beginning Japanese classes were given a survey that examined their attitudes, motivation, and classroom personality in both the fall and spring semesters. The researchers found support for their hypothesis that affective variables influenced learners’ performances as measured by final grades, test scores and homework. Motivation and attitudinal factors were critical in predicting students’ success in Japanese. Classroom personality factors such as risk-taking and discomfort were also found to be determinants of the students’ final grades. When the results of the fall semester were compared with those of the spring semester, negative changes in the students’ motivation and attitudes were observed. Based on these
findings, recommendations were made to enhance students’ motivation and attitudes towards learning Japanese.

Focusing on 120 learners of Arabic as a FL in an American university, Husseinali (2006) also employed survey research methods to investigate their initial motivation to learn Arabic. The research subjects were divided into two categories: heritage language (HL) learners and non-heritage language (NHL) learners. The HL learners consisted of students who came from an Arabic or Muslim family background. Students who were neither Arab nor Muslim were treated as NHL learners. Descriptive statistics were used to outline the initial motivations of each group. Inferential statistics (t tests) were used to analyze and compare the initial motivations of the two groups to each other.

The results indicated that these Arabic learners had a variety of orientations which were broadly grouped into three major types of orientations, namely instrumental orientations, identification orientations, and travel and culture orientations. Significant differences were found between HL and NHL learners on the first two types of orientations. It was found that NHL learners are significantly more motivated than HL learners to study Arabic for instrumental reasons, whereas HL learners are significantly more motivated than NHL learners to study Arabic for identification reasons. Regarding instrumental motivation, NHL learners are more motivated than HL learners to learn Arabic to get a job and HL learners are more motivated than NHL learners to learn Arabic to fulfill degree requirements. Husseinali suggested that HL learners could be more productive and more involved in L2 courses if the courses and/or classes are designed to address their identification needs. He also encouraged adequate exposure of political, religious, and gender aspects of Arab culture to students in Arabic learning classrooms.
Combining all three East Asian language programs together, Sung and Padilla (1998) conducted research that aimed to mainly study students’ motivations for learning Chinese, Japanese, and Korean as FLs in California public schools, as well as parents’ attitudes towards FL learning and their involvement in their child’s language study. Information was collected by means of questionnaires. At the beginning of the 1993-94 school year, 140 students from two elementary schools and 451 students from six high schools completed a questionnaire that consisted of three parts. Part 1 contained items comprising a scale of instrumental and integrative motivation for Asian language study, which was adapted from one used previously by Gardner (1985). Part 2 consisted of items that tapped other motives or reasons for studying specific Asian languages. Part 3 asked students to indicate the level of parental involvement in their FL study. Another questionnaire was completed by 847 parents regarding their attitudes toward FL learning in general and their level of involvement in their child’s language study.

Data collected from both students and parents were examined using factor analysis so that items that clustered together could be organized into scales for the purpose of contrasting different groups of respondents. Since there was no elementary Korean program in their study, the researchers carried out student group comparisons between Japanese and Chinese programs with respect to gender (males vs. females), grade level (elementary vs. high school), language program type (Japanese vs. Chinese), and ethnic heritage background. The findings revealed that elementary students were more motivated, overall, towards Asian language study than were older students. Elementary students also perceived their parents as more involved than did high school students. Comparisons were also conducted across three high school programs (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean). It was found that female students, regardless of grade level or language program type, reported significantly higher motivation to learn an Asian language than male
students. In terms of parent group, the researchers conducted similar comparisons between parents of elementary school students and parents of high school students in the Chinese and Japanese programs. The findings revealed that elementary school parents had more positive attitudes towards FL learning and were more involved in the child’s language study than were parents of high school students. Additionally, comparisons were also conducted with the parents in the three high school programs of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. No difference in attitudes or involvement was found based on parental gender.

In an effort to study learners from Asian and Asian-American backgrounds learning Mandarin Chinese, Wen (1997) separated and investigated the initial motivation of college students who chose to learn Mandarin Chinese and the motivation that encouraged them to continue their study beyond the beginning level. Using the expectancy model, her study also examined the interaction between the motivation and desired learning outcomes. The sample of the study was 77 Asian or Asian-American students enrolled in first- and second-year Chinese classes at two universities in the U.S. While most of them could speak or understand a Chinese dialect, they had little language background in Mandarin Chinese when they enrolled in beginning Chinese courses. A two-part questionnaire was used as the first instrument; the second instrument consisted of midterm and final examinations where their scores were converted to become a compound criterion variable. The first part of the questionnaire was adopted from the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (Gardner 1985) and the questionnaire developed by Ely (1986), with new items that were relevant to learning Chinese as a FL. The second part of the questionnaire, used to measure expectancy, was developed using the Mitchell (1974) method, incorporating the six desired outcomes of Chinese learning that were discovered from a preliminary study. Fifty-three first-year students had been learning Chinese for two months and
24 second-year students had been learning Chinese for 14 months when the questionnaire was administered.

Motivation of instrumentality, intrinsic motivation, expected learning strategies and efforts, and passivity toward requirements were found as a result of the factor analysis. It was reported that intrinsic motivation played an important role in enrolling students in Chinese classes while expectations of learning strategies and efforts were the motives that retained students at the intermediate level in the context of Chinese language learning. Based on the results of quantitative analysis, the researcher pointed out two implications. As passivity to the FL itself and to the course requirements correlated minimally or negatively with Chinese language attainment, she suggested the language requirement should be changed to one that measures how much students can use language to communicate, in order to maximize student learning. The second implication was that appropriate and realistic expectations of the learning task and of one’s own ability played an important role in starting and continuing Chinese.

Also studying college students in Chinese classes, Weger-Guntharp (2006) investigated both HL and NHL learners in the context of first semester Chinese classes at an American university. The participants were 25 students drawn from across four classes with both traditional FL learners/NHL learners and Chinese HL learners in a mixed classroom setting. She identified 8 Chinese HL learners, who had one or more parents speaking Chinese as their first language and who self-identified as taking Chinese classes in part because of their ethnic heritage. The three-phased data collection involved a short biographical data profile, which included a question about participants’ motivation for studying Chinese, an online adapted questionnaire, which included items about the learners’ attitudes towards learning Chinese, and then open-ended and informal interview sessions.
Although her study explored attitudinal differences between Chinese HL learners and NHL learners, the emphasis was placed heavily on Chinese HL learners in her analysis. The data revealed that a HL learner classroom profile consisted of at least three interwoven components – self, peer, and teacher. The data provided students’ accounts of parental influence, perceptions on activities involving group or pair interaction, and power relations between the learner and the teacher. The study suggested that a learner’s heritage was an important factor in that it affected the construction of a language learner’s identity, the co-construction of motivation, and influenced attitudes towards classroom activities. The findings of NHL learners were addressed in a limited fashion. In contrast to HL learners drawing on their backgrounds in Chinese language use to explain why Chinese will help them meet their economic and academic goals, NHL learners often alluded to the novelty of learning Chinese in comparison to other languages. Weger-Guntharp also argued that terms such as HL learner should be conceived of more flexibly, for the complexity of the individual backgrounds problematized the use of markers such as home-language use or place of birth from distinguishing HL learners from traditional FL learners/NHL learners.

As can be seen from the studies above, definitions of HL learners have not offered a clear picture. Wen (1997) did not use the term HL learner. Instead she identified research subjects as either having an Asian or Asian-American background. Both Husseiniali (2006) and Weger-Guntharp (2006) compared HL learners with NHL learners. However, their definitions of HL were different and context-specific. That is why Weger-Guntharp (2006) claimed that the complexity of individual backgrounds problematized the identification of HL learners. Kondo-Brown (2005) took a stance against the simple dichotomous comparison of HL versus FL students. Her study on differences in language skills between three Japanese HL learner
subgroups and FL learners showed how similar the language behaviors of a particular HL subgroup were to those of a traditional FL group. There is a need to clearly and carefully define which subgroup of the HL population is being studied in future HL research because of the "heterogeneous nature of the HL population" (Kondo-Brown, 2005, p. 575). The ambiguity of how the HL learner is defined led to the purposeful sampling of non-Asian Mandarin learning students in the current study.

**Summary**

From the review of literature, I came to acknowledge that the understanding of L2 motivation and attitudes has experienced different phases of development--from viewing it as a static construct to realizing its variability in nature, from focusing on the motivational and attitudinal dispositions of entire communities to analyzing how the motivational construct operates in actual learning situations. There is an abundance of studies in the literature suggesting the importance of motivation and attitudes in L2 learning. However, even though significant progress has been made in understanding motivation and attitudes and their relationship to classroom performance and academic achievement, there is some inadequacy in current prevalent theories and frameworks. There is a strong bias towards an individualistic orientation, with little attention to context or socio-cultural influences (Rueda & Moll, 1994). In the book entitled *Social Psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*, Gardner (1985) proposed that there were four classes of variables linked in a causal sequence in SLA: (a) the social milieu (cultural beliefs), which exerts some influence on (b) individual learner differences (intelligence, language aptitude, motivation, and situational anxiety), all of which affect different (c) SLA contexts (formal and informal experiences), which, in turn, determine the level of (d) successful outcomes (linguistic and
nonlinguistic). As Gardner’s original research on the role of motivation and attitudes also called for, it is important to address the impact of the sociocultural context on motivation and attitudes in L2 learning. No activity, no matter how individual it seems, occurs in absolute isolation from the social context within which it takes place and the social relationship with others involved. More empirical studies are clearly needed to address the complexities of language learning of specific populations taking into consideration the social, cultural, economic, political, and historical contexts of a defined time and space.

A review of the existing research also reveals what has been done in different subfields. In terms of the choice of subjects, much has been done among both SL and FL learner groups worldwide. In FL settings, a large proportion of the research has been conducted on learners of English. Because English is the world’s principal lingua franca, the attitudes towards it and English speaking communities, the motivation to learn it, and its wide availability and accessibility make its learning process different from other FL learning environments. The established instruments in the field need to be tested for validity in the FL context of other languages. In the context of learning LCTLs, there is a significant amount of literature on HL learners and some about the comparisons between HL and NHL learners. In HL and NHL learner combined studies, most investigate college students, partially for convenience reasons. As learners collaboratively engage/disengage in learning, research with a focus on NHL learners learning LCTLs will reveal a new picture of how motivation is initiated and sustained during language learning. Due to the complication of LCTLs to native English speakers and the expected length of time needed to master those languages, additional research focused on the topic will offer implications to the teaching field, where the search for effective practices and strategies to build a pipeline of LCTL learning is still in an exploratory stage. More research on
LCTLs at all levels of schooling is needed to be able to answer the related questions social scientists, educators, and policy makers have.

In terms of research methodology, there is a shift from employing overwhelmingly quantitative methods to examine L2 motivation and attitudes to the emergence of importance of qualitative work. Since the start of this field, quantitative research methods have been dominant and do offer powerful tools for examining the intangible motivational construct. The approach allows researchers to discover statistically significant relationships between certain factors and language learning outcomes, therefore contributing to our collective understanding of language attitudes and motivation across settings. For instance, Gardner’s AMTB has been widely tested and its validity is verified in general. However, research methods should be context-sensitive. Surveys and questionnaires should be adapted to research subjects’ particular learning situations. In the literature, there is a mixed reality regarding the appropriateness of quantitative instruments. There are studies which were reported to adapt questionnaires from previously conducted studies and to conduct pilot studies to test their validity. On the other hand, there are other studies where the validity of their instruments was not mentioned and the actual questionnaires were not included.

Several scholars (Syed, 2001; Ushioda, 2001; William et al., 2001) took the opportunity to challenge the dominant quantitative research paradigm by claiming the need for new methodologies to move away from the exclusive reliance on self-report questionnaires and correlational studies. van Lier (1996) suggested breaking away from the traditional paradigm and including a qualitative inquiry research design approach such as ethnographic research, case studies, and action research. In order to explore the learners’ internal process in relation to attitudes and motivation, the qualitative methods of analysis appear valid for capturing the
dynamic characteristics of that process. Ushioda’s (1996a, 1998, 2001) qualitative research has offered an example of how qualitative work can usefully complement quantitative research and help discover new interpretations of the seemingly same phenomena. Ushioda’s (1998) argument about less successful learners serves as one example. Ushioda stated that less successful learners seem to define their motivation in a qualitatively different way from more successful learners. They cannot be defined as being less motivated or even unmotivated by their negative learning experiences.

Quantitative and qualitative research methodologies share some overlap on how to look at the relationship among factors affecting motivation, motivation, and outcomes affected by motivation, however. Both paradigms identify these three categories and try to examine how they operate together during language learning. Quantitative research traditions tend to quantify outcomes to find cause-effect relationships. The most widely used outcome in the literature is language achievement, which is mainly measured by grades. Other outcomes include intended effort, language behavior, language choice, etc. Some scholars question the validity of correlational findings between motivational factors and language achievement as they argue that motivation supports the behaviors necessary to learn a language but not language achievement (Dörnyei, Csizér, & Németh, 2006). In qualitative research fashion, learners’ behavior and their involvement in learning are the main focus. In reviewing the literature, it was found that there was very little empirical research concerning the topic of L2 motivation and attitudes towards L2 learning that had used qualitative methods to better understand these issues. Quantitative and qualitative methodologies clearly offer two intrinsically different perspectives to explaining L2 motivation and attitudes. It was apparent from a review of the literature that research findings gained from a combination of quantitative research approaches would potentially neutralize the
shortcomings and limitations inherent in each paradigm, and help to provide a more holistic view of the motivation and attitudes of L2. That is, the gap in the literature revealed an obvious and urgent need for qualitative research applications that could help to uncover new and alternative interpretations for the field.
Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

This section includes a description of the rationale for employing the present qualitative case study approach, the role of the researcher, and a detailed description of the participants. The data collection procedures and data analysis procedures are explained. The strategies I employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the study are also discussed.

Rationale for the Study Design

This study used a qualitative case study research design to explore and comprehend the meaning individuals ascribe to Mandarin learning. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Language is essentially part of a social process and language learning develops through social interactions. How we perceive social interactions affects our approach to tackling new learning tasks and our overall attitude to what we are expected to learn. This research adopted a constructivist perspective on learning, with the goal of studying what it means to students to learn Mandarin as a foreign language and how their parents perceive their children’s Mandarin learning experiences in the context of their prevailing sociocultural environments.

The body of L2 motivation and attitudes literature employs both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. In quantitative studies, however, the closed-ended questions commonly employed do not always reveal the same depth of information that often surfaces in qualitative open-ended questions. Dörnyei (2001) mentioned that:

Qualitative/interpretive research appears to be particularly useful when researchers are interested in the structure of events other than their overall distributions, and when the
goal is to explore new linkages and causal relationships, external and internal influences, and internal priorities inherent in a particular social context. (pp. 193-194)

Creswell (2007) echoed Dörnyei’s (2001) view by stating that qualitative research may be used to “follow up quantitative research and help explain the mechanisms or linkages in causal theories or models” and to “develop theories when partial or inadequate theories exist for certain populations and samples or existing theories do not adequately capture the complexity of the problem we are examining” (p. 40). My research study aimed to explore and describe how non-Asian L2 students make sense of Mandarin learning and if their stories would reveal important information about their motivation and attitudes towards the Chinese language and culture. The qualitative research was chosen for this study because I wanted to understand more about the contexts in which participants were immersed, and how this influenced their L2 endeavors and I also wanted to obtain a more explicit and detailed understanding of their motivation and attitudes surrounding Mandarin learning and the related variations. I, the researcher, served as the primary instrument for the data collection process and did this both by extensively examining relevant documents and by interviewing selected study participants. A qualitative approach appeared to provide a better fit for understanding my research problem because interactions among people are difficult to capture with existing quantitative measures, and these measures may not capture the uniqueness of individuals, for example they may have been insensitive for examining the thoughts of those individuals who participated in the current study. The data analysis approach adopted was an inductive one and one that established patterns and categories. The focus was on learning the meaning that participants held about the issue and on trying to develop various complex pictures of the issue.
Moreover, a qualitative case study approach was adopted for my study because I wanted to document a detailed description and to conduct an in-depth analysis of the individuals in the sample to discover what it means to them to learn Mandarin. According to Creswell (2007), “[c]ase study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded system (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes (p. 73).” The current study did not seek to develop a theory, understand the essence of the experience, describe a culture sharing group, or document the life experiences of an individual. Therefore, a grounded theory, phenomenological, ethnographic, or narrative approach was not appropriate (Creswell, 2007). The unit of analysis was each student’s meaning making of the Mandarin learning in the sociocultural context in which they lived, and in the dimensions of the Mandarin language, the Chinese culture, and China. By concentrating on this single entity, the study aimed to uncover significant factors characteristic of the Mandarin learning phenomenon. A number of cases were studied to investigate and better understand the phenomenon. Thus, the current study is a multiple case study where “the single case is of interest because it belongs to a particular collection of cases. The individual cases share a common characteristic or condition. The cases in the collection are somehow categorically bound together” (Stake, 2006, pp. 5-6). Case studies can be used to describe a phenomenon in-depth, and this in-depth analysis may allow the researcher to present data that may provide insights into the language learning field (Nunan, 1992). The qualitative multi-case study approach allowed me to describe and analyze how students made sense of their Mandarin learning experiences in an in-depth way, and as a
result, helped uncover from the student perspective the negotiations between the students and those around them that influenced their learning experiences.

**Role of the Researcher**

Since I was the primary instrument for data collection process, I was conscious that the collected data would be filtered through my particular theoretical positions and biases. I hold a constructivist worldview and looked at my research through a sociocultural lens in order to study the multileveled Mandarin learning process from the perspective of learners of Mandarin. I believe individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences. I looked for the complexity of views which do not exist in a social vacuum, but exist in specific sociocultural contexts. I limited my perspective in this respect by examining only one foreign language learning situation in the context of the U.S. As a result, my research findings do not reflect post positivist, participatory, or pragmatist worldviews. My examination and its findings simply provide an in-depth perspective of how students learning Mandarin and their parents interpret this experience in relation to the micro, meso, and macro levels in which the Mandarin learning occurs.

Nunan (1992) suggests that the interviewer must have knowledge of the topic discussed during the interview. In the current study, the topic addressed concerned the motivation and attitudes of the students during their L2 endeavors. I, who assumed the role of interviewer, have studied several languages and am also familiar with L2 learning processes. I have also been motivated to start learning a L2, to persist in learning a L2, and have experienced motivational and attitudinal changes from both theoretical and practical perspectives. As such, I had knowledge of the interview and encouraged the participants to discuss matters of any significance relative to the topic with me. The shared experience of being a L2 learner and a parent of a HL child helped me to develop rapport with the student and parent participants. I
worked to minimize my role during the interview in order to guide the interview to ensure that the participants continued to talk freely in order to elicit as much information as possible on the topic.

Participants

The primary target population of this study was 10 students selected purposefully. They all met the following criteria: they were (a) current Mandarin learning students; (b) current secondary school students in New York City; and (c) current students with a non-Asian background. The secondary target population was their parents. I was interested in exploring the meanings of Mandarin learning to both the students and their parents, who had no prior exposure in linguistic or cultural practices as heritage learners. Therefore, I excluded students with any Asian background (not just Chinese background) since many Asian cultures share some Confucius’ ideas and associated cultural values.

Student participants ranged in age from 14 to 17. The length of Mandarin study ranged from 8 months to 11 years, although the contact hours of Mandarin study varied. They studied Mandarin through different programs: the Mandarin program at their school, dual language education school programs, summer intensive programs, weekend Mandarin programs, afterschool programs, and study abroad programs. Many of them took advantage of Mandarin programs funded by the U.S. government. More specifically, seven students enrolled in Startalk programs, which were organized under the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI). One student was in the process of applying for a Startalk summer program. Another student was applying for the NSLI for Youth scholarship to study in China for one academic year.

Table 1 and Table 2 describe the student participant profiles. Participants were documented by code during the data collection process and are referenced here using the
pseudonyms, of Abby, Adam, Andrea, Bella, Clark, Edward, Eric, Grace, Peter, and Sarah. The student participants included five males and five females. I did not choose this gender ratio intentionally. It all started by me reaching out to the families of my former students and then the sample extended to other secondary school students whom I had never taught. Four student participants were my former students, two males and two females. Among the ten student participants, five were minority students. Four minority students indicated that their families were from Caribbean or Latin American countries. I did not collect direct socioeconomic information about the participants and their families. However, I gathered the information of parental occupations, as can be seen in Table 1. Eight students were currently attending private schools, one was attending a public school, and one was attending a charter school.

However, the students did not necessarily receive Mandarin education at their current schools. As a school subject, seven participants took Mandarin at private schools, one at a dual language school, and one at a charter school. One student did not study Mandarin at his school at all but at an educational institution as an extracurricular activity. All of the student participants were continuing students. I did not include any students who discontinued with Mandarin study in the sample. The study’s findings are limited to the perceptions of the students who were still taking Mandarin and should not be used for generalization purposes. Moreover, the sample does not include the perspectives of drop-outs as regards their Mandarin learning motivation and attitudes, which might offer different findings from those in this present study. I also attempted to recruit more Mandarin learning students from public school settings but due to a stronger personal network with private schools, I was unable to obtain more public school student participants.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Parents’ occupation and heritage background</th>
<th>Form of current school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Abby  | F      | 15  | Caucasian                | Mother: Scientist; Northern European descent  
Father: Attorney; Northern European descent                                                                | charter school         |
| Adam  | M      | 15  | Mixed European           | Mother: Professor; Eastern European descent  
Father: Professor; Eastern European descent                                                                 | public school          |
| Andrea| F      | 15  | African American         | Mother: Computer compliance manager; an immigrant from Guyana  
Father: Train operator; an immigrant from Guyana                                                            | private school         |
| Bella | F      | 16  | European                 | Mother: Teacher; an immigrant of Romanian descent from Brazil  
Father: Outreach coordinator; an immigrant from Russia                                                        | private school         |
| Clark | M      | 14  | African American         | Mother: Associate director in television; African American  
Father: Producer in television; African American                                                              | private school         |
| Edward| M      | 15  | Multiracial American     | Mother: Program coordinator; an immigrant from Jamaica  
Father: Businessman; an immigrant from Dominican Republic                                                     | private school         |
| Eric  | M      | 17  | Multiracial American     | Mother: Office manager; mixed heritage of Jamaican descent  
Father: Construction manager and architect; an immigrant from Jamaica                                          | private school         |
| Grace | F      | 16  | Hispanic and African American | Mother: Database administrator; Venezuelan descent  
Father: Attorney; an immigrant from Panama                                                                     | private school         |
| Peter | M      | 15  | Spanish/ Caucasian       | Mother: Housewife; an immigrant from Spain  
Father: Business manager; an immigrant from Spain                                                              | private school         |
| Sarah | F      | 16  | White                    | Mother: Homemaker; white  
Father: Residence Manager; white                                                                                  | private school         |
Table 2

Student Profiles – Part 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Mandarin program at school</th>
<th>Extracurricular Mandarin program (weekend or afterschool)</th>
<th>Summer program in the U.S.</th>
<th>Summer program in Mainland China or Taiwan</th>
<th>Travel experience to Mainland China or Taiwan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>since 7th grade</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>not at the current public school; 6th – 8th grade in a private middle school</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>since 5th grade</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bella</td>
<td>since 6th grade</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark</td>
<td>since 5th grade</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>since 7th grade</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>since 10th grade</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>not at the current private school; K – 8th grade in a dual language public school</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>not at the current private school</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>since 5th grade</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following are participant student profiles that are designed to provide the reader with a sense of each of the participants’ backgrounds. More details about each student participant can be found below:

**Abby**

Abby, a 15-year old Caucasian girl currently attends a charter school in Brooklyn where she is learning Mandarin. She went to China with her mother and her aunt when she was in the 5th grade. She started to have exposure to Mandarin in an after-school program in her elementary school and officially started taking Mandarin in the 7th grade. Her aunt has always been a big part of Abby “being a world person” and played an important role in her Mandarin learning. Her aunt is teaching French, Mandarin, and Spanish at a high school in Connecticut. The reason why Abby chose to take Mandarin was because her aunt suggested she take Mandarin and also because Abby did not think her 6th grade Spanish teacher was great. She is applying to National Security Language Initiative for Youth program (NSLI-Y) in order to study in China for 10 months next year. It is a merit-based scholarship program. Abby believes that she will probably be able to speak fairly fluently, but will have to learn how to write more Chinese characters when she comes back. So most likely she will continue to take Mandarin in college.

**Adam**

Adam is a 15-year old boy of European descent who attends a public school in Manhattan. He is currently taking Mandarin at a Startalk Saturday Mandarin class in Manhattan. His current high school does not offer Mandarin. He started taking Mandarin in the 6th grade at the private middle school he went to. He also attended another Saturday school in Manhattan for Mandarin learning during middle school years. He also went to China on a trip with other middle school age students, which “added importance to learning a language.” He started taking Mandarin as it
was mandatory at his middle school. It was also because Mandarin was such a different language and because it would become a means of communication with one seventh of the world population. He wants to master Mandarin and considers that by itself learning Mandarin is a great accomplishment. He is excited about the possibility of being fluent and the opportunities this could present.

**Andrea**

Andrea is a 15-year old African American girl attending a private school in Manhattan. She studies Mandarin at her school and started taking Mandarin in the 5th grade. She also attended a Saturday school in Manhattan for Mandarin learning in the past two years including last summer. She took Mandarin at her school because it was mandatory in the 5th grade. She thought that “it’s good that the school requires it because a lot of kids don’t know about Mandarin at all. So you automatically would want to take a different language.” So “it is better that they make you take it.” Because she enjoyed learning Mandarin and her parents did not want her to give up on anything easily, she chose to continue with Mandarin in the 6th grade when she could choose among French, Mandarin, and Spanish. Her mother thought they being African American was a disadvantage and having her daughter learn Mandarin could make her more competitive. Both Andrea and her mother were not satisfied with her current Mandarin teacher but she still plans to take Mandarin throughout high school. At this point she is not sure about continuing in Mandarin after graduation, but she really wants to go to China.

**Bella**

Bella is a 16-year old girl of European descent who attends a private school in Manhattan. She is learning Mandarin at her school and taking a Startalk Saturday Mandarin class in Manhattan. Last summer she studied Mandarin in a Startalk summer program which she was
applying for again this summer. She started taking Mandarin in the 6th grade. It was mandatory. She told me she would not want to switch to Mandarin if it was not mandatory since she had been exposed to Spanish from Kindergarten at school. She would not think it made sense to switch to another language after investing in one language. But after learning Mandarin for three years, she felt that she could have a future with Mandarin and decided to continue learning it in high school. In addition, with her family’s help she kept looking for extracurricular programs to keep her constantly exposed to Mandarin because she believed that “you can’t just continue it in school. It’s not going to come to you if you just take it a few times a week.” Bella is thinking about a minor in Asian studies in college and maybe travelling to China for a year or two and becoming fluent.

**Clark**

Clark is a 14-year old African American boy who attends a private school in Manhattan. He is currently learning Mandarin at his school and taking a Startalk Saturday Mandarin class in Manhattan. Last summer he went to Taipei for a month to study Mandarin and came back to continue to study Mandarin in a summer Startalk program in Manhattan. He also attended another Saturday school in Manhattan for Mandarin learning during middle school years. He chose to apply to a program that required him to spend this coming summer in Beijing, China. He stated that he prefers this program over others because he can learn more and because they speak standard Mandarin. He started taking Mandarin in the 5th grade at his school. He had tutors to help him with his Mandarin. Sometimes he failed his Mandarin tests. He needed to receive speech therapy before because he could not pronounce certain sounds in English. When he needed to choose which foreign language to take, based on his speech therapy history, the school wanted him to learn Latin or be on an English only track. Because his mother was
exposed to Mandarin, she thought Mandarin would be suitable for him because there were no conjugations and she believed that he would be able to produce Mandarin sounds. So she fought for it and had him enrolled in Mandarin. Clark felt he was down the road so even if he failed some tests, he still wanted to take Mandarin. He wants to eventually be fluent in Mandarin and maybe move to China in the future. He feels the way to sustain involvement is to “keep taking classes. Don’t stop.”

Edward

Edward is a 15-year old multiracial American boy who attends a private school in Manhattan. He is learning Mandarin at his school. He started taking Mandarin in the 7th grade. It was mandatory for him to take Mandarin in the 7th grade when he transferred from a public school through a program that prepared promising students of color for placement at private schools in New York City. But he said that if he could choose, he would still take Mandarin as he thought the schools that offered Mandarin were “forward thinking.” Believing that he might not have opportunities in the future to study Mandarin, he grabbed the opportunity when it came. He is also self-teaching himself French. He does not do any formal Mandarin learning outside school but he is looking for opportunities to study Mandarin, such as the Startalk summer program or programs to study abroad. He does not expect to become fluent in Mandarin, but hopes to be able to communicate one day, maybe enough to travel and spend time in Chinese speaking countries.

Eric

Eric is a 17-year old multiracial American boy who attends a private school in the Bronx. He is learning Mandarin at his school. He also took a Startalk Saturday Mandarin class in Manhattan for the first semester this academic year. Last summer he studied Mandarin in a
Startalk summer program. He started taking Mandarin in the 10th grade. He took Mandarin because he considered the language as hard and challenging. As he was not eligible to take honors classes back then, he took Mandarin partially because it “looks good,” according to his mother. He is the president of the Asian Club at school. He has been to Chinatown forty or fifty times since he started learning Mandarin in the 10th grade. He told me when he thought about learning Mandarin, he did not think about sitting in class. He took advantage of non-instructional settings such as Chinatown and social media as he believes that his “understanding of the language has a huge part to do with understanding the culture.” He wrote one of his college application essays about his Chinatown experience and only applied for colleges that had a Mandarin program. He wants to be a doctor and is interested in both Chinese and western medicine.

Grace

Grace, a 16-year old girl of Hispanic and African descent, attends a private school in Manhattan. Her high school does not offer Mandarin, but she received her K-8 education at a dual language public school in Manhattan. The languages taught there were English and Mandarin. She also learned Mandarin in a Sunday Mandarin class in Chinatown of Manhattan. She attended a Startalk summer program for the past two years and was applying to a program to spend the coming summer in China. She went to China on her 8th grade graduation trip funded by the school. Mandarin was her favorite school subject because she was “just more comfortable with it than anything else.” It was the parents’ decision to send her and her two brothers to the dual language public school so that they could learn Mandarin. Her mother also talked about the racism in the society and how she wanted to prepare her daughter with a skill set that gave her an
advantage. Grace wants her Mandarin to be at her English level and get a really good job, most likely involving Mandarin.

Peter

Peter is a 15-year old Caucasian boy of Spanish descent who attends a private school in Queens. He is currently taking Mandarin at a Startalk Saturday Mandarin class in Manhattan. Last summer he started his Mandarin learning in a summer Startalk program. His school does not offer Mandarin. His father, who was originally from Spain, found the summer Startalk program online and asked if he wanted to do the program. It was his father’s idea because his father considered China as rising power in the global economy. He accepted his father’s suggestion because not many people that he knew were willing to learn Mandarin. So he told himself that “I can be different and I don’t need to be the same as everyone else.” After a summer of studying, he decided to continue learning this language. He hopes to be able to go to China one day to either live there or go on vacation, visiting big cities as well as smaller places.

Sarah

Sara, a 16-year old white girl, attends a private school in Manhattan. She is currently learning Mandarin at her school and taking a Startalk Saturday Mandarin class in Manhattan. Last summer she went to Beijing to study Mandarin for six weeks. The summer before, she studied Mandarin in a summer Startalk program. She started taking Mandarin at her school in the 5th grade. As the school emphasizes commitment to studying a foreign language, her mother helped her carry out some research before making her decision on which language to choose. They went to a book store to find out what Mandarin and Spanish languages were like. Her mother also invited a Mandarin teacher to show her the basics of Mandarin. She was struggling with reading in English and was diagnosed with dyslexia last year. When Sarah was about to
choose which foreign language to take, her mother was told learning Mandarin might be a different story from Sarah’s English experience because it was not an alphabetic language. It was Sarah’s decision as a 5th grader to take Mandarin. The mother emphasized Sarah’s own choice as being the reason why she had been motivated to learn Mandarin. Both she and her mother were not satisfied with her current Mandarin teacher at school. She subsidized her learning through extracurricular Mandarin programs. “I don’t learn to get ahead,” said Sarah, “It’s just nice to be in a class and you’re using the Mandarin you know.” She said she would still have an interest in Mandarin after high school graduation, but is not sure if she is going to take Mandarin in college depending on where she will go to college and whether they will offer it.

**Data Collection**

The interviews were conducted with the 10 student participants mentioned above and with 10 additional parent participants and took place from February 2013 to March 2013. I employed in-person semi-structured interviews to better understand each participant’s perspective on learning Mandarin. In the case of interviewing student participants, I used a revised format of Seidman’s (1998) three interview series: a 90-minute interview followed with another 90-minute interview with approximately a week in spacing. Each semi-structured student interview lasted between 60 to 90 minutes, depending on the duration of the student’s responses. In the case of interviewing parent participants, one semi-structured interview was conducted, each lasting between 70 to 90 minutes.

I, as the interviewer, began the interview by explaining the general context and purpose of the study. This was done both to inform the participant of the kind of introspective data that was being sought and to emphasize that the data would be used for research purpose only and their personal identities would not be revealed in any study-related report. If the participant did
not have any more questions, I had the participant read and sign a consent form. Then at the beginning of the interviews with the parent participants, they were given an article in *The Denver Post* (Appendix A) about Mandarin Chinese becoming the first choice of a growing number of second-language learners in Colorado. It was an article that described the phenomenon of Mandarin Chinese gaining popularity as a second language for learners in all age groups in Colorado. It included points of views of students, parents, teachers, as well as administrators and some details of programs sponsored by U.S. and China to promote Mandarin Chinese learning. I chose this article because I assumed that the article probably reflected social attitudes that were likely to influence Mandarin learning students and their parents. It included student and parent accounts so that the participants of my study might have something to relate to. After the parent participants read the article, they were asked to share with their comments and thoughts while I began recording the interviews using a small digital recorder. This was followed by inviting the parent participants to talk freely in a relaxed and informal manner.

I followed a consistent interview protocol (Appendix B for student participants and Appendix C for parent participants) during every interview. In the 1st interview with the student participants, I first asked about their language learning history, and secondly, about the details of their experience with Mandarin learning. At the beginning of their 2nd interview, I gave the student participants the same article (Appendix A) that their parents read for them to talk about their perceptions regarding the content of the article. In the 2nd interview, I also asked them questions to reflect on what it meant to them to learn Mandarin. As Merriam (1998) points out, semi-structured interviews are guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, but neither the exact wording nor the order of questions is determined ahead of time. Each interview was guided by the questions in the interview protocol, but the actual structure was largely dictated by
the participant, with occasional prompting by me to clarify the meaning or to encourage the participant to expand upon points just mentioned. I maintained a friendly demeanor and managed the conversation to ensure that the participant talked freely about his/her perceptions in order to elicit as much data as possible. Once the momentum of the opening self-report account was perceived to slacken, the prompting became more structured as the participant was asked questions that he/she did not mention based on the interview protocol. I concluded with an expression of appreciation, and again, I answered questions if the participant had any.

Documents were used as a data source. I collected 51 articles regarding China and the Chinese language and culture from New York Times, newsletters from the Asia Society’s Chinese Language Initiatives, and newsletters from the Chinese Language Teachers Association of Greater New York from November 2012 to March 2013. Then I used a random number picker to choose 15 articles to examine. Among the articles I examined, I chose two articles to use during the interviews and the focus group discussion, separately. One article was used during the parent interview and the 2nd student interview, as I mentioned earlier in the description of the interviews. Another article was used during the focus group discussion for selected student participants to discuss, which I will elaborate on later. These two articles I chose were based on the assumption that they would reflect social attitudes that were likely to influence Mandarin learning students and their family. Besides all the articles mentioned above, I specifically looked for one article that interviewed one parent participant and her child on the choice of school from the New York Times to gain more background information. Web content was also reviewed to understand the missions of the seven schools that offered Mandarin as a school subject to its student participants.
After the interviews with students and parents were completed, I conducted a 60-minute focus group discussion among four student participants in April 2013. At the beginning of the focus group discussion, the second article was given to them to obtain their perceptions regarding the article. It was an article in *The New York Times* (Appendix D) reporting that China’s job market tightened for young foreigners. Apart from the promising future of Mandarin Chinese learners mentioned in the first article used in student and parent interviews, this article touched upon the reality of China’s job market by including anecdotes of young foreign job seekers. It conveyed the idea that proficiency in Mandarin Chinese was an important factor in landing a job in China if one wanted to find jobs other than teaching English. Since this article offered a very different voice from the first article, I chose this one to interview students with and to obtain their perceptions regarding contrasting viewpoints of Mandarin Chinese. During the focus group discussion, I also shared the preliminary findings with the student participants and asked for their feedback. The focus group discussion was recorded digitally.

Throughout the research process, I kept reflective notes in a notebook to chronicle my own thinking, feeling, experiences and perceptions. I used my notes to document posed questions, stories, and works in progress. These details recorded helped me to maintain consistency among the different phases of the research: the design of the research, the collection of the data, and the interpretation and presentation of the findings.

### Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data collection and data analysis are a simultaneous process (Merriam, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The ongoing analysis began with the first interview in this study. I took reflective notes on ideas and categories that emerged during the interviews. In some interviews, I asked follow-up questions when I believed
that the student or parent might have more to say about a specific category that I had heard in previous interviews.

The digital recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was adopted in order to analyze the interview data. Thematic analysis is “a process for encoding qualitative information” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). After I reviewed the purpose of my study, I recognized the codable moments by highlighting text that struck me as interesting, potentially relevant, and important to my study aims and began writing comments and generating initial codes in the margin of the first student’s interview transcripts. In my reflective notes, I wrote down my reflections, tentative categories, hunches, and ideas from this first set of data. After I generated initial codes of the first student’s transcripts, I adopted the constant comparative method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) when I read the second student’s interview transcripts. I kept in mind the initial codes and tentative categories from the first student’s transcripts, and examined the second student’s transcripts to compare incidents, students’ remarks, etc. and to see if the initial codes and tentative categories were present in this second data set. I also wrote in my reflective notes about the second data set in a manner similar to how I reported on the first data set. Then I compared the reflective notes of these two sets and merged them into one, rather than two lists of concepts. This combined list constituted a primitive classification system reflecting the recurring patterns in my study. By using this constant comparative method throughout the process of reading all the transcripts, I was able to continuously recognize the codable moments and develop codes. Categories then emerged and these were later sorted into the emerging patterns.

After the analysis of the data I examined each research question individually and analyzed the data from each participant’s transcript in detail in order to ensure that data
addressed each research question. This allowed me to confirm the analysis of both similarities and differences among the participants. Then I reviewed and analyzed the data collectively for the first research question and sub-questions of the second research question. I reported the initial data for each of those questions individually by placing the information into arrays, creating tables of categories, and drawing flow charts in order to continue to search for, review, and refine patterns and themes. This process continued until two patterns and themes emerged as necessary to accurately explain students’ Mandarin learning processes based on their accounts. Then I went back to analyzing the data to address the second research question based on the findings of three sub-questions.

**Trustworthiness of the Study**

I adopted the following strategies to establish the trustworthiness of the study. The issue of credibility of information received was addressed through the triangulation of my data. Multiple interviews of students and their parents and publicly available documents were used in triangulation, as I attempted to corroborate evidence from different sources to shed light on the meanings of Mandarin learning process to students and their parents under study. The different data sources from students, parents, and publicly available documents also helped me to understand the multileveled context at the micro, meso, and macro levels, and were pitted against one another in order to cross-check the data and to render sound interpretations of the data. In the member checking process, another strategy used to establish the trustworthiness of the present study, I solicited participants’ views of the credibility of the study findings and my interpretations. I convened a focus group composed of four student participants in my study and asked them to look at my preliminary analysis to obtain their views regarding the findings and various categories of organization (as suggested by Creswell, 2007). They provided feedback on
my interpretation and analysis of the data and offered explanations to help clarify my confusion. As this was a qualitative study, generalizability was not intended as a study aim in the statistical sense (Merriam, 2009). By using purposeful sampling with three specific inclusion criteria, students had to be: (a) current Mandarin learning students; (b) current secondary school students in New York City; and (c) current students with a non-Asian background, I intended to maximize the range of information uncovered from the specific context restricted by those three criteria. I collected thick descriptive data that would permit comparisons of this context to other possible contexts. I developed detailed descriptions of different contextual factors such as the student participants’ school, language learning history and learning experiences. Thus, transferability was enhanced by providing detailed and thick descriptions of multiple cases from the study. The descriptions were used to contextualize the study such that readers would be able to determine whether the findings could be transferred to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
Chapter IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the study based on the data collected in order to discuss these relative to the research questions. This chapter is organized to present the findings according to the research questions. The findings to the first research question are presented and are followed by the findings to the second research question.

Data were collected from 10 student participants who were learning Mandarin. These participants included five male and five female high school students, ages 14-17. All student participants began foreign language learning before entering high school, and 8 participants studied two or more foreign languages. Two participants were raised in a bilingual/multilingual family environment and 8 participants were raised in a monolingual family environment. One of these participants with a monolingual background, however, enrolled in a dual language school (English and Mandarin) from Kindergarten through 8th grade. All, except one male participant, began Mandarin learning because foreign language learning was required in school. The exception was being introduced to Mandarin learning through parental recommendation.

All participants reported learning Mandarin in a classroom environment. Nine participants had experiences learning Mandarin as a school subject in their school. Three participants were not studying Mandarin at their high schools because it was not offered. Six participants participated in intensive language programs and eight participated in weekend language programs. Five participants reported travel or study abroad experiences in Chinese speaking countries.
Data were also collected from 10 parent participants. Two fathers and eight mothers were interviewed. Only one parent reported Mandarin learning experience but based on a self-assessment, her proficiency was not high enough to help her child in Mandarin learning.

The Social Context

This section addresses research question 1 – How does the social context in which students live provide motivation for them to take on Mandarin Chinese learning?

Student and parent participants were aware of the current climate in the global economy, to different degrees, and considered China as an economic superpower. The most straightforward example for many of them was that many products they encountered in daily life were made in China:

So many things come from China. Without China America would not survive. Because first of all there’s a lot of things that say “Made in China,” for example. There are all these big companies that I know for a fact, they have companies and factories in China where they make the stuff and they ship it. If it weren’t for China, all of the stuff that we see that says “Made in China” wouldn’t exist, which is probably at least 50% of the things we have. There could be more stuff created in China and without [them] we’d be lost or try to resort to other things. But the economy would slow down. Production would probably be slower. It would affect everything. China plays a pretty big part. (Peter)

According to the United States Census\textsuperscript{7} Bureau, as of March 2013, China was the second largest trading partner with the U.S. while ranking No. 1 in imports to the U.S. and No. 3 in exports from the U.S. The importance of the business relationship between China and the U.S. was acknowledged by both the students and their parents:

\textsuperscript{7} www.census.gov
I think that because our culture really doesn’t push it, we’re really isolated here. … [In China] they realize it’s important to learn to speak English because you can do business with America, you can go to America. Now we’re learning. It’s important to learn Mandarin because you could do business with China. So now it’s like it’s flipped. Look how long it took. It’s finally flipped but I think it can’t hurt. I mean even if you never do business with China you still know how to speak the language and you still have exercised that part of your brain. (Clark’s mother)

Clark’s mother saw the utility of Mandarin in doing business with China and was glad to see American society as a whole had started to realize the importance of learning the language. In the meanwhile, she recognized the intellectual benefits of learning a foreign language in its own right. As many other interviewees in the study stated, she was aware of the economic aspects of globalization and considered her decision to push Clark to take Mandarin as “an unconscious decision” that was influenced by globalization.

China’s rapid economic growth has caught many people’s attention. As Peter’s father put it, “[W]hen every country was almost in recession, China was experiencing big increases every year.” In 2010, China surpassed Japan as the world’s second-largest economy. China overtook the U.S. in 2009 as having the largest automobile market and Germany as the largest exporter. The nation is the world’s No. 1 buyer of iron ore and copper and the second-biggest importer of crude oil (Hamlin & Li, 2010). Participants knew of the importance of China and believed that China’s importance was also generally well recognized in American society as a whole:

I think everyone in the back of their heads somewhere understands that there is a lot going on in China, and that there is a lot of important things that we need to have in relationship with China. Whether they know the specifics, they know that we almost need
China in general. You can buy anything and look at it, it’s made in China. Everyone knows something that’s telling them that China is important. …I mean whether you know the language, people at least respect China because they help us a lot. I mean it’s a good environment to begin with because it’s slightly peaceful – mentally with China because no one has any angst really. I mean there are very very high up government issues but that’s really up there. The things that people care about they don’t really have any qualms about China. I mean there are obviously things that America and China have issues with. But an average everyday person, they don’t think that there’s anything wrong with China.

(Eric)

The student participants reported that they were the generation growing up while almost everything was made in China. It was an environment without “thinking really anything bad of China, not really thinking anything at all,” as Eric described it. Even though the media often portrayed China in all different ways, this generation was not affected as much as their parents’ generation:

I feel China is portrayed both negatively and positively. It’s not so much about the people of China. It’s the government of China, [it] is being portrayed negatively. You hear about human rights abuse and corruption the most. Well it’s pretty contrasting because let’s say you see a documentary about China, they would talk about all the beautiful landscapes and people. But if you see a news report about China, it’s usually something bad. … Because of a generational gap, people of my age we have different experiences than people who were my mother’s age during the cold war. So they would have had different ideas about China than we do now. Our generation is not necessarily affected by images
that are presented in the media that much. You have more cultural stereotypes rather than images in the media. (Edward)

So for the student generation, it was relatively an easy environment to be exposed to the language later on, instead of an environment where people completely did not respect China. “Because most people really are okay with China, it’s a lot more welcome,” said Eric.

While many individuals had realized the importance of having a relationship with China which affected all aspects of their daily lives, the U.S. government was endeavoring to promote the learning of critical need foreign languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Hindi, Farsi and others. The National Security Language Initiative (NSLI)\(^8\) was introduced by President George W. Bush in 2006 under the direction of the President of the United States, the Secretaries of State, Education and Defense, and the Director of National Intelligence. This initiative clearly emphasized the ability to communicate in those critical need foreign languages:

An essential component of U.S. national security in the post-9/11 world is the ability to engage foreign governments and peoples, especially in critical regions, to encourage reform, promote understanding, convey respect for other cultures and provide an opportunity to learn more about America and its citizens. To do this, Americans must be able to communicate in other languages, a challenge for which most citizens are totally unprepared.

Chinese, specifically Mandarin Chinese, was identified as one of the critical need foreign languages. All participants admitted the growing popularity of Mandarin as a new trend and several parents mentioned that it was not available when they were in high school. The number

\(^8\) www.aplu.org
of Chinese speaking people in the world played an important role in the students choosing which language to learn, as Adam commented on the article that I provided during his 2nd interview:

I mean part of my motivation is similar to Trinity, the twelve-year old girl, in that she had the option of taking French, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, or Lakota which is really interesting. But she wanted to learn Chinese because more than a billion people in the world speak it. It’s like why it would be better to learn something that more people do, or more people speak because you can just talk to that many more people. It’s obviously important if a seventh of the world’s population is speaking it. So I thought that was similar to what my train of thought was when I was thinking of what language to take in middle school. When the parents were saying that she and her husband [sic] musing over what it would be like to have teenage children fluently speaking a language they didn’t understand. It’s the same with my parents. During their childhood there were not a whole lot of Chinese people in this country. So I think that they weren’t immersed in Chinese culture, Chinese language. They weren’t taught Chinese history in school. That just wasn’t an option. It was either French or Spanish. So yeah it’s different for parents to see their children now learning a language and studying a culture they’ve never heard of and might not have realized really existed.

The NSLI was given $114 million in fiscal year 2007. Startalk, one of the programs under the initiative, was given $2.3 million in fiscal year 2006 for planning and preparation purposes and $5 million in fiscal year 2007 to implement Startalk summer language camps. The National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y), a youth exchange program, was among several
Department of State programs that received $26.7 million in fiscal year 2007. Seven student participants were enrolled in programs funded by Startalk. One participant was in the process of applying for a Startalk summer program and one participant was applying for the NSLI-Y scholarship to study in China for one academic year. The parent participants were grateful for the scholarship the government provided and, for some, it was crucial in fostering the students’ ability to access extracurricular programs:

I think the government has its own interests. I think they want to have increased numbers of people who can speak Mandarin, so I’m not surprised. I hope that the money will continue. I mean we are in a very serious recession still. I don’t know if the money will continue. It’d be great because I don’t know that I would be able to fund her learning otherwise. So it’s great. Let’s see what happens. (Bella’s mother)

This confirms Pavlenko’s (2002) argument that unlimited access to linguistic resources and interactional opportunities should not be taken for granted in the study of second language acquisition. Without government funding, it could be impossible for some students to pursue the learning of this critical need foreign language. In Peter’s case, he would have had no access to Mandarin learning at all without funding because his own school did not offer Mandarin.

In addition to the U.S. government’s endeavors, the Chinese government had been assisting this process by funding half the salaries of Chinese teachers through Chinese Language Council International programs called Confucius Institutes or through a Chinese Ministry of Education program called Hanban (Lofholm, 2012). In response to both governments’ endeavors, Adam commented:

\[9\text{ www.aplu.org}\]
If Chinese government is paying half the salaries of Chinese teachers in America and Americans are paying Chinese teachers to teach Chinese, it shows that both governments are encouraging people in America to learn Chinese. I think they recognize that there’s a lot of trading between China and the United States. China’s ascendency to the global economy means anyone doing business on an international business is likely to encounter Mandarin speakers. So I think both governments are encouraging people, non-Asians, to learn Chinese so they can be more fluent with their business counterparts.

Bella considered the endeavor from both sides “for political and diplomatic reasons” and thought “they must feel it will make communication between the two countries easier.” Andrea echoed Bella’s point of view:

I think that’s good because in China a lot of people learn English so then you can have people communicate more between China and America. So that’s a good thing. If we’re able to communicate more we can do a lot of things together as countries.

Eric used “a peaceful connection with China” to describe the possibility of communication with each other, because if the students knew how to speak their language, that could provide a better chance to connect with the country later on. As Eric put it, “if we want a job, or to do anything in China it feels more possible.” He thought he was signing up for Startalk program only for personal benefits of learning a foreign language and did not realize how this could help to connect him with China, as well as helping to develop and strengthen the relationship between the U.S. and China. From students’ feedback, it seems that the NSLI had partially reached its goal in promoting communication and understanding between Americans and their different language counterparts.
In response to societal visions, schools envision particular future trajectories for their students and therefore frame their current policies and practices accordingly. Since it was believed by many people that China was the next big world power, being able to communicate with the country in their native tongue was considered to be forward thinking. Among the seven schools in which the student participants received Mandarin education as a school subject, five of them had mission statements regarding the preparation of their students to engage in the global community. Clark’s mother talked about the connection between the prevailing societal influences and the school’s vision:

I know that as far as a school like [Clark’s] school offering it, that has a lot to do with society saying that this is relevant. This is something you should be doing for his school to even offer it. They’re not offering Japanese, they’re not offering Korean but they’re offering Mandarin. For it to even be on the menu of choices, that says that society has pushed for it in a school. His school said we gotta do this, we got to have this. I don’t know how long their Mandarin program is. It seems relatively new. So for it to be offered, society has a lot to do with it.

Schools have a vision of the type of communities and societies in which their students could grow up to participate in (Kanno, 2003). The very fact that they included Mandarin program at school was an illustration that they envisioned their students participating in the global community, possibly communicating with Chinese speakers. From the perspective of marketability, Sarah considered the inclusion of a Mandarin program in private schools as an indicator of schools with academic rigor:
They could be thinking like what’s going to make people appeal to our school or what’s going to up our standards. … A lot of these schools do have really good Mandarin programs. That might be one of the things that changed it.

She pointed out that many top-ranking private schools in the country had good Mandarin programs and how the Mandarin program at her school was used as one of the highlights to attract prospective students and parents. This was how schools reflected a society’s vision and how they used that to gain potential consumers of their educational services.

The schools’ response to the prevailing societal vision played a critical role because it made Mandarin a language of access to the students. Most of the student participants would not have been able to learn Mandarin if it were not offered at school first. Only after they were initially exposed to Mandarin, did it become possible to extend their learning in extracurricular programs. Once they were on the Mandarin learning track, the society’s message of more tangible future benefits was mentioned to them. Sarah’s mother heard such comments all the time, “That’ll look great on college application.” In terms of career aspects, it was not a surprise to Eric’s mother when she read about the job opportunities in one article:

I’ve heard so much from the career counselors of how whenever they hear that someone is learning to speak Mandarin, they always say, “Oh, that’s great! That’s a good thing. It’s gonna go far!”

This was also confirmed by the fact that Eric’s Mandarin learning friend was offered a job before graduating college. While all the student and parent participants kept an open mind in regard to the students’ future career paths, they recognized learning Mandarin to be a very important aspect if one wanted to work in China.
The larger social context thus appeared to influence institutional and individual decision making processes as far as language learning was concerned. The economic power of China and the U.S. national security establishments have also affected people’s language learning motivation and attitudes towards learning Mandarin. Mandarin education has become important because American society has recognized the need for people to speak multiple languages to achieve its collective goals (Kanno, 2003). Learning languages supports the desire of the U.S. to be become more prominent in the world economy, to secure better national security, and to achieve greater participation in the global community. Clark clearly explained the current social context he lived in, “You hear that China’s taking over the world, so you wanna jump onto that ship.”

Variations of Motivation

This section addresses the research sub-question 2.1 – What are the variations of motivation for students to learn Mandarin Chinese? Because of the dynamic and temporal nature of motivation, I divided my investigation into two motivational stages: (a) variations of motivation to start Mandarin learning and (b) variations of motivation to sustain involvement in Mandarin learning.

Variations of Motivation to Start Mandarin Learning

Student participants had various explanations as to why they made the initial decision to start learning Mandarin in a formal setting. Before learning Mandarin at school as a foreign language, most students were attracted to the uniqueness of the Chinese language, mainly because of the Chinese characters. Being in New York City made it possible for all student participants to have experienced some minimal degree of exposure to the Chinese language. For instance, students reported that Chinese characters were seen in store signs and newspapers and
different dialects of the Chinese language were overheard on public transportation. Because of the existence of Chinese speaking communities in New York City, student participants were more likely to associate Mandarin learning with practical language use. The teaching resources were abundant in terms of the number of qualified Mandarin teachers and opportunities to take advantage of what the Chinese speaking communities could offer. The experience of getting into Mandarin learning at school, however, was not always based on a choice. While all schools had a three year foreign language requirement at the high school level, the different agendas of different schools affected each school’s foreign language policy in practice.

**Institutionally established requirement.** Four student participants enrolled in a Mandarin program at school because it was mandatory. They all started learning Mandarin in middle school.

Andrea and Adam were at the same school and their school required all students in the 5th grade to take Mandarin for one year as a minimum. Adam transferred to this school in the 6th grade and based on the school policy, new students in the 6th grade were required to take Mandarin, while other continuing 6th graders could choose among the foreign languages offered in middle school. The school aimed to build its reputation of being an international school where they accepted international students from all over the world into their high school. It was bought to be one of its ten campuses worldwide by a firm which operates for-profit college-preparatory schools. For the 2012-2013 academic year, 37 international students were admitted to the school and 27 of them were from China, paying $68,000 for boarding and tuition per year. The sale of the school to the firm illustrates the growing force of profit-seeking companies in private education. Setting Mandarin as a mandatory course in the 5th grade forced all their students to be exposed to this less commonly taught language and enabled new experiences in their day to day
contact with the Chinese culture and its people. “They knew it was going to be the next thing to take over. They said that’s why they chose to go with Mandarin in the 5\textsuperscript{th} grade for everyone,” recalled Andrea’s mother. As a for-profit school, it foresaw the rising status of China as an economic power and how this would affect how their students understand and navigate the world. The school had already started gaining the benefits of making a profit from the recruitment of international students from China. It is the macro level which includes factors greater than those at the meso level that inevitably affects the shape of features in the local context. In this case, it was a mandatory Mandarin course that was offered as the school’s response to the larger societal call for recognizing China as a rising power across the globe.

Bella and Edward were in the same school and their middle school division required all middle school students to take Mandarin in the 6\textsuperscript{th}, 7\textsuperscript{th}, and 8\textsuperscript{th} grade. Fifth grade was also considered middle school, but the school did not require Mandarin learning in the 5\textsuperscript{th} grade because that was the first year of transition from the lower school. The reason why the school decided to make Mandarin a mandatory course in all three grades was because they wanted to offer something non-Western. The idea was to use the Mandarin class as a channel to make students exposed to a non-Western country that offers a rich culture and history. Interdisciplinary projects were encouraged and supported by the school administration to provide a non-Western presence and a focus on different subject matters. The middle school humanities class started to include a solid set of lesson plans on Asian countries in their curriculum since the establishment of the Mandarin program. However, when the implementation of the Mandarin program began, some students held different opinions. Bella, who had attended that school since Kindergarten and studied Spanish throughout, was recalling the experience:
In 6th grade, they just said, “Okay. Now you’re switching to a completely different language for three years. And then you get to decide which one you want [in high school].” That didn’t really make sense to me. I thought it should have been at the very beginning you give people a choice, because no one really wants to stop a language for three years, if they’re going to continue with it.

Although Spanish was still offered in middle school, Bella thought it was offered less frequently than Mandarin because it was an elective. In fact both Mandarin and Spanish were offered at the same frequency in middle school. But by the school’s endorsement of Mandarin as a mandatory subject, it consolidated Mandarin’s legitimization in the school and passed the message along that Mandarin and China in a larger sense had become important in the communication action context, and the curricular space was created by the school to facilitate contact with the Chinese language and the Chinese culture. The attitude towards Mandarin at the individual micro level, therefore, was affected by school’s inclusion of Mandarin on their mandatory course offering list.

When asked if Bella would choose to take Mandarin if it were not required, she said she would not take Mandarin only because she had been taking Spanish since Kindergarten. She would not want to invest in a whole new language. It is the idea of investment that made her want to continue with what she was learning. It is also the idea of investment that made her want to continue with Mandarin later on in high school. The institutionally established requirement resulted in her journey of studying Mandarin, a formal language learning opportunity she would otherwise have had no access to and would have had no motivation to seize. The initial motivation to study Mandarin was entirely external, as to fulfill a course requirement pressured by her school.
Her classmate Edward, however, welcomed the school policy of making Mandarin a mandatory course. To him, it was a choice to some extent. He was in a program that prepared promising students of color for placements at private schools in New York City. Before he transferred to his current private school from a public school, he was looking at the candidate schools’ language programs. He was not so interested in the options such as Latin and Greek. He looked into schools that offered Mandarin and thought “they’re thinking ahead, they’re looking towards the future, and they’re preparing for an ever changing world.” He considered the schools that offered Mandarin as the ones with a vision in response to the call of society. Besides his awareness of China’s rising power in the global community, his motivation to take Mandarin had its practical aspect:

Well I thought that since Spanish is becoming such a more prevalent language in the United States today, it would be something that I can learn later in life, and when I saw that I had the option to learn Mandarin Chinese, I thought it was a great opportunity because I thought that if I didn’t take it, then I would never be able to learn it in my adolescence.

He considered the offering of Mandarin as a scarce resource that otherwise he would not get access to. Based on the supply and demand, it made more sense to him to seize this opportunity even without much prior knowledge about Mandarin. Taking Mandarin was a choice for Edward. He could have chosen to attend another school but he chose the school he did in part because learning Mandarin was compulsory. The motivation to take Mandarin was not only fulfilling a course requirement, but also his decision to take advantage of a rare opportunity. His judgment of schools offering Mandarin as a rare resource was influenced by information gathered from his social world, subject to individual selective processing of information that fits within his belief
systems and own experiences. It was the meso level of local interpersonal networks that provided the information that Edward selectively processed, which led to his action of choosing this school and consequently choosing Mandarin as a foreign language since 7th grade.

**A matter of choice.** Contrary to the experiences of the students who started taking Mandarin as a required subject, five student participants started this language based on personal choice. They reported various reasons why they decided to learn Mandarin. The motivational dimensions readily observable in the data related to the kinds of attitudes towards Mandarin that were verbalized (cool, enjoyment of Chinese characters, etc.) and the sources of influence attributed to motivating them (internal impetus, external incentives, etc.).

All of the student participants were from non-Asian backgrounds and reported no extensive exposure to the Chinese language and culture prior to Mandarin learning. They did not have a concrete idea of what Mandarin learning was about at the time they needed to make a decision as to which foreign language to choose. Therefore, variations of motivation by external influences were dominant in this process, as expected. However, there was one student, Sarah, who displayed genuine interest in the language itself during this decision-making process.

As a school foreign language policy, every student was supposed to start taking a foreign language since the 5th grade at Sarah’s school. The school emphasized students’ commitment to a foreign language, which in reality meant no one would be able to switch later on. Spanish and Mandarin were given as foreign language choices. In order to make this commitment, Sarah asked for an extension in deciding which language to choose. Her mother brought her and her younger brother to a book store for them to visually and aurally explore Spanish and Mandarin. Because Sarah had less exposure to Mandarin than Spanish, her mother invited the Mandarin teacher at Sarah’s brother’s school to give her and her brother a mini introductory lesson on
Sarah was fonder of Mandarin, so the decision was made. Sarah’s mother emphasized the importance of having the child take ownership, “We have to make the choice for the right decision and not because your parents are saying ‘Oh, this is going to look good one day.’” Sarah’s initial motivation to learn Mandarin was because her first experience of learning this language was enjoyable. The positive attitude towards learning Mandarin influenced her decision of which language to choose. There was clearly parental support in this entire process. Parental support did not influence the language to choose, however. As Sarah’s mother mentioned, Sarah took the ownership of her choice before entering the 5th grade.

Besides parental support, parental/familial influences were obviously evident in other cases. Peter was bilingual in English and Spanish and his parents were immigrants from Spain. He moved to New York City three years ago and his family had been “a little bit isolated” so they did not know many people, according to his father. It was his father who found a Startalk intensive summer program online and asked him whether he would like to study Mandarin. The reason why his father thought of Mandarin was because his father’s own belief in the power of foreign language learning in communication and development of cross-cultural understanding and his own perception of China’s economic power from the local media. Peter was surprised that his father chose Mandarin because he considered it was out of nowhere. It was not a language he had any connection with. However, he decided to take his father’s advice so the decision making of taking Mandarin was heavily influenced by his parent. He demonstrated motivation with strong external incentives because both his family and he did not have much

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10 Startalk is a program of the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) announced by former President Bush in 2006. Its mission is to increase the number of Americans learning, speaking, and teaching critical need foreign languages by offering students (K-16) and teachers the language learning opportunities.
prior knowledge of Mandarin. The societal influence at the macro level was mediated through the local media and government funded programs, as his father mentioned:

It was put into the screen… the Olympics, and the fact that when every country was almost in recession, China was in big increase every year. For example in Spain, they are in recession or depression. We have a lot of youth unemployed, and on the other hand you hear that the Chinese have only four or five percent. I mean it’s got your attention.

Peter’s father also expressed the view that his main concern when choosing a program was the funding. He said if it were not with scholarship, in their case, it would be very difficult. He was pleased and grateful that Peter was able to learn Mandarin in a scholarship program. In fact the Startalk intensive summer program is one of the programs that run under the NSLI. It offers American students an opportunity to study critical need languages through scholarships. Startalk programs have been active since 2007 and have continuously been providing students and teachers with resources for learning and teaching critical need languages nationwide. At the micro level, Peter was learning Mandarin as an individual learner. He was able to do so because his interpersonal networks provided him this opportunity to enroll in the Startalk program. The program was made available in a larger social context where national security was taken into consideration under the current global political and economic reality.

Abby’s decision to take Mandarin in the 7th grade was also influenced by a family member, her aunt. However, in her case, it was relatively a more educated decision than in Peter’s case, depending on how much prior knowledge each family had about Mandarin. As Abby explained:

My aunt teaches French, Spanish and she’s learning Mandarin, to teach that as well.

She’s definitely a big part of [me taking Mandarin]. She’s always been a big part of me
being a world person. I went to Canada with her. We went to... all over the place. We went to China with my aunt. ...I decided to take Mandarin and I think part of it was I really hated the Spanish teacher. But part of it was also that my aunt had said, “You’ve heard Spanish and it’s in your system a little bit.” Part of learning languages is the accent. You can pick up an accent better if you’re younger.

Her aunt was not only knowledgeable about the Indo-European languages but also about Mandarin. She provided Abby a native English speaker’s perception on learning Spanish and Mandarin with emphasis on the timing of learning different foreign languages. As she had been a big part of Abby being a world person, this familial encouragement played an important role in Abby’s decision to take Mandarin. In the meanwhile, this encouragement was accompanied by Abby’s negative learning history in her incompatibility with the Spanish teacher’s teaching approach. Due to all these external influences, Abby decided to take Mandarin in the 7th grade.

By the same token, Clark’s decision to take Mandarin in the 5th grade was largely based on a family member’s influence. In his case, it was his mother who had a one-year experience of learning Mandarin in her twenties in Taiwan. Clark’s decision to take Mandarin, however, was not merely a decision of a foreign language choice. It was also a decision to fight for an equal opportunity to learn along with his peers. Clark had difficulty with English pronunciation when he was small. He received speech therapy and by the time he had to make a decision on what foreign language to take, he no longer needed speech therapy. Based on his history, however, the school thought that he should learn Latin as it involves less speaking and the roots of the words were similar in English or he should be on the English track doing more English writing/grammar. As Clark’s mother recalled:
So we had a disagreement and they didn’t want him to take any language; they wanted him to take Latin. That started our journey: me against them. …So I had to really push Clark to take Chinese. The reason why I wanted Clark to take Chinese was because when he was little and I would push him around the baby store and he would always point to symbols. He recognized symbols and I knew the basis of Chinese. It doesn’t have a lot of grammar, no conjugation, and I knew that all sounds in Chinese were sounds different in English. There weren’t any rolling “r”s. There wouldn’t be anything hard for him to do with his tongue. …The school thought it was the way he processed language and I knew it was the way he produced language. It’s interesting when you go to private school, what they will do to try to push their agenda on you. Then I went to talk to the head of the school and she said that it’s your child, make that choice. We can’t tell you. This teacher might feel strongly but it’s really your decision.

As a result of having basic knowledge of Mandarin, Clark’s mother pushed against the school’s agenda. She was able to discern how Mandarin would be feasible for Clark to study and used this as her argument to fight for an equal opportunity for her son to take a foreign language at school. In the end, the school respected her decision. She felt that the fact that Clark was studying Mandarin not only made him special considering not many people were studying Mandarin in a larger social context but also made him common among his peers because he would be like other classmates taking same school subjects. The school’s offering of Mandarin created the opportunity for Clark to be on par with his peers despite his history with learning disabilities. His mother seized this opportunity because she had linguistic knowledge about Mandarin. Clark listened to his mother and began his own journey as a Mandarin learner.
**Summary.** A majority of the student participants with a non-Asian background started learning Mandarin for external reasons. The forces influencing them were the school and the students’ family. That many schools should offer Mandarin signified a change in the larger social context regarding Mandarin and China at the macro level. Schools had their different agendas when pushing students to study Mandarin as far as requiring or setting Mandarin as one of the foreign language options. In students’ interpersonal networks, familial encouragement played a significant role in the decision-making process. In some cases, it was the parents who made the choice for their children. For the female student participant Grace, who had gone to a dual language school since Kindergarten, it was completely the parents’ choice due to the young age when Grace faced that decision. Parents and family members reported different reasons why they supported students’ decision to take Mandarin. These varied from a perspective of a good timing in language acquisition, to a perspective of the utility of the language, to a perspective of scarce resources, and a perspective of allowing for equal acceptance. Because these student participants had no Asian background, they had very minimal exposure to Mandarin before officially starting to learn this language. Their decision to start this adventure was mainly encouraged by their parents or other family members because the adults either possessed the knowledge of Mandarin or had a vision why they thought it might assist the child with his/her future. This validates Gardner’s (1985) assumption that parents play an important role in attitude development and in their child’s attempts to learn a second language.

When students were given a chance to be exposed to Mandarin more systematically before making the decision, as seen in Sarah’s case, they were intrinsically motivated to learn the language. For less commonly taught languages, due to their minimal presence in potential learners’ immediate social context, it is necessary to provide some linguistic contact to allow for
an educated decision. From the interviews, it was learned that some schools later changed their approaches to ask students to make a foreign language choice. They decided to offer each foreign language for a semester before asking students to make their decision. Unlike Bartram (2010)’s study, this study did not find that peer groups exerted a powerful influence on the interviewees’ foreign language choice. Peers were not even mentioned when students were asked about the reasons for starting to learn Mandarin. The role peers played in the initial period of Mandarin learning appeared to be minimal.

**Variations of Motivation to Sustain Involvement in Mandarin Learning**

While all the student participants were engaged in Mandarin learning through different trajectories, there were two patterns found across the cases on how they sustained involvement in Mandarin learning, regardless of how they started learning Mandarin. The first was called the agentic pattern and the second was called the traditional institutional pattern. In the agentic pattern, students attended Mandarin classes operated by different educational institutions, but they also exercised agency in non-instructional settings to access additional linguistic and interactional resources. In the traditional institutional pattern, despite access to spontaneous interactional resources, students continued to be mainly active in Mandarin language socialization in instructional settings. Among the 10 cases, I selected two cases for each pattern to illustrate how the components (schools, families, teachers, peers, extracurricular Mandarin programs, local and overseas Chinese speaking communities, and media) at the meso level co-constructed the Mandarin learning experiences with each student participant in their particular sociocultural environment.

**The agentic pattern.** In the following section, I discuss two case studies to illustrate the first pattern - Students attended Mandarin classes operated by different educational institutions,
but they also exercised agency in non-instructional settings to access additional linguistic and interactional resources.

**Case study 1: Eric.** Eric, a multiracial American male of Jamaican descent, was in the 12th grade studying in a private school in the Bronx when I interviewed him. He was my former student from a weekend Mandarin program. According to Eric, he was in the top three in his Mandarin class at his private school. He started taking Mandarin in the 10th grade as this was the first year in high school when they could choose a foreign language. In the 9th grade, students at his school were required to take either Latin or Greek and he took Latin. The school offered a wide variety of foreign languages by the time I interviewed him: German, French, Spanish, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Latin and Greek. His parents only spoke English. He had experiences learning French and Spanish. As his mother recalled, he was good at learning new languages while he did not remember much about those experiences.

The reason why he chose Mandarin was because he thought it was the hardest language and his mother supported him in the idea that as he probably would be good at learning any new language, it would be better for him to choose one that would challenge him. Moreover, as the reality was that he was not eligible for honors in some other subjects such as science honors due to his grades back then, his mother believed that to some degree, Eric chose Mandarin because this could be a course that required as much competence as other honor classes would require. She recalled him saying, “I want to do something that is challenging, that looks good. This looks like it’s hard.” He tried to claim his membership as an academically competent student through taking Mandarin, in a way to substitute for other honors classes from which he was excluded because of his insufficiently high marks. His will was only part of the story. He was able to act upon his wish only because the environment he was in allowed for such agency. If the school did
not offer Mandarin, he would not be able to use the pre-conceived difficulty associated with Mandarin study by the society to claim that he was capable academically.

As I take the position that human agency, as the key factor in learning, is co-constructed with those around the L2 users, I will illustrate how the components at the meso level played their roles in Eric being an agent in his Mandarin learning experience.

*School.* Eric’s school has offered Mandarin for 6 years, German for 10 years, and Arabic was introduced this year, among all the eight world language choices. Regarding the wide variety the school offered, Eric commented, “my school is pretty extensive. They go as far as they can in any area.” There was certainly support felt from his end to consider that his school made efforts to offer the students a variety of choices in pursuit of one’s academic interests. His school not only offered the opportunity for him to take Mandarin but also offered the opportunity to take him to Chinatown, where he would otherwise have never been to. It was the school that provided the educational opportunities in instructional settings at first as well as in non-instructional settings.

There is an Asian Club in the school, which Eric joined right after he enrolled in the Mandarin class. He has been an active member as he “was always there for bake sales, advertisement, or doing anything.” This year he became the president of the Asian Club. He explained the reason why he was elected:

> It was a voted thing so I was voted in. I think of it more that people respected me enough to get the job done. That’s the main reason, I would say. Also because I was an active participant. … Also, I know a lot about Chinatown and I take Mandarin as well.

With his deep involvement in Chinese related activities, he had been trying to bring the culture from Chinatown into the club. He took the entire club which was around 20 people to Chinatown,
whether they were Mandarin learners or not. The Asian Club also raised money throughout the entire year and in March, they would hold a Pan-Asian day, when they asked Chinese restaurants to cater to the entire school. They raised money by asking school members to buy a Chinese lunch. The club did not really benefit from this. “It’s just giving back to the school and exposing it to Asian culture,” said Eric.

Eric also brought different games, music, and movies to the club based on his own experience and exposure to the Asian culture. By sharing with his club members an interesting activity he learned from the Startalk summer program, a good restaurant he got to know from the fieldtrip of his Mandarin class at his school, or a great movie he self-discovered from Netflix, his involvement in Mandarin learning and the Asian culture was strongly interconnected with his involvement in the Asian Club in his role as a leader. By the two roles mutually reinforcing each other, it allowed his agency to be co-constructed by this particular sociocultural environment.

Teacher. Eric had a close relationship with his Mandarin teacher and he often went to her office to talk if he was bored after school. It was his first interaction with an Asian person and his teacher being very friendly helped him ease into learning Mandarin. He talked about how the interaction with his teacher changed his attitude towards Asian people:

Now I’ve just become more and more unbiased. I just become naturally more at ease with anything Asian because I know that she’s really really nice. Anything I need[ed] help with, she’ll always help. She’s just really, really friendly in general so now I kind of just expect anyone else who is Asian to be like that…. I used to assume that Asian people weren’t really as friendly. They mind their own business all the time. That can come off as not being that friendly. I mean I was pretty unbiased really. I grew up thinking that everyone is just another guy. You have to know somebody to actually know who they are.
But just because when I was walking around every day in public and Asian people were always doing their own thing. I don’t even hear them talking on the streets. Then you see regular white people or black people that are socializing. … It’s not that [Asian people] wouldn’t want to talk to you. They’re just really into what they’re doing. So that’s just the way they are. I became friends with my teacher and she’s just like anyone else, perfectly just like anyone else.

His teacher offered him access to and an opportunity to get to know a Chinese person individually and she welcomed Eric’s attempt at socialization. These types of interactional opportunities in non-instructional settings were not only available in the school building. After she dismissed the students on Eric’s first fieldtrip to Chinatown, she hung out with some students including Eric and drank bubble tea with them. This simple introduction to bubble tea triggered Eric’s curiosity to discover what was offered culturally in Chinatown and opened another space of learning Mandarin for him besides his classroom studies. Eric’s teacher also provided him with the initial access to extracurricular programs because if she had not mentioned these during Eric’s first year of taking Mandarin, Eric’s mother would not have thought of this. Although it was Eric’s mother who sought to find out the details and helped Eric apply for extracurricular Mandarin programs, she credited his teacher with for helping with that because his Mandarin teacher played a resourceful role in providing information on what was available and what could be done to help Eric with learning the language. Therefore, Eric was grateful that his teacher helped him a lot on his journey to learn Mandarin. At the same time, he still wished his teacher could offer him and his classmates more exposure to the non-linguistic aspects of Chinese in the instructional setting as shown when he was asked to give suggestions on Mandarin programs:
She should give us more personal examples of the difference for her when she came. …

The way she is with me personally she should be with the entire class all the time. …

Especially for Mandarin because it’s such a special language, I think it would be more beneficial if she opened up to us learning with her as opposed to us just learning. Because Mandarin is so specific to culture as well as a language that if we learned with her, I think it would be easier and it would just be simpler. … I can’t name any other teacher that was born in another country. Especially for her, she has a very unique role. She almost had an advantage in that way because she can teach us in ways that the other teachers can’t.

Especially because China is such a different country, she can give us a lot more insight into learning the language and the culture than any other teacher can. She should take advantage of that.

Eric recognized the advantage Mandarin teachers from Chinese speaking countries had lay not only in their linguistic authenticity, but also in their authentic perspective as a Chinese person.

He considered that in the classroom, his teacher taught Mandarin primarily as a language class, especially at the beginning, without relating the language piece to where the language can take students. When asked to read the English translation of work by the famous Chinese writer Lu Xun for class, Eric felt that his teacher had skipped an important teaching opportunity. He explained:

I wish I had the opportunity to at least try to read it in Mandarin. She should have given it in English first and then tried to give it to us in Mandarin now. … Now that I’ve personally motivated myself to do all this other stuff to learn Mandarin, I see what she was getting at. To take Mandarin beyond the language and trying to relate to everyone in the class that it’s more than just a language and that the language is influenced by the
culture and the culture is influenced by the language, back and forth. But she skipped a step in how she would make us interested in it. She was like, “Okay now we’re learning Mandarin” and then “Okay read this book on China.” But she didn’t really make the connection so that we would actually want to make our own connections in other areas. Because Eric had been learning Mandarin for almost three years, he felt the necessity to go beyond just the language in order to sustain his engagement in Mandarin learning as “it will get monotonous. It will get hard mentally to keep having to go to class and learn more characters.” He observed that some of his classmates were not really as interested as they were in their first year of learning Mandarin because they could not really apply the language to anything. The lack of Chinese cultural element in his Mandarin class at the beginning somehow pushed him to go beyond the language on his own outside the classroom because he personally believed that language and culture should be learned at the same exact time:

When I think about becoming better at the language, now my understanding of the language has a huge part to do with understanding the culture. Now the language is so influenced by the culture, I can’t do one without the other. Because I’m in that phase where I’m all about learning about the culture. When I think about learning the language, I just think about everything else that’s going on.

That was why he suggested that his teacher should start off introducing the Chinese culture in the beginning of the class, instead of merely focusing on linguistic knowledge for two years. As Mandarin is considered one of the most difficult languages for English native speakers to acquire, the length and intensity of Mandarin study often times brings along demotivation which impedes further communicative progress, from my observations. Incorporating culture into language learning from the very beginning and allowing cultural activities to serve as the events for
students to apply their linguistic knowledge seems to be one strategy that could help to sustain a learners’ long-term involvement in pursuing this language.

New York City. Up until his first Mandarin class field trip to Chinatown in the 10th grade, Eric had been learning Mandarin mainly in the classroom. However, the very first class trip to Chinatown exposed him to a new community of practice. Since then, he estimated that he had been to Chinatown 40 to 50 times by the time he was interviewed in the 12th grade. As a tradition of Mandarin classes at his school, students went to Chinatown every year. He recalled:

   Every year there’s a Chinatown trip where all the Mandarin levels go with our teacher.
   The first time ever was my first year taking Mandarin at school. … We went there and I just really liked the food and I liked the area. It was a lot of fun. I went there once. Then the next time I went alone. I think I was just curious. I didn’t really know what was there. But I thought it was more interesting than other things. So I decided to go back to find out what was there. To find out more about it.

After the Mandarin class field trip, Eric began his own adventure in exploring Chinatown. This confirms Norton’s (1995) finding that while learners are initially actively engaged in classroom practices, the realm of their community can be extended beyond the four walls of the classroom.

   Another reason why Eric went back was to get better at Mandarin. “I figured if I could hear a lot more, I’d get used to it better because I can comprehend a lot better than I can speak,” as he recalled what made him to go back. He went through different phases to exercise his agency and to make spontaneous interactional opportunities happen in non-instructional settings.

   “It went from exploring to I know where everything is,” said Eric, “so let me just do what I have to do and leave.” During the process, his relationship with the Chinese speakers in Chinatown experienced changes over time and this had something to do with his Mandarin proficiency. At
the very beginning, he started going into stores and to see what it was about. He remembered trying to use Mandarin but he did not really know what he was saying. With the purchase of some Chinatown souvenirs he felt this was a fun and interesting experience. As his continuous effort to speak Mandarin went on, he eventually found a restaurant:

It’s more a kind of Western-style Chinese. But it’s still very very Chinese from China because they don’t really speak that much English in there. It’s just a regular you can sit down and eat. I went there and everywhere I go they’re kind of skeptical like what are you doing there. But that was okay. When I tried to order in Mandarin, [the waitress] didn’t understand what I was saying but I just realized that must’ve been trying to listen for English and then I explained that I spoke Mandarin in Mandarin. And she freaked out. She was asking me all these questions. I think she even forgot that I was trying to order food. She asked me, “Why do you take Mandarin?” I wasn’t really good at speaking at that time I think I’m much better now. So I told her to speak slower because I didn’t know what she was saying and I was like, “I’m not that good.” And she was like, “No, no, no. You’re good.” And I was like, “No, I’m not.” She understood what I was saying and she was really interested. It was just easy from there on at that place.

That was the first time Eric felt he “stepped into their world.” When the waitress found out that Eric spoke Mandarin, she became very interested and the relationship all of sudden changed from costumer-provider relationship to the one between a new Mandarin user and an experienced Mandarin user. She temporarily left behind her job responsibility of taking orders and engaged Eric in a conversation about his Mandarin learning experience and encouraged him by giving her approval of his Mandarin speaking ability. In one of his college application essays, as Eric’s mother recalled, he wrote about his Chinatown experience, “how they are accepting him more
and more because he just keeps going back to the same places and so now they are more likely to speak the language to him and don’t think that he’s just some odd kid. They know that he respects them.” With his constant efforts to continue participating in this new community, Eric practiced his membership and saw an improvement in his Mandarin proficiency:

At times, I know what I’m saying, whether you understand it or not is a different situation. Also it’s like I separated myself, kind of. When I’m in Chinatown, I try to not think American. … [If] I’m not thinking American, then there would be no other way to get what I’m saying across besides Mandarin. So that’s the way. … I went to them, so I have to cater to them. Not the other way around. So if I’m going to be there, I’m going to do that way, not American.

In Eric’s case, he opted for constructing new and mixed linguistic identities as he became a member of multiple communities. He “separated” himself into “not thinking American” when he was in Chinatown and approached Chinese speakers using Mandarin, almost exclusively Mandarin, as the way to show his respect to experienced Mandarin users in the shared community he found membership in. His decision to not use English and not think like an American showed his intention to claim his membership in the community in which he was like everyone else in Chinatown, speaking one of the Chinese languages as a means of communication. However, the process was not always smooth. The access Eric had to linguistic resources and interactional opportunities in Chinatown was mediated by his ethno-linguistic background. Eric had to struggle to declare his membership as the Chinese speakers in Chinatown did not respond immediately to their shared commonality with him in the ability to speak Mandarin and to understand the Chinese culture. Eric’s purchasing experience of Jianzi (Chinese hacky sack) illustrated his struggle in details. Jianzi, depending on the tones and
characters, means different things in Mandarin. 毽子 (Jiànzi) means Chinese hacky sack while 剪子 (Jiănzi) means scissors. This set of words has the same phonological representation except for the tonal difference. Eric recalled that experience:

> It’s [Jiànzi] the most impossible--the hardest thing that I’ve had to look for in Chinatown and I’ve looked for a lot of different things. It is the most difficult thing to find. Because not only it is rare but nobody knows what you’re talking about because they don’t assume that anyone remembers what it is, especially in America. I know it’s really popular in China but in America it’s nothing, nobody knows about. They always assumed that I was talking about scissors. I figured that and I knew that when I was asking I was going to make a complete fool of myself because I knew that they wouldn’t know what I was talking about. … Yeah that Asian game that nobody knows. They would assume that I was just wrong. But then I would even elaborate. I would be like, “Ti Jianzi [kick Chinese hacky sack]” and they would still be like, “We have scissors.” I was like, “I don’t want scissors.” They would keep taking me to the back for scissors and I don’t want scissors. That was never what I was looking for. I would tell them that and they’d get angry at me. I was like, “I told you in the beginning that I didn’t want [scissors]. I can’t kick scissors.” They’d think I was crazy because, the game where you kick scissors? But that’s not my intention.

The assumption many store owners in Chinatown made was that this young African American boy would not know about such a thing as Jianzi, the traditional Chinese toy. Because of the phonological similarity in Mandarin between Chinese hacky sack and scissors, they all thought Eric’s intention was to buy a pair of scissors. Eric actually did not know about the existence of Jianzi (Chinese hacky sack) until he attended the Startalk summer program and he fell in love
with it right away. The reason why he went to Chinatown to purchase Jianzi was because he wanted to bring it to the Asian Club at his school to share with the club members this interesting Asian game. As he understood the store owners’ assumption, he expressed his agency by elaborating that he wanted the Jianzi to kick in Mandarin, hoping for the possibility that the owners would then understand that he did not mean scissors but the Chinese hacky sack.

However, those owners did not process his elaboration the way he wanted them to and still demonstrated the same understanding. Eric struggled to socialize into this community of practice where Chinese was the lingua franca. The store owners ignored Eric’s attempt to express his intention in Mandarin and considered him no more than someone who knew several Mandarin words. Even so, Eric did not give up:

There must be a hundred stores, little shops on each street between Canal and Bayard St. There was like tons. And I had to go through every single shop for streets. After the first three I was so embarrassed that I was like, “I just got to find it. I’m not going to give up now. I’m ready.” I didn’t think it would be that hard because I didn’t even know how to say scissors. But I realized how hard it would become and then it kind of motivated me to not give up. I feel like it’s more rewarding if I can complete the thing or be successful. So when I realized there’s an 80% chance I would not find it and that I’d find scissors, I just became really stubborn. I just kept looking for it. So I went through every single street and it turned out that it was on the first street and it was one shop that I didn’t go to and I didn’t see it. It was this high entrance. It was just ridiculous.

After realizing how much harder this task was than he originally thought, Eric became determined to complete the task as a way to assure himself that he was a capable speaker of Mandarin who was able to communicate with experienced Mandarin users successfully. He
considered that finishing the task would be more rewarding than quitting because he then expanded his access to the linguistic resources and interactional opportunities. He did complete the task by the end:

I finally found a store where I had a really nice conversation with the owner. For some reason he was simpler to talk to. He was like, “So this.” And I was like “No.” So then he brought me to the corner and he showed it to me and I was like, “Oh they finally have it.” And there was so many. It was like an hour and a half [I spent time trying to buy Jianzi]. It was a great feeling and then we started talking. He was like, “Where did you learn to speak Mandarin? Where are you taking classes?” and I told him about [the institution he attended in summer] where it held Mandarin programs in the U.S. and in China. He was like, “Do you ever want to go to China?” and I was like, “Yeah, I would really really love to go to China.” and he said, “I wish I could get my son to go to China, but I can’t afford it and everything.” I said, “You know there’s an institution on 56th.” He asked me where and I said “wu shi liu jie (56th Street).” I wrote it down on a piece of paper or something for him, because he said he wanted his son to go to China.

He finally found a store owner who still thought Eric wanted scissors at the very beginning, but later the owner was able to process the fact that he actually wanted a Chinese hacky sack. Not only was Eric able to spontaneously interact with this store owner to successfully purchase the Jianzi, but also he was able to expand their conversation to extracurricular Mandarin programs. The store owner said something and Eric was able to piece it together. It was something that he did not really understand what that word was but he still understood the intent of the sentence. He used his limited Mandarin repertoire to help the store owner by detailing the location of the
institution where the owner would be able to find information regarding Mandarin programs in China.

In this Jianzi purchasing experience, Eric used his limited linguistic competence to negotiate his membership among Chinese speakers in Chinatown. His agency improved with this experience, from him being positioned in a powerless role where the store owners misunderstood him almost across the board to become an empowered individual that could offer information to Chinese speakers using his linguistic knowledge. He struggled to obtain access to interaction opportunities throughout these experiences and was rewarded with the feeling that he was able to expand his access.

As a result of frequently going there, Eric perfected his routine in Chinatown. “When I get off the train, here here here here, like the fastest way to get in and out. So it wasn’t really like spending time. I basically became any other person in Chinatown. I had no time for anything. I would go there, bubble tea, Jing Fong, Hong Kong supermarket, home. It was like a routine almost.” He considered himself no different from other people who he used to feel “don’t really have time to mess around.” His identity changed over time the longer he was a member of the community:

I mean at this point I don’t really even go to China to learn. I just go to Chinatown to do. I go there just to get in and out and I speak Mandarin in the process. … Now I’m almost becoming Asian in the fact that I don’t speak to people when I don’t need to. Before I would just speak to try and see what would happen. Now I go to Chinatown, I don’t speak unless I need something.

He attributed his breakthrough to taking Mandarin. As he said during the focus group discussion, “There’s a relatively decent size of Asian community amongst us but you don’t really
realize how exclusive they are, and how exclusive their culture is until you start taking Mandarin.” To him, the very fact that he was learning Mandarin opened him up to this otherwise exclusive community. With the curiosity of knowing about Chinatown and the intention of practicing Mandarin, Eric started his educational experience in Chinatown, a non-instructional setting. During his interview he stated that he was looking for authenticity in his language socialization as he preferred the Chinatown in Manhattan than the one in Flushing because “it’s more realistic” while in Flushing “they would speak slower when they would realize that I was trying to learn the language.” The existence of Chinatown in New York City secures a physical space legitimizing the Mandarin socialization in non-instructional settings without having Eric take the risk of embarrassing himself in finding a wrong person to speak Mandarin to. As he put it, “When you go to Chinatown, you know you can speak there. There’s no question. You don’t have to go searching for anyone.”

Parents. Both Eric’s parents did not speak Mandarin. But from Eric’s point of view, his mother “definitely helps a lot”:

Because once she realized how interested I was in the language, she helped me find Startalk. She helped me contact with the coordinator to get all my applications in. She helped a lot. I probably wouldn’t have been able to do it by myself. So I think when she realized how much time that I put into it, she wanted to help me stay with it. So she helped me do that program and she’s trying to force me to go to China this summer even though I don’t want to because it’s my last summer at home. She realizes how much I care about the language.

Eric’s mother resonated Eric’s words in explaining her attitude, “[f]or me, if I find out that he’s interested in something, I can’t stop thinking about it.” Besides looking for
extracurricular Mandarin programs for him, the parents also created other opportunities for Eric to practice Mandarin. He recalled sometimes his parents would purposely try to eat Chinese food and make him drive. He would have to go with them to the restaurant and they would try to make him order in Mandarin. Even though Eric’s parents were unable to speak Mandarin, they still involved in Eric’s Mandarin study by playing a listener role when Eric came home talking about what he learned and Eric’s mother believed that reinforced his Mandarin learning.

*Peers.* Peers did not play a direct role in Eric’s taking Mandarin. However, his friends’ responses to the fact that he was able to speak Mandarin provided motivation for him:

I think it’s special because all my friends that don’t take it, they think the language is interesting. Sometimes they regret not taking it. One of my closest friends wants to know what I’m talking about when I’m talking to my teacher, or when I go to Chinatown and start speaking. They’re interested but they really don’t know so I guess I’m different in that way as a student learning Mandarin.

Being able to communicate in a language which his close friends had no idea about and regretted not learning, Eric realized the importance of what he was doing and that he should cherish the opportunity and continue with it.

In another respect, Eric had been trying to be in a learner community where other community members were as motivated as he was. He found that learner community in the Startalk summer program and enjoyed studying with a group of students “as interested as he was,” according to Eric’s mother. In his Mandarin class at his school, while not everyone was as motivated as he was, he exercised his agency by excluding his best friend from doing a Mandarin project together:
I was not going to go with that one and that one. They wanted to be in my group but I said no because they’re not serious enough. … He’s my best friend but he [is] just not as into it as I am. I am only gonna do my project with those that are going to be just as intense as I am.

Eric was gatekeeping his learner community and wanted to make sure that he studied with a group whose members were at the same motivational level as he was in order to ensure his gradual progress in Mandarin learning.

*Extracurricular Mandarin programs.* Eric’s teacher mentioned the Startalk summer program to his parents and after that his mother helped him apply for it. In the summer of 2012, the program brought students on several field trips to Chinatown in Manhattan, Queens, and Brooklyn. Eric also went to the Chinese Scholars Garden in Staten Island with the program. This enabled the students to have new experiences as some of the places were those they would otherwise never visit because “it’s hard to get to.”

The program also arranged many cultural activities and that was when Eric discovered Jianzi as an interesting game and later sought to buy it in Chinatown in order to carry out the activity with his friends from the Asian Club at his school. Besides the field trips and cultural activities, this six-week intensive program adopted the immersion approach in the classroom, which Eric considered “the best way to learn” and reported making large progress in Mandarin proficiency after finishing the program.

*Media.* While Eric had been increasing his language learning through being immersed in the culture, he used the media to seek an authentic language and cultural environment in non-instructional settings. He tried to read the news in Chinese characters on a Chinese news website and due to his limited linguistic competence, it was too hard to understand the entire article. But
he still tried to read the headlines from time to time with the help of a dictionary and to keep up with what was going on in China. After realizing it was “impossible” to read the news, he turned to the music. He went to YouTube and watched music videos that had the lyrics on the screen. He gained a sense of progress through listening to Chinese pop songs:

It’s pretty straightforward. It’s not that hard to understand. They use the same phrases and words over and over again. But it’s good for me to memorize them at least, or understand. Also it feels good when I can almost pretend I’m fluent when I listen to a song, because if I can understand what they’re saying then there’s no difference between me and another Chinese person that’s fluent. Because if I’m understanding the same when I listen to a song as they are, then that’s just I guess one step closer.

Eric sought his way to share the same cultural practice with his imagined community. The very fact that he understood the entire lyrics as a Chinese person assured him of a feeling of membership in his imagined community in which Mandarin was the lingua franca.

Besides trying to focus on the linguistic part of Chinese pop music, Eric was interested in the artistic side of Asian culture in general. Eric’s mother saw him involved not only into Asian pop music, but also well informed of Asian artists who wrote and played classical music:

I think he has the respect for the musicality of Asian writers, music writers, and he likes the way the music sounds. Musically, he thinks it’s a high level, and he thinks it’s a higher level than the American pop writing. …He is also keenly aware of the progress that Asian people made, like the best violinists in the world. He appreciates that level of focus that he recognizes in the culture. I think he would like to be a part of that. It draws him.
After learning the music, Eric conducted research on his own about movies. He was interested in action films so he watched a lot of Chinese martial arts films. His understanding of martial arts films demonstrated changes over time when he compared Chinese martial arts films with American ones:

Anything with martial arts is always really cool. But before learning Mandarin my understanding of a good martial arts film was completely different. I just thought it was fighting. But after learning Mandarin and if you look for a Chinese film, it’s completely different from what Americans would assume a martial arts film is like. Now I just think that American martial arts films are stupid. Because there’s no cultural background in American Chinese films, at least that I’ve seen. They just throw a lot of action at you, because that’s what most Americans will find satisfying to watch. … But when you understand the culture behind it, it doesn’t have to be a lot of action, because there’s more of a discipline or a calmness about it. There’s a strength within. When you watch *Ip Man*¹¹, there aren’t that many action scenes but they’re more meaningful. It’s more interesting about just understanding what was actually going on, and it portrays really well how the Chinese people felt about being taken over by Japan. The fact that [the character] Ip Man was using a less violent way, that’s the interesting action part. That’s a lot more interesting than just seeing “Aw, I can’t wait until someone gets hurt.”

Eric demonstrated the development of his cross-cultural understanding when explaining his attitude towards Chinese martial arts films. He attributed this development to his action of learning Mandarin. Eric felt that learning Mandarin gave him a stronger desire to figure out more

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¹¹ *Ip Man* is a 2008 Hong Kong semi-biographical martial arts film based on the life of Ip Man, a grandmaster of the martial art Wing Chun and master of Bruce Lee. The film focuses on events in Ip Man’s life that took place during the Sino-Japanese War.
about their culture and how things work. It was the language that brought him to a new world, where he could learn about Chinese pop culture and how things worked in the Chinese government. He mentioned that his goal was that after going after the easier sides of the culture, he would be able to read more difficult items on the Chinese website because he could not read much right now. As can be seen, media enabled Eric to take more control and responsibility for his own Mandarin learning (Duff, 2012).

**Case study 2: Grace.** Grace, a girl of Hispanic and African descent, was in the 11th grade when I interviewed her. She had started learning Mandarin in Kindergarten when her parents decided to send her to a dual language (English and Mandarin) public school in Manhattan. Her two brothers also attended the same school. Her parents did not speak Mandarin and the family lived at the outer reaches of the city. The long hours of commute and the challenging curriculum were considered good preparation for the future, according to the interview with Grace’s mother by New York Times. The parents were aware of current events and through a family friend they got to know about this dual language school. The decision was made by Grace’s parents in 2001 that Grace would attend this school, with majority of the student population who were of Chinese descent. Many of their friends back then were shocked by their decision. But Grace’s mother felt their goal was clear:

> At an early age my husband and I felt the importance of learning as many languages as possible. When you look at the globe Mandarin is the most spoken language in the world. So in a country where racism is still alive and you want to give to your children the best and most opportunities you can in addition to a solid foundation of learning, why not give them that language so what they can do then is take it and go anywhere in the world and be able to communicate with people, and learn as well.
Grace’s parents were very aware of where the Chinese speaking communities were located in different continents. They helped Grace invest in Mandarin learning by choosing a Mandarin immersion education for her because they believed that it would enable her to gain membership in particular language communities in the U.S. and elsewhere (Dagenais, 2003). They not only thought of the utility of Mandarin but also found African Americans positioned at a disadvantage socially and economically in relations to others in the country. By learning Mandarin they believed that this could bring Grace increased social status and a wider range of symbolic and material resources she would otherwise not be able to access. Grace understood that the reason why her parents wanted her to go to this school was because they wanted to “get [her] ahead in life” and she had nothing against this decision.

In the following section, I will look into how things worked together in Grace’s experience of being a Mandarin user.

*School.* The dual language public school was a bilingual elementary and middle school. After graduation, Grace went to a private high school where Mandarin was not offered. She ended up taking Spanish to fulfill her foreign language requirement because the high school did not take her Chinese credits from the dual language public school, which “so annoyed” her.

The dual language public school offered English classes daily from 8:40 - 3:00 pm with one period of Chinese social studies which was in Mandarin and English. From 3 - 5:30 pm it was Chinese time where Grace learned Mandarin in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The elementary school division ran a speech competition each year, which was a big event to demonstrate students’ oral skills in Mandarin. Grace had done several of them and she won:

I won that three years in a row. That was really really great for me and I wanted to keep on doing it and keep on winning. The competitors, some of them are heritage students.
They were really mad when I beat them out. … I was always at the top, always there. So I kept on doing that and the competition was just a really really fun thing for me. During Chinese time my teacher would always be like, “Come. Let’s practice.” So I would write the speeches and she would edit them and then I had to recite them. We’d practice little movements and pauses and everything. My mom was always smiling even though she had no idea what it meant. She was always so proud that I won. And I think it was a one hundred dollar prize every time.

The cultural practice of this speech competition is generally considered a typical school event in Chinese speaking countries. The way the teacher instructed Grace on how to present herself in the speech competition reflected a form of culturally specific immersion in the classroom. It is obvious that Grace enjoyed her achievement very much and was proud of herself for being able to win the prize in speaking Mandarin in a school where the majority were students of Chinese descent. Grace’s mother also considered the speech competition an important event in her daughter’s life:

She won the prize among all of the Chinese students. How great is that? That confidence, she has no lack of. There were many times when she was asked to say something or do something in Mandarin and it just made her better. Not because she was African American doing it but she was actually better at it.

Grace’s mother was very proud about the fact that Grace’s Mandarin speaking was excellent and this was not only recognized by her but also by the school community, which in turn, built up Grace’s confidence. This was verified by Grace in the interview:
I feel that with Mandarin and what I have accomplished, if I’m not doing so well in another class, I’m like, “Well, I should be able to do a little bit of this.” If I did not have those accomplishments, then I would second guess myself more.

Being able to speak this hard language well had gained Grace more trust in her own ability to overcome difficulties. The accomplishments she made in Mandarin affected the way she perceived herself.

Besides the events focusing on language proficiency, the dual language school also provided cultural events. One of the biggest events was the celebration of the Lunar New Year in the entire school and was obviously very memorable to Grace:

Every year we would have a Lunar New Year festival. We would put on dances, plays, and shows since Kindergarten. I think it was just fun because rehearsals were a lot of fun. My parents go every year. The Lunar New Year was a really really big thing. We always ate after. I miss that a lot. It always brought us together, teachers and students. Because my class always got the dance room. So we had mirrors and everything. The teachers would do our makeup for us. It brought us all together.

It was in a non-instructional setting where Grace was immersed in a cultural event celebrated by Chinese people. She had been part of this as a performer for nine years and had gained much understanding of the Chinese culture. She had been one of the members participating in this cultural practice and shared an insider perspective about the festival:

Like Chinese New Year, a lot of people don’t understand it. They will go to Chinatown and will get gold coins and will be like, “Oh, this is so cool.” But they don’t understand what it is actually. People will be like, “Let’s go to a Chinese restaurant tonight,” and
they won’t understand that it is a holiday and most of the restaurants will be closed
because those people are celebrating with their families.

Grace’s mother also mentioned about how much her children knew about the Chinese culture
and that she herself knew quite a bit about it. The dual language school offered a lot of
experience for Grace to learn the language and the culture. That is why she pointed out that the
school influenced her attitude towards the Chinese language, and its culture, and speakers to a
considerable degree.

While embracing the Chinese culture and still celebrating some of the things Grace’s
family had learned from the dual language school, Grace’s mother mentioned some cultural
features that they just as soon were happy to leave behind, including “the ability to purposely not
recognize the child with special needs,” “only accepting teachings toward tests,” “often insisting
that things only be done one way,” and “the child could never be correct over the adult.” There
was tension between the school community cultural practices and the social norms perceived in
the larger American society. When one of Grace’s Chinese classmates called her the N word, her
reaction was:

I mean of course they will learn words and use them, but they don’t know how bad they
are. So they will say them to try to get a reaction out of you. I was upset when it first
happened but I told the principal. It wasn’t a big deal for me. I won’t sit back down and
do nothing. I am a very feisty person and will do what is right and will fight for what is
right.

Grace’s mother asked those parents to be contacted and the classmate’s father reacted in a way
she could not comprehend:
He didn’t understand where his son would get this type of language from because he comes to this country from Taiwan and if I were to come to his home I would see a picture of Dr. Martin Luther King on his refrigerator. What does that have to do with me? There were other incidents Grace’s mother recalled that had happened to other African American students. “When an African American student was called a monkey and the parents complained, they were told a monkey is an endearing term in Chinese.” She did not accept this as the truth and thought many things that were done were racist. She said she understood the whole experience as follows:

Culturally the Chinese never have any problems. If there’s an issue, we don’t talk. It’s not talked about. It’s not even recognized. If the issue has to be recognized, away it goes. When you’re the minority within that group of minorities, they don’t see themselves as minority. … So therefore, you know what, you little brown person we are doing you a favor by letting you in here.

Grace’s multiple identities were constructed and reconstructed through the negotiation of power as she not only belonged to an ethnic minority group, but was also a non-heritage minority learning Mandarin at school. She encountered racism from another ethnic minority group which was the majority in school where as a community they performed their own cultural practices. Their reactions to the racist incidents were culturally embedded ways to cope with such situations. The very fact that Grace was an ethnic and linguistic minority at the dual language school reinforced her identity as someone special in both positive and negative ways. She encountered racism and the fact that the incident was not recognized in the community was a piece of non-linguistic knowledge that Grace and her family learned in non-instructional settings.
On the other hand, she was someone special because she spoke Mandarin very well as a non-heritage student so the experience to her was unforgettable:

It was a lot of fun to go through the Mandarin learning experience. It was special because I was the only one doing it and everyone would be impressed because I was learning Mandarin. … I literally wish I could relive it because to think about it, it was so cool to come in first place [in the speech competition]. All of the Chinese people were so mad because who is this girl winning. But it was so much fun to do twice and going through and talking about the experience and being put in the newspaper so to be able to google my name and it be there. It was crazy.

Because Grace was the only African American student in her grade from Kindergarten through 8th grade, Grace’s mother observed her daughter gravitate towards the Chinese and considered the school experience played a significant role in shaping who Grace was. Given the contradictory experiences Grace had in the school, Grace’s mother thought in general “for the duration in which [her] children were there, they got the best out of that school” because she saw Grace “empowered to utilize a hard-earned skill and took pride in doing so.” Grace’s mother was able to separate the racist incidents from having her child to learn the language, stating “[o]ne has nothing to do with the other.” It demonstrates her belief in language competence functioning as capital in relation to educational, professional, and social markets.

*Trip to China.* One of the significant experiences in Mandarin learning for Grace was the trip to China, which was funded by the dual language public school as the 8th grade graduation trip. Her grandma, her mother, and her younger brother went together with her and the graduating class to China. Being able to experience the Chinese culture, rather than the American
Chinese culture was important to her. Being able to use the language to communicate with locals was a lot of fun:

The only time I didn’t speak Mandarin was when I was talking to my friends or family. But if I was talking to locals, everything was in Mandarin. Something I didn’t understand was that I would talk to them in Chinese but they would answer in English. I never understood that. They don’t expect me to speak Chinese at all. … I just don’t approach them with “Ni hao (hello).” That’s one phrase that I just did not use most of the time. I would say “Good morning. Good afternoon” [in Mandarin]. Because my mom would say “Ni hao” [in a] so Americanized [accent]. Obviously they’re gonna try to rip her off for something. I’m not a tourist. I am but I’m not one of them.

Grace separated her identity from other tourists by approaching local vendors with more complicated greetings to make the statement that she did not belong to the tourist group who simply were outsiders doing sightseeing in China. She expressed her incomprehension of locals responding to her in English even though she talked to them in Mandarin. The locals’ perception of her being one of the tourists was in contrast to her own perception of being a member in the community where Mandarin was the means of communication. Because she was enrolled in a dual language school where students routinely spoke Mandarin in school, Grace thought it was strange that people did not assume she spoke Mandarin, as well. She grew up with the Chinese language and culture so that she did not feel it was a big deal knowing both, as she always assumed her own membership in that community. That was why she felt comfortable in China, according to her mother:

She has no problem in China. When we were in China, she wanted to go off on her own and I said to her, “You can’t do that. You’re thirteen. You cannot go off on your own.”
You have to stay with me, the adult.” And she said, “I speak the language. You don’t.”
That’s the level of her confidence.
Given the opportunity to communicate with locals and having spontaneous interactions, Grace felt the trip was significant because:

The China trip definitely changed everything. Before I just thought of Mandarin as what I have to do. It’s going to help me at some point. But I don’t know when. Then during the China trip I was like, “Okay this is actually what I have to do now. I can actually do this for a living. I can talk to people and understand their language.” After that I came back and was like, “Wow I actually have to take this really serious now.”

Being able to experience where the language could take her, Grace started to realize the possible return on her parents’ investment in her Mandarin education. She joined her parents in believing that the investment in the construction of her identity as bilinguals would bring more symbolic and material resources in the future.

The China trip not only helped Grace discover a new self, but also brought Grace’s mother a nice surprise:

When I went to China for the first time, I marveled how lovely the people in China were. I couldn’t understand that these people were Chinese too. They were warm. They were nice. They were engaging. They were praising my child, who spoke this language and was able to barter and order her food and have a good time in Mandarin. Wow. And it was, “Oh mom, you did a great job. This is a great thing.” You know, you hear it back home from some and it’s okay. But when you go to the country of origin, and they’re telling you, then it’s a whole other lift.
While she was angry about the racist incidents that happened at school, Grace’s mother discovered another community of Chinese people who appreciated the determination and effort it took to acquire Mandarin as a skill and afforded Grace the respect. Moreover, these Chinese people recognized Grace’s family’s commitment and sacrifice. The school graduation trip to China definitely assured Grace’s mother on her choice of sending Grace to the school and motivated Grace to pursue the study of Chinese language and culture in a more serious manner.

*Family.* Her parents’ influence was considered tremendous by Grace in her Mandarin learning experience “because they got me into it.” The way her parents valued the acquisition of Mandarin sent a clear message to Grace that it was important. Her parents’ choice of sending all their children to the dual language public school can be viewed as an investment in education for symbolic and economic reasons. As Grace’s mother put it:

> We believe that each one of our children was born with toolboxes and it’s our job to pack that toolbox as much as we can for them. What they do with those tools as they become adults is entirely up to them. But they’re packed.

With three children learning Mandarin and both parents having no knowledge of the language, secret codes were created in the house. “They have no idea what we’re saying.” said Grace, “They don’t mind as long as we’re practicing.” Grace’s mother responded positively:

> I love it. I think it’s really cool. … There was a time when my older son and Grace were arguing back and forth in Mandarin. I said to them, “Cut it out. What is the problem?” And both of them look at me and started screaming at me in Mandarin. I said, “Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Speak English.” So if it was something that was the joke of the day. That’s to the level of what they’re comfortable with.
Grace’s parents supported her and her siblings in enabling them the Mandarin learning experience whereas her siblings provided her another non-instructional setting to practice Mandarin.

*Peers.* The interaction with Chinese speaking peers allowed Grace to use Mandarin in non-instructional settings. Being able to speak Mandarin had an impact on who she was friends with. Among her four close friends in high school, two of them were Chinese. How she got to know her Chinese friends was because of the shared language – Mandarin. As Grace recalled, “I just went to my Chinese friends because it was freshman year and we all didn’t know each other. I think I just went to them, ‘Do you speak Chinese?’” Chinese people were the ones Grace gravitated towards, according to her mother. She showed me a photo where two Chinese boys escorted Grace in the semiformal:

> These are her friends. So there’re white boys. There’re Dominican boys. There’re Latino boys. You understand what I’m saying? This is my daughter. This is where she’s comfortable. This is what we did. She didn’t say, “Mom, I don’t want to go to kindergarten to learn Mandarin” because this is what we exposed her to.

Grace’s parents’ decision to put her in the dual language school and the fact that the majority of the students in the school were of Chinese descent had a significant impact on Grace’s choice of friends. The sociocultural context she was exposed to made her gravitate more towards a group of people who shared cultural characteristics with her. In this case, it was Chinese culture. Grace mentioned the cultural shock she experienced after attending the private high school and preferred the Chinese demeanor:

> I like [the] Chinese way better because I learned it first and that’s just what I’ve grown up with. Chinese is very respectful. But at [my high] school now if your bag is left in a
common place, they’ll just take it and throw it somewhere else so they can sit there. I hate that. I’m like, “Why are you touching my stuff? No, leave it there. I was sitting there.” They’re so much ruder and Chinese they would just move to another place, they would not sit there. Or they would sit there and just not touch your stuff and then be like, “Oh sorry, I’m going to get up [since you’re back].” It was just frustrating. At my school now it’s just so annoying.

As Grace grew up with speaking Mandarin and was surrounded by Chinese classmates, despite the fact that she was not from a family of Chinese descent, Chinese characteristics were “embedded in her,” her mother felt.

*Extracurricular Mandarin programs.* Grace had been attending extracurricular Mandarin programs to subsidize her Mandarin learning as her high school did not offer Mandarin. She went to a Sunday Mandarin class in Chinatown and attended a Startalk program for two summers. She was in the process of applying for a summer program in China for the coming summer.

As she considered herself more of an experiential learner rather than someone who preferred sitting there with a book, Grace enjoyed learning Mandarin through spontaneous interactions which she carried out in summer:

It was always a lot of fun for us because we did scavenger hunt. Find the best place in this town for dumplings and we would go ask the locals which one is the best. Or we would have to find where they sell turtles or find a cafe and try a cup of tea. Scavenger hunt in Chinatown is what I was talking about. Instead of sitting all day reading textbooks I’d rather do stuff like that. … I think giving me a project, an open-ended project like that. Putting me somewhere I need to use Mandarin then it would be better. Just sitting with the textbook and reciting things just doesn’t help.
As Grace’s Mandarin proficiency was at an advanced level and she was comfortable with the Chinese language and its speakers, she started to connect the social context with her future with Mandarin. When the Startalk summer program took students to the UN, Grace was fascinated by the translator booths which she saw on TV all the time. She thought “that would be so cool to work there helping somebody understand what is going on.” The trips organized by extracurricular programs opened Grace’s horizon and brought her one step closer to the symbolic and material resources she might gain access to through her investment.

New York City. Being in New York City where there is a large Chinese population offered many spontaneous interactional opportunities to Grace. Her being able to speak Mandarin came in handy as Grace’s mother recalled one day:

On our way to Chinese school, we reached Allen and Delancy Street because we had to make a left turn. There was a driver to the right of us and he just kept moving his car, an Asian gentleman. I said to Grace if she could ask him if he wanted to get in front of us because that would be the courteous thing to do. So she stuck her head out of the window and she said whatever word in Mandarin. The driver said “Yes. Yes. Yes.” and he started to move his car up. Then he realizes that there was this African American little girl speaking to him. He stopped the car and he goes, “Wow, you speak Mandarin?” So the light turned and he didn’t turn. He was so stunned. I had to honk the horn to say “Go ahead” because he was holding up traffic. I looked at Grace and said, “Do you see what I’m talking about? Do you see the power of your language? It’s the power of your language.”

Grace’s mother was showing Grace the power of her language to help her recognize her identity and relationship with the world as she invested in the language. To Grace though, it had been not
a big deal for her because Mandarin was what she grew up with. This resonates with Pavlenko’s (2002) statement that many individuals experience a perpetual conflict between self-chosen identities and others’ attempts to position them differently in multilingual contexts. In addition to helping her mother, Grace also used her Mandarin ability to assist many other people in New York City. The following incident was one of the examples:

I remember going to the passport agency and I was getting a new passport. There was a Chinese lady there and none of the officials were able to help her. … I was maybe eleven or twelve and my younger brother and I had to go up and ask her, “Oh what do you need?” We just helped her the whole day. We led her around and were like, “Go to this window, and this is what the ticket says, and go here and there, and take your child here, and this is where you get the photos taken it’s around the corner.” All the officials were so impressed. I’m like, “You should not be impressed. You need to get someone Chinese to do this.” My dad was just so proud of me. He was like, “Yeah you see what you guys can do now. You can help people with your language skills.”

Grace felt great because she could use her language ability to help other people. New York City always made Grace connect to the utility of her Mandarin skill, even when she was not in the dual language school, by offering many spontaneous interactional opportunities in non-instructional settings.

The traditional institutional pattern. In the following section, I discuss two case studies to illustrate the second pattern - Despite access to spontaneous interactional resources, students continued to be mainly active in Mandarin language socialization in instructional settings.
Case Study 3: Bella. Bella, a girl of Eastern European descent, was in the 10th grade when I interviewed her. Her parents were both first generation immigrants and multilingual speakers. Her mother spoke Portuguese, English and Romanian, whereas her father spoke Russian, English, French, Spanish, and a little bit of German and Hebrew. Bella grew up as a bilingual in English and Russian and started to be exposed to Spanish at the lower school of her current private school. In the 5th grade, the first year of middle school, she continued with Spanish, which was the only option. Entering the 6th grade, the middle school required every student to take Mandarin through the 8th grade while they could still continue to take Spanish as well. Bella did not continue with Spanish but only took Mandarin. I was her Mandarin teacher from the 6th through the 8th grade. She did not think she would have taken Mandarin if it were not required only because she had already invested time in learning Spanish since lower school. Her mother, a math teacher in the upper school of Bella’s private school, felt the same way:

I thought [it] was odd if you ask me, because it started in the 6th grade. Whatever language the school decided to do is fine by me. The only thing is I thought it was a little confusing that they had Spanish from the first and started only in the 6th grade. Then you lose what you’ve learned from Spanish and you start again on a different language. I thought this was a little confusing. If you want to be fluent in a target language, I think you should start much earlier. The downside is the kids don’t know and it’s not going to be their choice. … It’s a shame because they have lost everything that they have learned. I don’t know what the best answer is. But I thought it was odd at the time that it was exactly in the 6th grade when they could start with Mandarin, right in the middle of middle school. That was a little odd.
Bella’s mother strongly believed that starting early with an immersion approach was the best way to learn a foreign language, based on her own experience of learning English in a partial immersion setting in an after-school program in her home country. She considered learning a language was an investment in a skill set that globalization required. That was why she was not in favor of the idea of switching Spanish to Mandarin without Bella achieving fluency in Spanish. However, the family accepted the switch because it was mandatory to take Mandarin.

When entering the upper school, Bella had a choice to choose among Mandarin, Spanish, and French. Bella’s mother mentioned Bella’s favorite of all the courses that she took in the middle school was Mandarin and it had a lot to do with having a good teacher. As Mandarin was the language Bella had the most grasp of and had invested in for three years, she decided to continue with Mandarin. Based on the accounts of Bella and her mother, it was the concept of investment\(^\text{12}\) that influenced Bella’s opinion on what language to study. However, the investment was not simply an individual endeavor. Bella, as an agent in charge of her own learning, was influenced by the sociocultural environment she was in that allowed for such an investment. As we will see later, she relied more on the instructional settings than the non-instructional settings to pursue studying Mandarin. She was someone who felt strongly about learning how to study as a skill, therefore, making her more used to instructional settings where she could prepare what she was about to do:

> I like school. So I learned how to study. … Being able to study and learn is something that you have to learn. It’s an actual skill. That’s why teachers go over how you should

\(^{12}\)The concept of investment (Norton Peirce, 1995) is used to describe the practice that if learners invest in a L2, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital. Symbolic resources refer to such resources as language, education, and friendship, whereas material resources refer to capital goods, real estate, and money. The term cultural capital refers to the knowledge and modes of thought that characterize different classes and groups in relation to specific sets of social forms, according to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977).
take notes, and how you should know what’s important. It’s a system. It’s a method. You have to have an outline and you have to prepare. Knowing how to study is a skill you have to get.

_School._ Bella’s school was a progressive school and she went to its lower school, middle school and upper school. Her school culture influenced the way she saw the world when I asked her about the role her school played in her learning Mandarin:

My school did play a role because my school offers Mandarin. Some schools don’t even offer Mandarin. We’re a very progressive school and they cannot stress enough about community service, community actions, making contact, branching out, being involved in new experiences. That unspoken motto that constantly driven into our minds all the time, it makes you think it must be really important. It’s just that motivation because some schools could be very traditional and not care.

This was the school that made Mandarin mandatory from the 6th through the 8th grade and was based on the idea of introducing something non-Western into the school curriculum. The school’s Mandarin policy reflected society’s vision and transmitted this onto its students. Bella’s mother considered that the school played a crucial role in Bella’s learning Mandarin because she said “I don’t think she would have even thought about learning Mandarin otherwise.” Moreover, the school encouraged interdisciplinary work with the inclusion of non-Western culture. As a result, Bella was able to study Asian literature, culture, and history throughout the years and did this in different classes. For example, in her high school English class, she read a book called “The Joy Luck Club” about four Chinese American immigrant families. She loved the book and the students in the class were assigned to work on different themes from the stories and wrote an essay. In the Asian history class she took this year, she learned a lot of in-depth information
about all these people who made China what it was today. She learned about all the different emperors and what happened during those reigns under those dynasties. In another history class at high school, they went over the concepts of Taoism, Confucianism, Yin and Yang and harmony and she found the ideas very interesting:

I love all these ideas that ancient China had, like the filial piety, the five rules of how you treat your ancestors, and how important ancestors were and how there were certain traditions that you had to uphold in ancient China. Just the history was so long and all the different stories that they had and ideas. It’s just very interesting.

Bella was exposed to Chinese study from different angles at high school, but not only in high school. She also studied China in the 5th and 6th grade humanities classes when every middle school student started to take Mandarin in the 6th grade. She made the connection between the school curriculum and her engagement in Mandarin learning:

Maybe because we were so immersed in it because in the 5th grade everything was about Asia, China more specifically. We did a play about “Li Chi going up against dragon” and the theater teacher taught us that it came from the same Chinese fairy tale. We were learning about it in humanities, and it all accumulates. Because if you don’t know anything about it, it’s sort of big and scary and intimidating and it’s completely different from anything I’ve learned. But if you come at it from all aspects, you learn about the art, we learned calligraphy. You learn its history. You learn the characters are very meaningful. You learn it as a firm sentence structure. It’s not just a completely random bunch of characters you have to memorize. If you learn all this it combines to make it seem, “Hey, this is actually doable.” You can actually learn this and make it interesting.
The school’s endeavor on interdisciplinary work with a focus on non-Western culture clearly had an impact on Bella’s understanding of the Chinese culture and her thirst to learn more. The curriculum set up of learning about China in the humanities class helped students ease into Mandarin learning and provided another opportunity for them to be immersed in Chinese culture.

In terms of learning the language specifically, she felt that she had a good start in the 6th grade:

I think that pace at the beginning actually helped. Because it provided enough time for it to really sink in. Because sometimes when you’re first starting out and you go at this really fast pace you’re just trying to keep up and you don’t even try to remember the old stuff. It really sank in when we read those little dialogues in the textbook over. You start to remember the characters. That really helped. I’ve had three different Mandarin teachers and a sub. That’s the most helpful so far.

Although she was intimidated by the fact that characters are pictographic without offering much hint of how they sound and it takes memorization to know the meaning, she was able to ease into the language learning gradually and realize the possibility to continue with it. Bella’s mother did not expect Bella would go this far in Mandarin learning and also attributed Bella’s decision to continue in high school to the Mandarin class in middle school:

She enjoyed the class very much. I think this helped tremendously. This age, she wasn’t thinking about college. Nor was she thinking about the profession in the 6th grade, or the 7th grade, or 8th grade. She enjoyed the class and when it was time to make a choice, the most positive attitude was towards Mandarin and she decided to take Mandarin. … I think she has very good instruction. I’m a teacher. If you know how to teach immediately
the response is keep doing, want to learn. I’m a teacher so I can see that. That was her response and incentive.

Entering high school, she experienced some turnovers of Mandarin teachers, which affected her study:

I know that I’m going to do [the Startalk program] in summer. It’s really hard now with my school work but there’s no point in stopping and come back to it especially when my school Mandarin program is pretty weak right now. No communication between the teachers so no one knows what we’ve learned or not. I had a quiz last week on something I took as a quiz on two weeks ago before the teacher left, the same quiz. The quizzes that we’re taking, they’re not about comprehension of the language. They’re about raw memorization. … I feel that if I stay at the level I’m at, I’m just going to end up losing Mandarin, my progress. I’m at the same level I was at the beginning of the year.

She complained about it taking too long to study one chapter which made her forget what was learned at the beginning of the chapter, and this was echoed by her classmate Edward, another interviewee in the study. Therefore, she looked for summer programs to subsidize her Mandarin learning in order to maintain the progress she had made. She felt strongly about sustaining constant exposure to Mandarin in instructional settings, otherwise she would forget if spent a few months without practicing. It was for this reason that she decided to sacrifice the SAT prep class in the coming summer for the Startalk summer Mandarin program. Again she acted on agency to look for instructional settings as a major way to study Mandarin. When she was asked in general what kept her going in Mandarin learning, she replied:

The teacher is definitely what keeps me going but I wouldn’t do it if I didn’t like it. I take the class because I like it. Even when you like something, it’s really trying and you want
to give up sometimes but thinking about how it might come in hand in the future. It’s a combo. … I don’t know what I want to do. I just know that I want to learn the language. Norton’s (2000) concept of investment describes Bella precisely as it “signals the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language, and their often ambivalent desire to learn and practice it” (p. 10). That concept of investment connects Bella’s past, present, and future as a Mandarin user. As she invested in time and effort in middle school, her desire for the future was reassessed because she thought she might have a future with Mandarin. Then she made a commitment to learning Mandarin in high school and looked for linguistic and interactional resources to subsidize the weak school Mandarin program, which helped her get closer to her goal of achieving fluency in the language. Although her motivation could fluctuate along the way because of both the factors within Mandarin learning (e.g., too many characters to memorize) and the factors outside of Mandarin learning (e.g., too much other school work), Bella was still committed to investing in the language as she believed that with a language, her “opportunities are endless.” It was the sociocultural environment that she was in that affected her actions towards sustaining involvement in learning Mandarin, an investment she made with an understanding that she would acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources.

Bella’s school helped her discover what her passion was as she talked about the function of schools:

This is what schools are for. They give you a taste of everything and you have to go to what you like and do it outside of school. Otherwise you’re never going to get anywhere with it. … They want you to take what you love doing at school and find something outside of school that you can channel it into. So if you love math they encourage math they encourage you to spend the summer at NASA solving equations. Or if you love
doing community service or government you can go to political seminars. They want you
to take your own initiative. They don’t come to you directly. You have to seek out what
you want to do.

The school put information regarding extracurricular programs in its morning announcements
and posters. If anybody was interested, students would have to go find out more details
themselves, according to Bella. Her school was providing opportunities to allow her act on her
agency to “go above and beyond” what the school offered. It was obvious that the school played
a role in training her to take her own initiative to look for something outside of school based on
her academic interests.

Parents. As a first generation immigrant, Bella’s mother almost took for granted that her
own children would learn foreign languages. Her and her husband’s immigrant experiences made
her see the importance of flexibility because one would never know where to live next. The
attitude in general in her household was to value learning other languages and cultures. She
focused on the impact globalization would have when educating her children and her students:

We’re moving towards globalization, in which there won’t be any more geographic
barriers. Individuals will be dealing with individuals all over the world. What does
globalization mean? What does it mean in terms of the skills that are necessary in this
new world economy? One of the skills that I think is essential is to be able to speak at
least one foreign language, fluently. And the more the better. I think it’s incredible that so
many of our students don’t see this as a necessity. It’s impossible to imagine
globalization without having a common language that people can talk. So that’s for me
absolutely a must.
What challenges Bella’s generation would face in the age of globalization was the major concern of Bella’s mother. Referring to her own experience of transnational migration, Bella’s mother realized the importance of investing in multilingualism and language education so that the younger generation could acquire the language resources needed to access various imagined communities nationally and abroad (Dagenais, 2003). The fact that Bella’s parents were both multilingual also influenced Bella’s attitude towards learning a foreign language. As Bella’s mother put it, “If you have a mother who speaks three languages and a father who speaks I-don’t-know-how-many languages, you find it normal that you should speak another language.”

She was open to Bella learning any foreign languages while acknowledging that “China is a formidable power. I think Mandarin is certainly one that is now in more demand” under the current global economy. She recognized the utility of Mandarin and believed it would be “extremely useful” in many professional fields. Bella understood that her parents were different types of L2 users as she described it, “Language never really was my mom’s passion. She had to learn them. She knew she wanted to come to the States. English was a priority. My dad, he loves languages. He has two masters in languages.” When her father was in his second masters program, the entire family went to Canada to accompany her father to complete a summer course in French language and literature. Bella witnessed how her father was passionate about languages and pursued his interests. Because her father acquired a lot of linguistic knowledge as he spoke six languages, he actually tried to persuade Bella to take Spanish when she had the option to choose. He thought Spanish would take less time for Bella to achieve fluency and would be useful in the immediate environment as they lived in New York City. Bella was persistent in continuing with Mandarin because she felt she had to in order to keep what she had acquired. However, Bella’s father later on changed his view as he was exposed to more
information about the economic connections between China and America and started to see learning Mandarin would actually be very useful for Bella’s future.

Bella’s love towards Mandarin surprised her mother and in order to support Bella with what she would want to do, her mother introduced Bella to the Startalk summer program once she heard about this from her advisee at school and also asked her social studies colleague to help Bella with her application essays. Based on her own English learning experience, Bella’s mother felt strongly about the necessity to use extracurricular programs to develop one’s fluency in a language:

Learning a foreign language in school, because of my experience, I expected that she would have some exposure but first of all I didn’t expect that she’d love it so much and she would like to dedicate herself so much. So when I learned about this program and mentioned to her, she said she would be interested. So it became a bigger thing than what we had anticipated. I’m very realistic. I don’t believe you can be fluent in a foreign language from what you learn just in school. I just don’t believe that.

Bella’s mother had a clear idea how to achieve fluency in a foreign language and worked with Bella’s school in the same direction to assist her go further with her passion. In addition to considering foreign languages as a skill required by globalization, Bella’s mother also believed that cross-cultural understanding could be developed through the process of foreign language learning:

She’s opening herself to worlds that otherwise she wouldn’t have exposure to. Once she showed me some readings that she was doing for the Mandarin class about globalizing China. Just understanding that different countries have different realities, and understanding the realities of other countries, it’s already part of what I see as her
globalization and being aware. So to me, understanding other cultures is essential. I can’t envision education without it.

Bella’s mother would watch foreign films at home and invited family members to watch with her, depending on their interests in the movie genres. It was a clear message at home that L2 education and the understanding of foreign cultures were valued when Bella’s mother watched movies or Bella’s father read the same book in three different languages. Therefore, when Bella mentioned her parents’ reaction to her learning Mandarin, it was all positive:

My parents really are proud that I’m studying Mandarin. It’s big for them. Languages are very big in my family all around. They think it’s a big step up and are impressed with my progress because they can see it when I talk to people. They can see the leap.

The leap occurred in the past summer when Bella attended the Startalk summer program where she struggled with catching up in the class. Her parents provided emotional support during the struggle, which will be touched upon in the next section.

**Extracurricular Mandarin programs.** Dedication and time were considered necessary by Bella in order to do well in learning Mandarin. Influenced by both her school and her mother, she believed that “You can’t just continue it in school. It’s not going to come to you if you just take it a few times a week. You have to go above and beyond.” That was why when her mother mentioned the Startalk intensive summer program to her, she looked into it and decided to apply. It was not an easy experience to her:

It was insanely difficult because of the gap, because they were so far ahead from our level [at my school]. I mean I was supposed to apply to level one but I accidentally put my name in the level two turn slot. I hadn’t studied Mandarin for a month and a half when I took the proficiency test. I barely made it but I did. The teacher was great and she
only spoke in Mandarin and it was so hard. But it helped because she would point to stuff and after a while when she would say the word I would understand it and it would become easier. Just the intensity, and all the games, and the competition, all the different things that we did influenced my Mandarin and this really helped. So by the time I got out I was really bored at school. I was really exhausted and I had a lot of homework and it’s an hour on the train each way but I feel it’s worth it.

Because her proficiency in Mandarin was somehow between level one and level two, she struggled the entire summer at level two trying hard to catch up with her classmates. How she was as a Mandarin student in the summer program was quite different from the one in the school Mandarin class, when she made the comparison, “In my school I volunteer to answer questions. But in the summer program no. I just take notes and try my best and not drown.” Her identities as a learner and experiences of Mandarin learning were totally different in these two instructional settings. While she felt easy learning Mandarin at school and felt comfortable with the pedagogical approach, she struggled not only with the linguistic gap but also with the pedagogical challenges:

I don’t really like the races. It’s a race to finish. Also posting on a board what people got on a test or on a writing assignment. I also go to a progressive school where that’s totally against policy for other people to see your grades or to make it a competition. So it was really different for me. But other than that I liked that the teacher did every different type of learning you could possibly do. First there would be a writing assignment. Then it would be speaking. Then you’d be put in groups. Then you had to write about your personality on the whiteboard. Then you would go and have a conversation about the topic we were talking about. It was every different type of immersion and projects.
While she appreciated the learning activities her teacher designed, she faced the challenges of being positioned as a non-top Mandarin learner based on her performance in competitions and tests. Bella’s mother was supporting her when she struggled:

This is definitely something I cannot help her with but we can support and that’s what we do. The best example was the difficulty she had this summer she felt sometimes. She could come home, “Oh, mommy, I don’t know if I can do the assignment. It’s just so hard. What should I do?” The response was always the same, “You do the best you can. The teachers know that you are skipping a level and if they feel you are not learning, they will move you into the appropriate level and you’ll be fine. This is not a race. You go where you have to and where you learn the most. This is what this is all about. It’s about learning. There is no competition here and the goal is to learn as much as possible.” …

Everything that you acquire through hard work that is not easy, is something that you value. That’s the way I look at it. So if you struggle for many years, but you see that you’re progressing, you take great pride and you want to move forward.

Being aware of every step of progress was important to Bella. Her mother’s emphasis on valuing learning was the message that helped Bella focus on what she gained instead of how she was positioned by others. A guest speaker in the summer program also had a huge impact on Bella in connecting her with what she could possibly achieve in Mandarin. He was a non-Asian who started learning Mandarin at the age of eighteen without prior experience and became completely fluent. His current job involved using Mandarin which Bella felt pretty cool. She said “I was really impressed and that gave me hope.” The shared non-Asian background between the guest speaker and Bella allowed her to imagine her future similar to him in the sense that she could
possibly become fluent in Mandarin. That provided much support and the meaning of her investment in learning the language:

Knowing that I would get better kept me going. Just my goal, I want to learn the language I have to suck it up. You have to do it if you want to be good at it. Sacrifices. Nothing comes perfectly to anyone unless they work for it. … I already made a commitment. You can’t give up and stop coming. You applied. You got in. You did all the work. When it gets tough you can’t just leave. You have to honor what you went there for.

So Bella kept going further while struggling with the fast pace of the class. She also demonstrated a different learner identity in terms of risk-taking:

You’re not graded so you have the chance to try new stuff and you can learn from that. That’s a big difference. At school you’re not wanting to even try anything remotely different. Because on tests, I think if I mess up, there goes my grade. The colleges are not going to ask you “Why did you get an A- instead of an A.”

Because of the power of grades, Bella presented different learner images in different Mandarin classes. She felt that she would never jeopardize being more creative in her Mandarin class at school, whereas she took risks to express herself in Mandarin in the summer program. Her mother also thought Mandarin learning had been an all-around growing experience for Bella as a student. The fact that she did not have to worry about grades in the summer program helped her progress faster in Mandarin proficiency as she took more initiative to communicate in writing rather than passively receiving linguistic knowledge based on the teacher’s agenda. As a result, she made the leap:

I was proud. I remember the first writing I did there was so much red ink. Then when I took my last test, in the entire writing assignment there was only one correction and it
was because my character was a little messy. … I think that whatever point you start and you just build up from an intense program, your Mandarin will get better. If I had taken Startalk from the beginning [of my Mandarin learning], after two years, my Mandarin would probably be amazing right now.

*New York City.* New York City clearly played a role in Bella’s taking Mandarin as her mother thought “in general people who live in New York City are more exposed to other cultures and that certainly helps develop the curiosity that is necessary to want to acquire another language.” This was also recognized by Bella:

Living in New York and going to Chinatown makes you want to learn. It motivates you. If you see people speaking, you want to be able to understand them. One time I was walking down the street and I heard this lady ask “What is this?” in Mandarin and I understood her and she spoke it pretty fast. I’m pretty sure that’s what she was saying because it was brief. But I felt proud that I could understand her.

Bella also had been trying to decode what was written in Chinese characters, which was available “everywhere,” such as the menus, the store signs, and the signs in the subway. The existence of a Chinese population in New York City enabled Bella to connect her investment with the utility of Mandarin on a daily basis. However, when asked about her experiences in interacting with Chinese speaking people, Bella mainly recalled her experiences during Mandarin class field trips to Chinatown. The majority of her experience in Mandarin socialization was done in an instructional setting, even if she was put in Chinatown where spontaneous interactional opportunities were available. When she learned about food in Mandarin, and after practicing in the classroom, she was brought to Chinatown with her classmates by the Mandarin teacher to eat lunch there and had to order in Mandarin. When they
visited the Museum of Chinese Americans in Chinatown, the historical background of the exhibition was explained by the curator first and then the students went around reading all the signs that were talked about. As a way to assess what they had learned, they had to fill out a sheet that their Mandarin teacher prepared. When Bella had interview projects to do in Chinatown, this provided a semi-spontaneous interactional opportunity for her because she still had a task to complete. Her focus was on completing the communicative task for the Mandarin class:

We did do interviews for projects. We had to pretend we were going shopping and interview people about “How much is it? How much is that? I’ll give you this.” Just practice. [The stores] were told that we were in school and we were just interviewing. Actually no one wanted to do it, except for one store. We were at a candy store. It was okay. They were really nice about it. But we didn’t have to buy anything. … It was cool.

It made me feel better. If I was in a situation where I needed to access this different language, I would be able to. Communication is important.

Obviously through Mandarin socialization in instructional settings, she was able to use the language to accomplish some communicative tasks. She was encouraged by the fact that she was able to communicate in the language, but overall the opportunities of communication were mostly initiated by her Mandarin teacher through class assignments. As Bella believed that study was a skill to acquire, she invested much of her time and effort in instructional settings to acquire the Mandarin skill and centered her Mandarin socialization in instructional settings.

She did have experience interacting with Chinese speakers in non-instructional settings as well. After she was introduced to a Chinese restaurant on a field trip in Mandarin class, that
restaurant became one of her favorites in New York City and she decided to go there for her birthday with her family:

I started speaking to the waitress in Mandarin. I understood everything she told me the first time she said it. She didn’t slow down for me. She didn’t say character for character. She said maybe three different things and I felt pretty proud that I understood all of them. I mean I understood them completely and it wasn’t even that hard for me. She understood what I said eventually after I really annunciated. We said a few sentences back and forth. It was really fun.

The fact that Bella was able to understand the waitress’ spontaneous responses made her and her parents very proud. It proved to her that how much progress she had made through her dedication in learning Mandarin. Not only the waitress was impressed, but also the American couple sitting next to their table witnessed the communication and was very impressed. They came up and said, “That’s very impressive. That’s very good because we have a friend who speaks Mandarin and is now working for the government. It’s very difficult.” The acknowledgement by other people was no doubt encouraging because the general attitude towards Mandarin was that it was a difficult language. The sense of accomplishment she gained through the restaurant experience connected her past experience of learning with her current communicative ability. The American couple’s mentioning of their Mandarin speaking friend working for government also connected Bella’s investment in learning Mandarin with her increasing asset for the future.

**Case Study 4: Clark.** Clark, an African American male, was in the 9th grade when I interviewed him. In the 4th grade, students at his school had to decide which foreign language to take in the 5th grade. Clark had a history of receiving speech therapy because he had difficulty
with certain English pronunciations. Even though he no longer needed speech therapy by the time he had to enroll in a foreign language class, his school was concerned, according to Clark’s mother:

The school had the concern with him. They thought he should be more focused on the English language and they wanted him to do that track. They didn’t just have Clark. They had a few kids. They didn’t all have the same issues like maybe some of them had difficulty writing or whatever it was but there’s a track where they would take kids and they wouldn’t let them take language. I think they would make them take Latin or they would make them do more English writing/grammar. They’re just not letting them take language.

Clark’s mother refused to accept the reported knowledge of her son by the school as someone who was not qualified as a foreign language learner. To her, Latin was not considered the same foreign language as others because based on her junior high school experience of taking Latin, she felt “[i]t’s the utility” that separated Latin from other foreign languages. “Nobody talks Latin. At least with Mandarin or with any language, you have people you can actually use it.” She also took advantage of her own knowledge of foreign languages and found the “best choice”:

I knew the right language for him. I knew that he wouldn’t have to deal with grammar and conjugation. I knew that he could make those sounds. I knew he knew symbols. His Chinese characters are really beautiful. … Because of all the rules [in Spanish and French], there are not the same amount of rules [in Mandarin], it’s simpler for him. I thought it was the best choice for Clark. I did. He seems to enjoy it.

The extent of parental language knowledge not only appeared to be an important factor in influencing student attitudes, confirming Bartram’s (2010) findings, but also played a crucial role
in legitimizing the necessity for Clark to take Mandarin. Clark’s mother was pushing hard for Clark to take Mandarin during the entire decision-making process, in disregard of the school’s resistance, because she was concerned with how Clark’s identity would be viewed by Clark and others:

It gives him something different. It’s something like if you were to see him, you would never think that. Just to look at him and know that he speaks Mandarin. I think it makes him special. I think it rounds him out. It makes him interesting. It gives him another skill set. I think it keeps him at level with his peers at his school. You know, say [if] I hadn’t fought for him to take that, he wouldn’t have the skill set. He was feeling a little less than [his peers]. Then I said, “Well wait a minute, you speak Chinese, you read Chinese, you write Chinese. That sets you apart. That makes you special.” It makes him special to the outer world but [in] a place like his school, it makes him on par with everybody else because everybody, 90% of the students at school are learning a foreign language. He would just be beginning one [in the 9th grade] if I hadn’t fought for him. That was a big push for me because I didn’t want him to feel different. I didn’t want him to feel like, “Okay, I have to go to this special class over here while this kid is going there.” So that was one of my reasons. Now he has that and I told him that nobody can take that away from you. It’s like any education, nobody can take that away from you. It’s up to you to do something with it and if you don’t, it’s okay. You still have it.

It was taking Mandarin that empowered Clark as a student in his immediate social context, to allow him equal acceptance in the school community. Being the same is something very important among middle school aged children, especially when Clark had already constructed his own knowledge that he was not as capable as his peers. Because of the linguistic distance
Mandarin had from Indo-European languages such as Spanish and French, it became possible for Clark to take Mandarin as a foreign language option, which helped him to be on par with his peers. In a larger social context, he was also empowered because he was acquiring a skill set that was scarce in supply in the society. Clark also viewed the opportunity to be able to learn a foreign language positively:

> It’s always good to learn a different language. Knowledge is power, right? So having a different language is good. Having a language really helps you be able to speak with other people you wouldn’t normally be able to speak with. … For people who don’t speak foreign languages, they’re missing a chance at many other opportunities. Like knowing the feeling you can go to other cultures, try different things, meet different people. If you’re stuck with that one language, you’re stuck in the one country, the same people, the same types of everything.

Through learning Mandarin, Clark was empowered with the possibilities to communicate with a group of people he might otherwise have no access to and to explore his intellectual space with another language and cultural perspective. His goal was to become fluent in Mandarin so he found “no reason to know half of one language and half of another.” He was determined to study Mandarin until he would be “able to immerse yourself in the culture without being lost.” An interesting side effect of studying Mandarin to him was that it helped with his favorite thing – acting. “Because I learned tones, I can speak differently even in English. It made me be able to play a depressed character versus a happy character in my acting. I can use different tones.” said Clark. For someone who received speech therapy at a younger age being able to obtain
confidence in acting, and having a dream of hopefully doing something like *Rush Hour 3*\(^{13}\) in the future, Mandarin did play a role in Clark’s identity construction. He was able to take advantage of what this language offered him and stretched it to meet his own goals.

Clark’s mother’s concern was resolved by the school’s concession on allowing Clark to take Mandarin since the 5\(^{th}\) grade. From then on, Clark started his journey to fully engage in Mandarin learning through different Mandarin programs. He had been investing in the language with an imagination of the fun interacting with Chinese speakers once he became fluent.

*School.* While Clark had started to learn the language from the 5\(^{th}\) grade, he had been exposed to the Chinese culture and population through the school curriculum. As Clark’s mother recalled:

> His school’s mission statement is diversity. They have that culture fair where everybody comes and brings their cultures, whether it be food, dance, and art. That’s what he was exposed to. Then with the curriculum, I remember one time I had to come up and I had to do something about black history month. Then somebody else was to come and do something else about their culture, whether it be Chinese or whatever. He’s always had that in his curriculum, the exposure. I think one grade I went on this trip where they did a whole Chinese unit. We went to Chinatown and we visited cultural things down there. They did a whole unit and they talked about how the Chinese came and lived in California and helped build the railroads and then they started breaking down from community to community.

\(^{13}\) *Rush Hour 3* is a 2007 martial arts/action-comedy film starring Jackie Chan and Chris Tucker about a Chinese chief inspector from Hong Kong and an African American detective from Los Angeles who set out to execute a transnational task in Paris.
The Chinese unit was not taught in the Mandarin class, but in a class in the lower school. Clark’s mother spoke highly of the school’s endeavor to educate their students about diversity. As a result, their students developed openness to different cultures:

I mean [the kids] just don’t have the prejudices that other people have towards different cultures because they’ve made sure that it’s been an inclusive environment and they made sure that it’s not just the exposure to the individual but it’s woven into the curriculum and you actually learn about the people’s history. It’s a perfect place.

Regarding the Chinese culture, it was talked about not only in Clark’s Mandarin class but also in the world history class. Another resource was provided by the Asian Culture Club at school. Clark joined the club because he was taking Mandarin. Once he was able to gain access to learning Mandarin at school, all these resources were available for him to deepen his understanding of the Chinese culture within the school community. It was the language that triggered his interest in the culture.

Besides the fact that Clark enjoyed learning the language and culture in the school community, he admitted that Mandarin was one of his hardest courses:

The tones are difficult. I can’t even speak with tones anymore. When I speak with other Chinese people, I realize that they speak with tones. I find it too difficult to actually learn.

I can barely learn the characters. The tones are just a whole other thing.

Clark was very aware of the correct pronunciations and this was one of the reasons why he applied for a program in Beijing, China for the coming summer because people in Beijing spoke standard Mandarin. He was fond of Chinese characters because “once you get the hang of them, the characters are cool. They’re all distinct and unique.” However, the school reality was that because of the difficulty in Chinese tones and need to memorize all the characters, Clark’s
academic performance was not excellent in Mandarin. As he personally perceived, “I’ve never really been good at Mandarin.” He sometimes failed tests and became frustrated. However, this did not stop him from continuing with this language, as he recognized that the tests were “helpful. They’re hard to do but they are helpful in the long run.” While not liking tests, Clark was able to understand that tests were a helpful tool to assist in his Mandarin learning and because of his performance on tests, he asked his mother for help to find tutors. His response to test failures was not dropping out of the class or switching to another language. Instead, he sought help in order to make progress in Mandarin. It was the investment Clark had been made that drove him along the way, as he stated:

I have to, I have to keep going. I can’t drop out now. I’m like halfway done. I’ve been taking Mandarin for five years. I can’t just stop now and speak another language. I want to keep going with it. I’m down that road, can’t turn back.

He had a clear goal that he wanted to be fluent in Mandarin, before moving on to any other language. That was why he wanted to take Mandarin all the way. Clark’s case resonated with Ushioda’s (2001) finding that learners with less positive learning experiences are able to “compensate motivationally by focusing on particular goals and incentives channeling their desire to learn the language” (p. 109). As the majority of quantitative approaches to L2 motivation research used test scores as the criteria for language achievement, Clark, as a less successful Mandarin learner according to those criteria, could not be classified as being less motivated. He expressed his motivation “in a qualitatively different kind of way” as he acted on his agency to engage himself in many extracurricular Mandarin programs, which will be mentioned in one of the following sections (Ushioda, 2001, p. 109).
Family. There were two family members in Clark’s family that had knowledge of Mandarin. One was Clark’s mother, who played a significant role in Clark’s pursuit of Mandarin. As he put it, “She got me into Mandarin. She’ll point me to different programs I take. Help with tutors if I need them.” Clark’s mother was being “very supportive” in that she was the one who introduced Clark to all the extracurricular programs he did in Mandarin. She was also the one who found tutors for Clark to help with his Mandarin in order for him to “do well in school.”

Besides her role in fighting for her son to have an equal opportunity to take Mandarin as a foreign language at school, Clark’s mother also influenced Clark regarding the appreciation of Chinese culture. She and Clark did calligraphy with one of the tutors and she had several Chinese girlfriends in the U.S. She took Clark to attend one of her girlfriends’ cultural festivals in Long Island. She believed that her genuine interest in “the Chinese people, Chinese culture, and how to appreciate these” influenced Clark personally. “He sees that I value it, that I love it.” Clark’s mother considered languages were the introduction to other cultures:

I think language is a good way to learn about another culture and show appreciation for another civilization. I think that’s important. A lot of times I look at television and every time we’re watching a show, they’re like, “Oh, America, the greatest country in the world.” And I’m like, “Not necessarily.” I don’t necessarily think that because I’ve been all around the world and I’m like, “This is not necessarily the best country in the world.” I’m sure it has some great things that other places don’t have. When you’re in a country, your country and its own propaganda will make you think that’s the best place on earth. So I think that learning a language like Mandarin, which is part of Chinese, part of China, that too is a great civilization. I think that’s important. That [civilization] was there long before. By learning a language, you learn to have an appreciation for something other
than what’s familiar to you. It’s a way to another love. I think that’s important. When I watch any type of television or a movie, I prefer entering a world I know nothing about. I love foreign movies and learning about other people.

Clark’s mother’s curiosity about foreign cultures and the love of travelling had an impact on Clark as he thought learning Mandarin made him more open, try new things and meet different people he would hang out with possibly. In the family, there was another family member who influenced Clark in his Mandarin learning:

I have one family member who is fluent in Mandarin and he has a wife who is Chinese. He had many Chinese friends in high school and started learning Mandarin when he was in college. He moved to China when he was an adult. I don’t know how long he stayed there. I guess that was where he met his wife. … I thought it was pretty impressive that he was fluent in Mandarin. I guess because he moved to China. He lived in Beijing for a couple years. I know that the best way to learn a language is to be in that culture. So I guess the best way to learn Mandarin is to be in Beijing.

This family member was someone Clark “look[ed] up to” besides his dad, according to his mother. This member was not only fluent in Mandarin, but also used Mandarin at his work as the community service director for Queens. His wife was one of Clark’s tutors. In addition to Clark’s mother’s experience of learning Mandarin in Taiwan, his life experience of going to Beijing, China to study Mandarin and coming back fluent had an impact on Clark to make him believe that the best way to acquire language proficiency was to be in the places where the language was spoken. Clark felt that he was not going to “learn it the best way in Manhattan where everyone speaks English.” He considered the readily available linguistic resources in Manhattan were mainly in English and that was why he made a commitment to engaging himself in different
Mandarin programs looking for the Chinese language environment. In spite of the existence of Chinatown in Manhattan, Clark said that he had not really done anything except go to class. Clark did not use the population in Chinatown as a linguistic resource, and this might have occurred partially because the majority of people in Chinatown were Cantonese speakers, not Mandarin speakers. While there existed spontaneous interaction opportunities in his immediate social context, Clark mainly engaged himself in instructional settings to not only acquire linguistic knowledge, but to also improve his language socialization. With a strong belief that one of the best ways to learn a language was to go to its country of origin, Clark was motivated to study Mandarin regardless of his test scores. He took his current academic performance in Mandarin as a temporary matter and believed that he would be able to achieve fluency if he was immersed in the language and culture sufficiently. His family member’s experience set a good example for him. In addition, Clark’s mother played an important role in encouraging him by showing him how his identity could be positioned in a larger social context:

I told him, his school is a school where there are kids that are phenomenal. Clark, he’ll look at a school like his school and he could feel like, “I’m not great at anything.” And I said to him, “But you’re good at Mandarin.” And he says, “Nah, I’m not that great.” I said, “Well, I could tell you this. You’re better than a lot, like 90% of the people, because 90% of the people don’t speak Mandarin, right?” So I said, “And you will become great at it.” I said, “If you stick to it, you will become great at it. It’s not going to happen overnight. But you stick to it and you go to China, it’s going to come. If you continue with it, it will. It’s not going to come overnight. But it will come. And you will be better than most people.”
Clark’s mother emphasized the uniqueness of his identity as someone knowing Mandarin as a skill set in the current society. She also pointed out to Clark that the way to become fluent was to stick to Mandarin and to go to China. She adopted a way of motivational thinking to help Clark realize the difficulties were normal and temporary and she connected all this to the future where Clark would be great at Mandarin and better than most people at this skill. Under the family influence, Clark had been and was busy studying and planning to study in extracurricular Mandarin programs both in the U.S. and overseas.

*Extracurricular Mandarin programs.* Clark’s mother was trying to get Clark into a Saturday Chinese school organized by immigrants from Taiwan in Manhattan once he started taking the Mandarin class at school. But Clark was not accepted because he would be too old compared to the other children with a Chinese background at the level where he was expected to be. Instead, the Chinese school recommended a tutor to his mother. Later on the tutor became the principal of the Chinese school so she made sure that Clark could attend the school before she left the U.S. So during his middle school years, Clark had tutors and attended the Chinese school on Saturdays. In the summer of his graduation from the middle school, Clark had a busy schedule with respect to his learning Mandarin in instructional settings. At the beginning of summer, he went to Taipei, Taiwan to take Mandarin classes and stayed with that tutor who later became the principal of the Chinese school. As the program in Taipei overlapped with the Startalk summer program in New York City, Clark missed one week of the Startalk program. When he came back from Taipei, he went directly into the Startalk program. It was a summer full of immersion into the language and culture. Entering the 9th grade, Clark continued with a Saturday program funded by Startalk, while having tutors to help him with homework and study for tests.
Clark’s mother played a major role in finding different programs for Clark using her interpersonal networks such as the Chinese school, the program in Taipei, and the tutors. She was informed of the Startalk summer program from the newspaper Clark’s school sent out. She pushed him and helped him go through the application process in order to be admitted to the program. Clark was presently applying for a summer program in Beijing, China organized by the same institution that had conducted the Startalk summer program. Clark’s mother recalled the change of Clark in his attitude towards extracurricular Mandarin programs:

[The school] sent out their newspaper and I think [the information of the Startalk summer program] was on there. I opened it up and I said, “Wow, this sounds great.” So then I said to Clark, “Aren’t you interested in this? This is amazing.” He’s like, “Yeah mom, I heard about it.” I was like, “You should be really trying this.” You know, you really have to kind of push. But this year, he did the whole thing himself. I think he had a wonderful experience in Taiwan.

So Clark took on more initiative and completed the application for the summer program in Beijing, China all by himself. His mother connected the change with his wonderful experience in the Chinese speaking community in Taipei. The positive experience Clark had in Taipei regarding the Chinese language, culture and speakers gave him the incentive to continuously engage himself in learning Mandarin, especially in the places where Mandarin would be the lingua franca. He again signed up for, and went to extracurricular Mandarin programs to further improve his Mandarin.

The program in Taipei was mainly directed at acquiring linguistic knowledge without the inclusion of any field trips. The majority of the things taught there were things Clark had learned at his school and he considered the program as a form of reinforcement. While he spent a large
part of the day in the classroom every day when he was in Taipei, physically being there had a
great impact on him and he considered going to Taipei as the biggest thing in his Mandarin
learning experience. He not only considered the experience as “a lot of fun” but that it also
brought him “a different understanding of the language, of the culture, and of the people.” As he
recalled his experience in Taipei he stated:

Taipei is very crowded. Everyone is everywhere. Everyone is sharing space. They’ll try
to fit as much stuff in one space as possible. … They were all very nice. They encouraged
me to speak. They didn’t laugh at me because of the tones. In America, people laugh at
people who aren’t fluent in English. They will laugh at your accent and really make fun
of it. In Taipei, they were not judging you because of your tones. They were
complimenting me. … I feel smarter when interacting with people in Taiwan. Some
people wouldn’t be able to do that. They would be lost in the sea of chaos of Taiwan.

In addition to the fact that Clark was able to gain a first-hand experience of Taipei, he felt
encouragement from the Chinese community as a new Mandarin user who was still trying to
obtain fluency in the language. In spite of Clark’s self-assessment of his Mandarin proficiency as
not being that great, Clark did not experience the alienation from experienced Mandarin users
but felt welcomed to participate in the community, which he did not believe would be the case if
he were a new English user in America. Moreover, he kept in mind what his mother told him
about his uniqueness as a Mandarin user in the context of U.S. and felt proud to be able to
interact with people in Taiwan, even though the conversations were limited. After the trip to
Taipei, he was able to connect the spontaneous interactions he experienced with what he learned
at school:
I was at this night market with my host family, and this lady who was selling necklaces complimented me on my Mandarin. She was like, “Your Mandarin is pretty good.” And I said “Thank you” in Mandarin. So a month ago, we learned [about how to respond to a compliment] in the class. I learned that you’re not supposed to say “Thank you.” In fact, that sounds arrogant. So now, I feel bad because you’re supposed to say “Nali, nali (not at all, not at all).” Now that I think back, she’s just like, “Your Mandarin is really good.” and I’m like, “Yeah, I know.”

The linguistic knowledge and culturally appropriate ways to interact with Chinese speakers mutually reinforced each other, connecting Clark’s Mandarin learning in instructional settings with the real-world applications. It was the encouragement from experienced Mandarin users and the fun in interacting with Chinese people that accelerated Clark’s further engagement in Mandarin learning. He held a realistic view of his Mandarin learning journey:

Learning Mandarin will be fun once you pass all those hard parts. Once you get fluent, that’s gonna be pretty fun. When you’re able to speak with other people fluently, that’s gonna be a lot of fun. If you can keep conversations, [it] should be a lot of fun. … I mean it’s hard. But if everything was easy … I mean that’s part of the fun, isn’t it? If everything was easy, where would all the fun be? It would be boring if everything was easy.

So Clark was aware of the fact that he was still learning Mandarin and had not achieved the desired level of fluency. Whether he was academically more successful or not had nothing to do with his decision to welcome challenges. Clark considered failing tests as temporary difficulties he had to go through in order to be fluent. That did not demotivate him to the point where he decided to give up. He continued to invest in learning Mandarin with a goal to become fluent in
the future. His imagination of the fun experience communicating with Chinese people once he became fluent led to the fact that he exercised his agency to keep engaging himself in instructional settings of Mandarin. Envisioning participating in his imagined communities impacted Clark’s engagement with the prevailing educational practices and impelled him to seek educational opportunities he might otherwise not have sought (Kanno & Norton, 2003).

**Summary.** The present case study analysis illustrated two patterns of how the student participants sustained their involvement in Mandarin learning. While all of them experienced using the language in instructional and non-instructional settings, some preferred learning Mandarin through spontaneous interactions with Chinese speakers and others endeavored to engage themselves in different Mandarin programs in order to use the language to interact with teachers and classmates. The findings supported Bakhtin’s assertion that language learning is a process of struggling to use language in order to participate in specific speech communities (as cited in Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 416). While overall the student participants had positive experiences in Mandarin learning, they had to struggle at times in order to participate in their communities of Mandarin practice. The students as agents at the individual micro level along with those around them at the meso level co-constructed their Mandarin learning experiences. Schools, teachers, families, peers, local and overseas Chinese speaking communities, extracurricular Mandarin programs (summer, weekend, afterschool, and study abroad), and media played different roles in the students’ pursuit of Mandarin. They worked together, at different proportions each case, to engage or disengage the students in the communities of practice. As a response, the students in the study organized the resources available to them to take advantage of these in order to participate in specific Mandarin speaking communities. This
represented a dynamic process in which the relationship between the micro level and the meso level was dialogic (Giles, Katz & Myers, 2006).

As motivation itself is viewed as temporal, motivation and social contexts – macro, meso, and micro – continuously shape and reshape each other (Gass & Selinker, 1994; Norton Peirce, 1995; Pavlenko, 2002). The prevailing contexts are strongly involved in setting positive or negative conditions for L2 learning and these conditions are always changing. When Andrea, Adam, and Sarah experienced unsatisfactory classroom teaching experiences at the school, they went to look for other extracurricular programs to supplement their Mandarin learning with their parents’ help. Without any direct parental assistance, Edward wanted to extend his Mandarin learning once he knew about Bella’s participation in a Startalk summer program. Peter’s positive experience of interacting with Chinese speakers in Chinatown encouraged him to continuously study Mandarin, a subject that was not in his school curriculum. Abby did not have a good experience in her Spanish class and that experience partially explained why she switched to Mandarin when she had options. Having wonderful Mandarin teachers helped push her to pursue Mandarin more seriously by applying to spend an academic year in China through the NSLI for Youth program. As we can see, the conditions for Mandarin learning as perceived by the students and parents could be positive and negative at different times, depending on the prevailing social contexts. The social impact on Mandarin learning illustrated in the different cases presently examined challenges the conventional distinction between the social and the individual. It was the ever changing social contexts that were in step with the motivational changes in each individual student interviewed, and which was crucial in understanding the dynamic and temporal nature of motivation among these students. The social interactions which occurred between the individual learner and those around them clearly influenced the learner’s
motivation to language learning. Then depending on what resources were available to the learner in the social context, the learner displayed a unique learning trajectory. It was the social plane pointed out by Vygotsky (1978) that came first in one’s learning before the individual appropriated the learning motivation.

**Students’ Attitudes towards the Chinese Language, Culture, and Speakers**

This section is designed to address research sub-question 2.2 – How do students of Mandarin Chinese describe their attitudes towards the Chinese language, culture and speakers? The findings will be discussed in the following order: (a) Students’ attitudes towards Mandarin, (b) Students’ attitudes towards the Chinese culture, and (c) Students’ attitudes towards Chinese speakers.

**Students’ Attitudes towards Mandarin**

The following findings are based on data extracted from the interviews I conducted with the 10 student participants and some students contributed to more response categories than others. It is important to keep in mind that the numbers below represent responses, not students. Numbers and examples of responses to questions concerning the Mandarin Chinese language are shown in the table below.
Table 3

Reponses to the Mandarin Chinese Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment (n=10)</td>
<td>I love Mandarin so that’s why I’m taking it; Writing the characters is the most enjoyable part.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty (n=10)</td>
<td>It’s one of the hardest subjects; really hard for me to remember each individual character; I don’t look at it like it’s hard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic Uniqueness (n=10)</td>
<td>The characters hold history; It’s a hard language with different tones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utility (n=10)</td>
<td>Helps you throughout either your college, your job, or whatever; You could do so much with just a language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to communicate (n=10)</td>
<td>Want to master it and be fluent in it; I wouldn’t expect to become fluent, but I hope to be able to communicate one day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment (n=10)</td>
<td>I didn’t want to give that up. It would be a waste of time and effort; Maybe I’d be more fluent in it if I’d started earlier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enabling new experiences (n=6)</td>
<td>Having a language really helps you be able to speak with other people you wouldn’t normally be able to speak with; You don’t really realize how exclusive they are, and how exclusive their culture is until you start taking Mandarin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Side effects (n=6)</td>
<td>If you learn Mandarin and you stuck with it, then you could learn something else and you’d be able to stick with it and learn it to the end; With language you’re pushed out of your comfort zone because you’ve never encountered anything like that before; Appreciating the stroke order and learning and remembering actually the stroke order of everything, it can apply to a lot of things because you can’t be sloppy with it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational strategies (n=5)</td>
<td>To set a goal for yourself and remember that you’re always striving towards that goal; You’ll learn. If other people can do it, it’s been done. It’s not revolutionary.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Learning a unique language as an enjoyable challenge. All the student participants reported that they enjoyed at least one aspect, if not more, of the Mandarin Chinese language. Many attributed the reason why they were studying Mandarin to the fun experience of doing this. Edward, for example, took advantage of the fact that he lived in New York City and enjoyed recognizing Chinese characters whenever available:

I’ve seen people reading Chinese language newspapers on the subway, and then I try to see which characters I can recognize, even though those characters might not be used in the same context as I remember them being used, and then it’s pretty fun, because even though most newspapers are in traditional characters, there are still some that I can point out.

Edward, among others, was fascinated by characters and was given opportunities to become familiarized with them because of the existence of a Chinese population in New York City. Beyond the language itself, every student participant mentioned the enjoyable experience of learning Mandarin. As Grace felt it, “It was a lot of fun to go through. It was special because I was the only one doing it and everyone would be impressed because I was learning Mandarin.”

While the student participants spoke about the less enjoyable experiences they encountered in Mandarin learning such as bad teaching and hard tasks, they all had fun experiencing the language, be they doing a skit in the classroom or ordering food in a Chinese restaurant.

It was also acknowledged by most of the student participants that it was hard, as most people generally would perceive. The findings echoed Bartram’s (2010) observation that difficulty in learning did not always equate with a learning experience not being enjoyable. It

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14 Traditional Chinese characters and simplified Chinese characters are the two standard character sets of the contemporary Chinese written language. Traditional Chinese characters are currently used in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, and overseas Chinese communities whereas simplified characters are currently used in Mainland China, Singapore and overseas Chinese communities. Edward was taught simplified characters.
was a combined feeling of favoring a difficult language. Because it was hard, the progress the students expected actually came at a slower pace. “Sometimes I’m frustrated that I’m not getting any better or feel like I’m not getting any better. I want to be going faster than I can and not have so many other things I have to do.” said Adam when he explained the reality of having so many different things to study, which made it more difficult to make adequate progress on an already hard subject like Mandarin. Due to the fact that Mandarin was a less commonly taught language and therefore there was less possibility of help outside the classroom, Andrea spoke about the difficulty she experienced:

I would say it’s really tough. For homework often we have to answer questions and I usually have to use the textbook or Google translate to see how to write the characters that we’ve learned in class. So I would say sometimes it’s really hard.

However, Sarah was the only one who did not state that Mandarin was really hard. “I enjoy it so I don’t look at it like it’s hard. Everything is difficult. I feel like people totally over emphasize that it’s going to be so hard. But it wasn’t so bad.” Her general expectation of acquiring any knowledge and skills was that it would not be an easy job. She considered there was nothing special to learning Mandarin in that sense. She was also trying to make a point that Mandarin was not as hard as most people generally perceive it is. This was supported by Bella’s observation about people’s preconceived ideas of how difficult Mandarin would be. It was felt that Mandarin was not as hard as you thought once you were in the process of acquiring the language. It seemed that offering exposure to Mandarin was crucial in moderating the subject’s attitude about the language given the reality that most people believe Mandarin is difficult.

The difficulties the student participants encountered in Mandarin learning were largely related to the linguistic uniqueness of Mandarin Chinese. All reported how Mandarin provided a
different learning experience from learning English or other Indo-European languages such as French and Spanish. This resonated with Weger-Guntharp’s (2006) finding that non heritage learners often allude to the novelty of learning Chinese in comparison to other languages. In an essay for college application, Eric wrote 150 words to explain about his fascination with learning the characters, and the connection the characters have with the actual language:

Because it’s a lot different than basically any other language that anyone knows. Because you can’t read what you’re looking at basically, you can’t read a character, you have to memorize it. I explained that difference, and how it’s a completely different mindset when every single time that you want to write down a word in Chinese, it’s not like writing, it’s like drawing.

When comprehending written Chinese, the students could not apply the skills they had acquired from learning to decode Indo-European languages. Because the Chinese writing system is logographic, it takes considerable memorization to be able to recognize Chinese characters. Writing Chinese characters was more of a painting-like experience to them. There is no connection between the written and the spoken form of Chinese. Every student participant talked about this difference and the memorization required for making the connection in fact triggered part of the difficulty:

[Usually] if you know the spoken language and you know the alphabet, you know how to write it or vice versa. If you know the written and the alphabet, you can figure out pretty close how to speak it. But with Mandarin, you just have to memorize it, there is no connection there. … In other subjects, like in global studies and history and in science, you can see how things connect. It makes sense to me because I spent my whole life learning them. And then having to learn Mandarin, I have to go back and learn a different
set of connections. So it’s sort of starting point one again, and learning the whole new set of connections just for language. (Abby)

Abby mentioned about her experience of relearning how to learn because of the distinction of Mandarin from Indo-European languages. From the students’ experiences, they either had no foreign language learning experiences prior to learning Mandarin or were exposed to Indo-European languages such as French, Latin, and Spanish. To them, learning Mandarin was not simply about the new experience of learning a foreign language which required learning new grammar patterns and new vocabulary. The fact that Mandarin does not have an alphabet adds on extra work to acquire this language by learning the connection between the written and the spoken form.

While there was no disagreement about the fact that it was hard to remember each individual character, characters were also frequently mentioned as the enjoyable part of the learning process. Many described the characters as “beautiful,” “cool” or “unique.” Because many basic characters to start with were pictographic, the students enjoyed the “drawing” experience and some went further to join the calligraphy club or find a tutor to teach them calligraphy. Moreover, each character had a story to tell about why it was formed the way it was, based on a book called Shuowen Jiezi\(^1\). Some student participants were exposed to the rationale behind the formation of the Chinese characters when their teachers helped them memorize the characters. They seemed to enjoy this part particularly. Edward mentioned it during the focus group discussion:

Every character is unique. So each character has its own origin and individual meaning. … It’s a lot more meaningful than other languages as well. It holds history. The

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\(^1\) Shuowen Jiezi, literally “Explaining and Analyzing Characters,” was an early 2nd century Chinese dictionary from the Han Dynasty where it analyzed the structure of the characters and gave the rationale behind them.
characters hold history. The way that the characters are formed all have to do with the culture.

The story behind each character carried on some elements of Chinese culture and therefore when these students were learning it, they were learning about related cultural ideas at the same time.

The fascination did not only stop at the characters. Adam reported enjoying both the writing and the speaking components of the language and commented that:

By just looking at the characters and seeing how complicated they are [because it is challenging]. Striving to write them and then [learning to] speak because I like the way the language sounds as well. It was something that I had never really heard before.

As much as the students enjoyed the characters while feeling it was hard to learn, speaking also had its own linguistic features which made acquisition challenging for the students. As a tonal language, the same syllable(s) with different tones in Mandarin have distinct meanings. Therefore, pronouncing the tones correctly is crucial to achieving effective communication.

Clark felt that was “the most difficult” and a special feature of Mandarin, “I mean in Mandarin it’s important. The tone changes the word. I mean with other languages, you don’t really get that, not with English.” Edward recalled the difficulty in communicating with the waiters at a Chinese restaurant during a Mandarin class field trip to Chinatown and learned that “we have to improve our pronunciation of the characters and all of the words, and that we really have to stop speaking so flatly.” In spite of the difficulty in pronunciation, Eric found the characteristics of a tonal language interesting, as he described it during the focus group discussion:

I felt it was interesting when I first realized that you could pronounce three letters in the same exact sequence about a hundred different ways that mean a hundred different things. Just by the tones, I always thought that was interesting. There are different tones and
sometimes even the same tones can mean something completely different. I realized it’s
the same tones but they are still not the same.

He was speaking about the fact that the same syllable with different tones could mean different
things and depending on which character the syllable represented, the syllable with the same tone
could also mean different things because the characters it represented were different. With the
complicated systems of writing and speaking, Mandarin was presented as a challenge to every
student participant and many of them reported enjoying the challenge. “The harder it is the more
interesting it is,” said Adam, representing some other participants’ point of views.

**Investing in acquiring competence in a beneficial language.** As found in Bartram’s
(2010) and Torres-Guzmán et al.’s (2011) studies, the utility of Mandarin emerged as another
important category across the responses of my study. Some referred to its usefulness in the
context of travel. Some other students had a clear short-term goal by learning Mandarin:

> It is good that the school requires Mandarin. You get exposed to the language. I think
> Mandarin learning shows that you like to try new things because Mandarin is a difficult
> language to learn. By you learning it, people can see that you’re outgoing and that you’re
> trying to learn things that you know are going to be hard. … I think learning Mandarin
> can give you an advantage because a lot of colleges like to see that you’ve done
> something unique. Because not everyone wants to learn Mandarin because they know
> how hard it is so they would probably try to learn Spanish or French. So I think learning
> Mandarin can give you an advantage. (Andrea)

Andrea was required to take Mandarin in the 5th grade by the school and she had strong parental
support for making plans to help her advance in Mandarin. Both she and her mother believed that
Mandarin would bring her an advantage. Learning Mandarin though, was “not really on the top”
of her priority list and it was never something that she definitely needed to learn. But she devoted much time and effort to learning it on the weekends and over the summer. Fulfiling the language requirement at school and adding competitiveness to her college applications might have been the force that drove her. It was not clear for her what she wanted to do with Mandarin after graduating from high school but she had clear reasons why Mandarin was useful in the short term.

Others talked about how useful Mandarin could become in their careers. As Peter commented, “It assures me that it will help me because there is always jobs that need people that speak many languages, like a government translator, like businessman if you do international business, you need to know Mandarin.” Bella, without having a clear idea about how Mandarin would play a role in her future life, wanted to be equipped with this skill set to be competitive:

It gives you an edge depending on what you want to do in your life. … [F]or now all I know is it’s important to have those because I love languages. So I can’t give up now and say, “Oh I wish I had stuck with it because this is the job I want to do now,” instead of keeping an open mind about it.

Because it was perceived that not many people were taking Mandarin – the most spoken language in the world – many student participants felt special in their identity as a Mandarin learner in the context of the U.S. under the historical background of China being the rising economic power. Not only was their identity unique as non-Asian Mandarin learners, but the lengthy acquisition process for them to study Mandarin also brought the student participants an advantage since they had started relatively early:

I mean honestly I don’t know if I’ll be able to use Chinese later on in life as much as I’d want to. But even if I decide to or not to do it, that’s an area where not a lot of other
people even have an option. … If I started learning Spanish right now, I would probably know the same amount of vocabulary that I know in Mandarin by the end of the year. So I mean it’s not like I couldn’t do it, but it’s just that I’m in an area now that people can’t catch up if they tried to learn now. So it’s just a complete different level of learning the language. (Eric)

In general, it was believed that knowing a language would bring opportunities. By acquiring a way of communication, one could do so much. The open-mindedness towards the utility of Mandarin was reported by most student participants.

The usefulness of Mandarin was felt by every student participant from different perspectives. The ability to communicate was also a goal stated by every one of them. Fluency was frequently mentioned in the responses. To some students, they did not set up a goal to become fluent in Mandarin at the very beginning. They experienced a development from the mindset of having some exposure in the Chinese language and culture to the mindset of wanting to be good at this language. “As I go on I want it more because the more you learn Chinese language and culture, the more interesting it gets and the more you want to master it and be fluent in it,” said Adam. However, to students like Edward, his current goal was not fluency, but to be able to survive inside Chinese culture. “I wouldn’t expect to become fluent but I hope to be able to communicate one day, maybe enough to travel and spend time in Chinese speaking countries.”

To many of the student participants, their criteria of adding Mandarin to their bilingual/multilingual identities were based on whether they would be able to survive in Chinese speaking countries. The end result of learning this language was considered fun and rewarding when they could go to China and talk to Chinese people. The communicative aspect of learning
Mandarin was stressed by all the student participants. Their accounts supported Norton’s (2001) argument that L2 learners have images of the communities in which they want to participate in the future, and that these imagined communities have a large impact on their current learning. How to help students envision the communities of practice thus becomes a possible strategy for helping to sustain and enhance a students’ language learning. This will not just happen internally within each individual learner. They have to be socially mediated into the possibility of imagining new communities of practice, which they were incapable of imagining before. Family, school, teachers, peers, local and overseas Chinese speaking communities, and media, who are the player components at the meso level, actually have the power to affect individual learners’ conceptualization of communities of practice. As a result, these components can impact the individuals’ learning.

In order to become members of such communities, the students were learning Mandarin as an investment in life. The concept of investment here, is the same as the one Norton Peirce (1995) introduces, which is best understood with reference to the economic metaphors that Bourdieu uses in his work – in particular the notion of cultural capital. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argue that some forms of cultural capital have a higher exchange value than others in a given social context. Norton Peirce (1995) builds on that and argues:

[I]f learners invest in a second language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital. Learners will expect or hope to have a good return on that investment – a return that will give them access to hitherto unattainable resources (p. 17).
Learners would expect a return on the investment in learning L2, be they symbolic resources such as education and interpersonal networks or material resources such as capital goods and money. The expectation of the return makes sense of the effort put in learning L2.

In order to avoid their investment becoming sunk cost, many student participants chose to continue with Mandarin. Andrea did not want to switch to another language even though she was very dissatisfied with her current Mandarin teacher in the 9th grade. Because of the school foreign language requirement of learning one language for three consecutive years, she found no incentive to start over in another language when she already had a foundation in Mandarin. By the same token, Adam did not want to start a new language, but wanted to continue with Mandarin, even if his current high school did not offer Mandarin and he had to subsidize this by going to a weekend school:

If I start a new language, it’s going to take a longer amount of time. I want to be able to have a language under my belt. … I already spent some time on it, like three years. I didn’t want to give that up. It would be a waste of time and effort. Because language is a continual learning process you have to build on what you know as well as what you previously learned. I think particularly language.

Bella also felt the importance of seeking constant exposure in Mandarin in order to acquire the language and she had a clear plan on her investment:

I think the language is the only thing worth time and dedication. It’s a language. You should be able to know how to speak. Commitment is very important. … I took it upon myself and gave myself a challenge because I wanted to learn. I set a goal for myself. If you want to use the language, then you should learn more complicated sentence
structures and more vocab, in order to get to that point. To a point where my Mandarin was okay enough, I applied to Startalk. You have to have plans.

She was clear that the time and dedication she invested in learning Mandarin was to gain fluency in the language and she believed that knowing the language would bring endless opportunities in the future. Therefore, a good return that would give her access to hitherto unattainable resources could be expected.

There were other students who reported that they felt the supply of Mandarin teaching was relatively scarce and that became one factor in their decision-making process of choosing which language to take. Edward considered the Mandarin class offered in his candidate private schools as the only chance to learn this language in his adolescence and did not worry about missing the opportunity to learn Spanish because there would be opportunities later in life as Spanish became such a more prevalent language in the U.S. today. Sarah also mentioned the widely available opportunities to learn Spanish later, in contrast to the rare opportunity to learn Mandarin in middle school.

Having the opportunity to learn at a young age was mentioned frequently. Especially as regards a widely perceived hard language, the student participants recognized the precious opportunity they had to be able to learn this in adolescence:

There’s time when I feel like there’s so much school work. Learning a language even though I’m already overwhelmed would be too much. But then there’s other times when this is the only opportunity because the younger you start the better. (Peter)

Abby followed her aunt’s advice to start Mandarin in the 7th grade partially because the younger one starts learning a language, the better the pronunciation one can have. The belief that the
younger you were, the easier it became to learn a language was also held by the students. Adam criticized the American public school system based on that belief:

The major problem with American public school education is that language is not included. Whenever we have budget cuts in education, which is frequently because we’re always entering unnecessary wars, they always cut back on arts and languages first. I wish I had language learning opportunities at an early age because there is so much research showing that it’s a lot easier to learn a language when you’re a kid and you’re still developing. It gets harder as you age. I wish there was more immersion because it’s obviously a great thing to know a language. That’s why I’m doing it now.

He pointed out the attitude of the public school system towards foreign language education at the macro level was marginalization. The unavailability of FL teaching at an early age made him miss the possibility to gain fluency of one language in an easier way. His belief was supported by Grace in that she felt way easier to learn Mandarin in an immersion program since Kindergarten and struggled with the first two years of Spanish learning in her current high school:

I don’t think there is any difficult part of Mandarin for me anymore. Only because I started so young and it was etched into my mind. That is how you learned it. But now I’m older and learning a completely different language, it’s just crazy.

She talked about people’s incomprehension of why she could learn Mandarin easily but was struggling with Spanish. She attributed this to the immersion approach she received at a very young age because “in Mandarin, it is the way it is. But in Spanish, there are all these different rules and conjugations. It’s a completely different mindset.” It is evident in her account that she was able to acquire Mandarin easily in the immersion program. In Grace’s dual language school experience, Mandarin was more of what she did rather than what she studied. While it was
desirable to many student participants to start learning Mandarin at a very young age, the dilemma between starting early and personal choice was mentioned by Sarah:

I wish that I was taking Mandarin at an earlier age. When you’re younger, it’s easier to pick up a language. If I was in an immersion course younger, I think it would have been really helpful. You’re going to be more fluent. But then at the time I was young, so I’m not sure I wanted to take Mandarin.

**Obtaining new experiences and abilities.** Learning Mandarin allowed the students the possibility of becoming culturally competent members of a particular community that would otherwise be deemed inaccessible. Eric felt that the Asian community in New York City was extremely exclusive until you stepped into their world. The exclusiveness he meant was not a physical feature but about being culturally exclusive in the sense that outsiders did not know much beyond cultural facts. He was able to step into that world by socializing with Chinese speakers in Mandarin. After understanding how exclusive their culture was he realized that “there might be a lot of cultures that are like that, we might be taking for granted.” He sensed the cultural isolation among different communities under the surface phenomenon of the “melting pot.” Eric achieved this understanding through his Mandarin socialization experience. Without learning Mandarin, it would not even occur to him to go to Chinatown.

Other student participants also recognized that learning Mandarin could enable new experiences. Clark, who went to Taiwan and applied for a summer program in Beijing, China, claimed that Mandarin learning made him “more open, try new things, different crowds” he would hang out with. Peter considered field trips to Chinatown the most significant experiences in Mandarin learning:
In many of the field trips we interacted with people and had either interviews or just asked questions with them and we were able to use our Mandarin on the street. Those interviews and interacting with those people made me realize that I knew a lot more Mandarin than I gave myself credit for because I was able to talk to this person and asks questions and certain things that I didn’t know that I remember.

Going to Chinatown interacting with Chinese people brought him a whole new experience. He was able to not only practice his Mandarin but also be around Chinese people, which made him “more aware and affected my view of Chinese people.”

In addition to what Mandarin learning brought to the student participants in terms of how it helped in the areas related to Chinese language, culture and speakers, the participants talked about the side effects of Mandarin learning that affected them in other areas. Some reported confidence building when facing challenges. As Andrea said, “If you learn Mandarin and you stuck with it, then you could learn something else and you’d be able to stick with it and learn it to the end.” The experience of making themselves be better at such a difficult language led to their belief that they would be able to do the same in anything else. Adam thought the experience to be out of your comfort zone would build one’s confidence and self-esteem in general:

I think language learning is cool because it takes you out of your comfort zone. … With language you’re pushed out of your comfort zone because you’ve never encountered anything like that before. I think with language learning it is the sense of you being pushed further than you really want to be.

Because L2 learning was “an intrinsically social process of socialization into specific communities of practice” (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 286), Adam felt that Mandarin learning took him out of his comfort zone when he did interview projects by talking to Chinese speaking-strangers
using his limited Mandarin. It was the unfamiliar and new experiences that made him temporarily uncomfortable. It was also these interactional experiences that made him feel more confident in dealing with any unfamiliar situations later on. The confidence did not limit to speaking Mandarin, it even spread to the situations when Adam spoke English as his native language:

   Even your own oral skills, even in your native language because you have more command in saying something in another language, then you feel like it’s even easier to say things in your native language with more confidence and persuasion.

All the student accounts support Gardner’s (1985) argument that self-confidence arises from positive experiences in the context of L2.

   More specific to the linguistic aspect of Mandarin, some students felt that they gained more discipline and became more detail-oriented through learning Mandarin. Both Eric and Adam, who had extensive piano training, saw the similarity in Mandarin in terms of the practice it required in order to acquire the language. Eric mentioned this during the focus group discussion:

   It’s a discipline. Because it’s not even so much a time thing but if you respect the way you go about learning language, it makes a huge difference. If you’re disciplined enough about every aspect of the language... It’s different from learning Spanish. It’s a lot more nuances to learn.

Adam elaborated on this point of view by giving an example of the writing aspect during his interview:

   If you’re doing a totally new kind of writing, then you should do a lot of exercises so that you’re doing it right. Somebody who is writing words like that aren’t gonna
instantaneously be able to do all the curves and boxes that the characters require. I think you do need a lot of practice. … Paying attention to details in terms of having to study the smallest thing like a dot or dash or stroke on a character. You have to focus on the smallest things.

The nuances of Chinese characters in terms of how the strokes were positioned seemed to be something unfamiliar to those who were used to writing letters. They learned how to write the characters correctly through trial errors and constant effort in practicing. They developed a new attitude towards “the smallest things” through the experience and according to Eric during the focus group discussion, he was able to apply this new attitude when doing other things:

Appreciating the stroke order and learning and remembering actually the stroke order of everything, it can apply to a lot of things because you can’t be sloppy with it. It always has to be the same if you want to get it done right. So like with anything you can’t just take shortcuts to learn it. It has to be even the smallest things are given respect to understand it fully.

None of the parents knew how to speak Mandarin except Clark’s mother, who claimed that her Mandarin level was not good enough to help Clark with his Mandarin. To many student participants, being able to speak a language that their parents would have no idea about was “cool” because it was a secret code that only they could decipher. Adam felt “empowering” as he explained, “‘Haha I know something you don’t know.’ Because [my parents] are very smart people and they know everything but they don’t know Mandarin. So if I can learn that and say ‘You don’t know this.’” In a family where both parents spoke at least three languages, Bella had her own territory by knowing Mandarin. Abby felt “it’s only fair that we have our own little secret language” because her parents would speak French to each other when they did not want
Abby to know what they were talking about. Grace echoed Abby’s point of view and added that her parents were supportive of the secret code in the house as long as she and her brothers were practicing Mandarin. Knowing Mandarin as a secret code created a feeling of expertise that the student participants acquired, in relation to their generally more knowledgeable parents.

The process of developing cross-cultural understandings was also a process of understanding one’s own culture in an introspective way. As Abby commented:

Just in general, it gives you something to compare your own life with. … It’s eye-opening comparing me to the people I’ve met who are my friends. The thing is that we’re not that different, but at the same time, we are very different. And noticing that the languages are equal but different. Just to be able to see those things where I would never know that if I didn’t speak Mandarin. … With language, you can really speak to other people and have a chance to compare. I think there are things we don’t notice until you compare them against something else.

When she was learning and using Mandarin, she was not only acquiring and exchanging linguistic information, but also was organizing and reorganizing a sense of who she was and how she related to the social world (Norton, 2000). The social dimension of language learning offered the learners opportunities to interact with the outer world and to reflect on their personal history and as a result, affecting their futures across time and space.

As Mandarin was not an easy language to learn, some student participants developed motivational strategies when they felt less motivated to learn. Abby learned a strategy through her mother when she was overwhelmed by the number of characters she had to memorize:

I had my mother. She was the biggest motivating point for me. She would come and she’d be like, “Okay. Just relax. Focus on learning one character at a time.” She has that
way of thinking that’s so different from mine. I tend to see all these characters and I’m like, “I can’t memorize these.” But my mother tends to see all these characters and says, “Okay, well, let’s memorize the first one.”

Abby’s mother helped her break down the task and focus on the small steps without worrying about whether she could complete the entire task. Some others reported taking a break from what made you feel frustrated and pacing yourself might help. During the breaks, Eric suggested an option that you could still engage yourself in Chinese cultural things such as watching movies but refrained from the continuous engagement of the language learning tasks that frustrated you.

Realizing how much you had acquired after reflecting on what you had learned was also reported as one motivational strategy that would encourage you to move on. Acknowledging language acquisition as achievable was another strategy when dealing with frustration.

Ushioda (2001) argues that students differ in the way they value and interpret goals and such differences in motivational thinking may affect their involvement in learning. For the student participants in the study who all managed to sustain involvement in Mandarin learning, setting up a goal was frequently mentioned as one of the more useful motivational strategies. “If you don’t have a goal, you’re not going to work hard to get that goal,” felt Adam. The importance of the goal was echoed by Edward who described the Mandarin learning journey as dynamic as going in “an exponential line”:

I think the most helpful thing is to set a goal for yourself and remember that you’re always striving towards that goal. … I’ve always thought, in times of great difficulty, maybe one day I would get to go to a Chinese-speaking country and actually use all of this at some point.
He referred to the imagined community he might be in and connected his current endeavor to the future. Whether or not he saw the learning of Mandarin as leading him closer to his imagined community influenced his current investment in that learning (Norton, 2001).

**Students’ Attitudes towards the Chinese Culture**

Positive attitudes towards the Chinese culture were reported by the student participants as they generally described the Chinese culture as “interesting” or “unique.” The interconnectedness of Mandarin learning and the Chinese culture were recognized by all student participants. The importance of integrating cultural lessons into language learning was felt by them, as Adam put it, “to give you a sense of what you’re learning, what it connects to.” The two-way relationship between language and culture recognized that learning Mandarin offered access to understanding Chinese culture from a perspective other than an outsider, and that the appreciation of Chinese culture made sense as regards the dedication needed to study Mandarin and took away the frustration as a result of temporary difficulties encountered in the language learning process. Edward felt strongly about integrating culture into language learning:

I really like the idea of talking about cultural ideas, about the cultural things because I feel it should just be a standard along the language learning. It’s such a crucial element to learning a language because it gives you an understanding of why you’re learning that language and why you want to continue learning that language.

In his opinion, culture served as the driving force for initially motivating language learning as well as for helping to sustain involvement in language learning. This resonated with Eric’s suggestion on integrating cultural elements from the beginning of the Mandarin learning process. Otherwise it would be too late when the culture was introduced at the stage where all the enthusiasm for learning a new special language faded away due to the routine dedication it
required to learn Mandarin. According to Eric, culture was not limited to the cultural facts such as festivals, but should extend to cultural ideas and experiences, which would facilitate the development of deeper understanding and multiple perspectives. Specifically, for example, he suggested that his Mandarin teacher could share her experiences in China with the class. To him, the development of cross-cultural understanding also came from the cultural practices he carried out with his Mandarin teacher by interacting with her casually after school.

There were different spaces for the student participants to be exposed to Chinese culture, such as Mandarin classes, history classes, cultural events at school and in New York City, field trips, trips to Chinese speaking countries, and social media. The student participants developed cross-cultural understanding through these experiences. Many Chinese traditions were mentioned during the interviews. During the focus group discussion, Abby talked about respect for authority and the older generations:

You have to respect the person and depending on what position of authority is in, I know that you have to say “Laoshi (teacher)” and the teacher’s last time. Also older generations. We as Americans are kind of bad at. You know, our parents have had more time on the earth to learn things and they actually know more than we do.

Andrea’s mother would love to see more gender-related cultural integration in her daughter’s Mandarin class, so Andrea would have an idea of what her boundaries might be in the current society. When I asked Andrea about it, she said, “It comes with the characters. You can see it in characters how males are usually preferred over females.” Other student participants also mentioned about how interesting Chinese characters came to be as the formation of each character carried Chinese people’s cultural interpretation of things. Because the Chinese culture

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16 In the Chinese writing system, many times male radicals are used over female radicals to indicate either characters falling into the male category or the gender neutral category.
was embedded in the form and meaning of Chinese characters, the characters had been serving as an attraction to the student participants, while they acknowledged that the memorization of all the characters was not an easy job.

Bella recalled her experience of trying to understand the Chinese value of education during a field trip organized by the Startalk summer program during the focus group discussion:

Over the summer we went to the Chinese Scholar’s Garden and we learned that people could rise from poverty by their brains and they could become scholars and they could live the life of luxury through education. I never thought about that because I know in Asia there’s this standard. My neighbor is from China. Her parents held her to very high standards and I thought that to be typical in China. That reminded of how it comes all the way back from how you can rise from any poor situation to a luxurious one in some cases through education.

She also wrote an essay regarding the Chinese tradition of valuing education in her Asian History class at school. Eric added onto that understanding, during the focus group discussion, by comparing the possibly different results between Chinese students and American students given the scenario where the teacher was not there for class after five minutes – sitting there waiting versus leaving as fast as you can. “It’s an overall different mindset - a higher respect for education. We value it but we don’t respect it. It’s expected to be given to us,” said Eric.

Some of the history classes offered at students’ high schools were reported covering Chinese history, mainly the prosperous dynasties in ancient times. In Peter’s case, although his high school did not offer Mandarin, he was able to learn about China in his global history class, “It talked about the Qin Dynasty. They just talked about their role in the world and the power they had over others. What they did and what innovations they made. What inventions they
helped create that helped the world.” Peter was able to gain linguistic and cultural knowledge through extracurricular Mandarin programs while learning about history of China at his school as reinforcement to a deeper understanding of China and its role in the world. Also learning Chinese history from school, Adam recognized the significance of Chinese culture to the world:

China has always been a major force in world history. The Japanese and the Koreans they all adopted Chinese value systems. Even people who conquered China adopted Chinese customs. That doesn’t happen these days. … But a lot of people would invade China and would be like, “These people know what they’re doing. They invented paper, a compass, a way of monitoring earthquakes. Maybe we should learn something from them.”

He spoke about the influence Chinese people had had on the world and thought highly of it. Adam also felt that New York City offered a great opportunity to immerse himself in Chinese culture and history:

Going to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and seeing any artifact from palaces during the Qin Dynasty or Zhou Dynasty. You feel like you have more connection to it, and you understand it a little more because you’re being immersed more in Chinese language and that whole kind of history than you normally would.

Because of studying Mandarin and history on a regular basis, even only once a week, it offered him continuous exposure to the Chinese language and culture. In addition, New York City assisted in this immersion process by offering both linguistic and cultural resources such as Chinese speaking population, Chinatown, Chinese cultural events and exhibitions. This did not only happen to Adam. It was also the experiences of many other student participants with possible more contact hours of Mandarin learning each week.
Two student participants who had been to China spoke specifically about their encounter with Chinese culture when they were there. What struck them the most were usually the differences:

I learned from the China trip, being there, seeing how people work and go around each day. When we were in China, it was the 90th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China, so there were a lot of festivals in Tiananmen Square. There was a big picture of Chairman Mao. So we saw a lot of political culture as well which was interesting to see. There’s a big nationalist kind of feel in China. (Adam)

He also talked about the “different, alternate universe in terms of social media and the media’s freedom” in China as many things were censored there. Sarah considered that she gained a good understanding of Chinese culture through the summer study trip she made to China. She talked about how she was able to realize different things as she observed how Chinese people lived when she stayed with her host family and how Beijing felt different from New York City. She also mentioned about her discomfort with asking people how much they earned when doing an interview project even though this was normal in Chinese culture. The uncomfortable experience she had to go through was one way for her to step out of her comfort zone and to step into a cultural practice which was completely new to her. Thus a better understanding of Chinese culture was achieved.

The cross-cultural understanding developed through Mandarin learning was acknowledged by all the student participants. Bella felt that it made them more tolerant in terms of someone or something being different from what they were used to. During the focus group discussion she clearly summarized this as follows, “It makes us more aware where other people are coming from and their thinking. It’s changing our understanding why people do what they do
and what’s expected of their culture.” As a prerequisite for any effective cross-cultural communication, cross-cultural understanding was evidently developed through the language learning experience. The cultural activities that the student participants carried out provided an added incentive for them in turn that motivated them to study more Mandarin:

Being able to learn about culture I think encouraged me to learn Mandarin because you realize that it’s not like an arbitrary thing that you learn on paper and take tests on; eventually you’ll stop doing it. But you can go out into the world and use it. (Adam)

The motivation to learn Mandarin, as illustrated by Adam, was to use the language to socialize with other members in the communities of Mandarin practice. Learning about cultural practices or engaging in them stimulated the students into learning how to communicate with Chinese speaking communities. Only when they were exposed to Chinese cultural practices, did it become possible for them to internalize the experience and this in turn, affected their motivation. Therefore, components at the meso level possessed the power to change the students’ motivation. For purposes of developing educational interventions, integrating culture into language learning was shown to be a good strategy for sustaining motivation.

**Students’ Attitudes towards Chinese Speakers**

The student participants either displayed positive attitudes towards Chinese speakers or felt it was inappropriate to be drawn into generalizing about Chinese speakers as a group.

Adam gave one example of his positive attitude regarding something he read in the newspaper:

It said because of Lang Lang\(^\text{17}\), 23 million Chinese kids are now studying the piano. It just stuck me as amazing. You have one influential figure in China and suddenly you have millions of kids who are doing the exact same thing. You’ve got this whole army of

\(^{17}\) Lang Lang is a famous Chinese pianist.
pianist for learning. This is why China is kind of succeeding and become a super power in the world. You have so many people who are dedicated and pushed to do their best at these things.

Positive experiences were also mentioned when the student participants spoke Mandarin, Chinese speakers were impressed and encouraging. Grace even got free drinks all the time at a restaurant she went to after her Sunday Chinese school at Chinatown because she ordered in Mandarin. Even when the student participants considered themselves not very good at Mandarin yet because they did not think they had achieved the fluency, the responses from Chinese speakers were all positive and encouraging:

They were all very nice. They always complimented me on my Mandarin. I mean I knew I was awful with the Mandarin. So they’d be like, “Your Mandarin is very good.” And I was like, “You’re lying but I thank you for it anyway.” I never felt that they were judging me. (Clark)

The participants, who refrained from generalizing about Chinese speakers, viewed Chinese speakers as their own equal and that people were very similar to each other. While acknowledging the fact that the Chinese culture and traditions were a little different, these students believed there was not much difference otherwise:

They’re people. I mean they’re like Americans. There’re probably a lot of idiots but there’re probably also a lot of smart people. One of the Mandarin teachers [that helped my aunt teach] became such a very close family friend. It’s hard for me to see that that’s different, you know? (Abby)

Sarah claimed to hold no stereotypes as she could “sympathize” with the fact that she was learning Mandarin and the Chinese were learning English. No matter what experiences they had,
these participants held the view that they preferred to consider human beings as independent diverse individuals rather than someone who could be categorized into different groups based on certain criteria.

To reach this view, Edward experienced a change from holding stereotypes of Chinese speakers to consider them as his own equal:

Before I came to [the private school] and started taking Mandarin, I had a very single minded image of what Chinese culture was and I had my own stereotypes about the people. When I was younger, it would always be “Oh, Chinese people look the same and they all speak Chinese.” I didn’t really assume any different variations of Chinese and they probably all know each other. And they’re all like super smart. As I grew older and more mature, those kind of came down. … It actually started when I met my first Mandarin teacher. She was the first person that I met who was from China. She actually contradicted my stereotypes. I realized that even though she’s from China, she’s pretty much alike. There are things that we can relate with. And we probably have shared human experiences.

Eric also spoke about the different attitudes he held towards Chinese speakers before and after learning Mandarin:

Well from before, I guess I would assume that they’re very strict and very busy all the time. But that’s not really exactly what’s going on. It’s more like they are focused. I used to assume they were really disciplined and that’s just the way that they were. But it’s just they have a stronger desire to pay attention to what they’re doing. … [A]fter being in Chinatown, when they’re doing something, that’s just what they do. They have no need to focus on other things when they’re doing something at that moment.
Grace echoed that in her view learning Mandarin helped her to understand why Chinese people do certain things, while other people wonder why they do things like that. As reported above, learning Mandarin allowed the student participants interactional opportunities with Chinese speakers they would otherwise not have access to. The Chinese speakers, as Peter believed, “[t]hey helped me to appreciate who they are and how they act, rather than I discriminate or rather than not bother with them and not really understand Chinese people.” The language learning enabled new experiences:

I can know more people and I can go to China and I wouldn’t do that except with that group of people unless I knew Mandarin, and so knowing Mandarin sort of destroys the people barrier because I’m more comfortable going there and meeting them. (Abby)

The people barrier was erased through knowing the language as the new identity was constructed when the students became Mandarin users and stepped into a Mandarin speaking world.

Andrea, however, reported not feeling closer to the Chinese speaking population after learning Mandarin because she did not “usually speak Mandarin with native speakers.” Although she studied Mandarin at a Saturday Chinese school with other Chinese heritage learners in the same class, she reported her classmates were a lot younger and therefore there was a lack of interaction. At school, while there were 27 Chinese students in her grade, she did not interact with them much and when she did, it was in English. This could possibly be explained by the fact that her experience using Mandarin with Chinese speakers was limited, and she probably considered using Mandarin in the classroom as a process of learning linguistic knowledge rather than socialization, therefore she had not developed a deep understanding of Chinese speakers. It seemed that interacting with Chinese speakers in Mandarin was essential in stepping into the Mandarin speaking world and feeling connected with Chinese people.
Summary

The experience of learning Mandarin was enjoyable to all student participants, despite the fact that they appeared to have many difficulties in learning the language. The enjoyment did not only come from the language itself, it also came out of social interactions with Mandarin users in instructional settings as well as in non-instructional settings. They acknowledged the societal attitude towards Mandarin as a hard language and all of them agreed that it was a linguistically difficult language for people whose first language was an Indo-European language, with one exception thinking that the difficulty was overemphasized by the society. As much as the difficulty came from the complexity of the writing and speaking systems, the affective evaluation of Mandarin also originated from the writing and speaking systems. Although the skills to decode for comprehension that the students had developed from learning Indo-European languages were not applicable to Mandarin, they enjoyed new experiences of learning characters and understanding Chinese culture through characters. The possible tediousness of memorizing characters was balanced by the relaxation of painting-like activities that they carried out when writing each character.

The student participants displayed diverse attitudes towards how Mandarin could be useful in their lives: travel; fulfillment of language requirement; competitiveness in college application and job market; as well as identity construction as someone special and therefore an advantage in life. It was worth noticing that even though two student participants’ parents spoke explicitly about wanting their children to gain advantage through studying Mandarin because they were minorities in American society, all of the student participants did not consider ethnicity as a major factor motivating them to learn Mandarin. For the students who thought Mandarin was useful because the ability to speak the language implied one’s competence to take
on challenges, their identity construction as someone special was not about gaining an advantage in life as minorities. They rather considered the role ethnicity played in their Mandarin learning experiences was such that once they had overcome their discomfort of being an outsider ethnically speaking, they felt they had gained much more encouragement from Chinese speakers for speaking Mandarin than a Chinese heritage student would be able to achieve. That affected their motivation and attitudes towards learning Mandarin positively. Certainly, they recognized the advantage knowing Mandarin might bring. But this did not originate from the desire to move up the social ladder because they were minorities. 

The sample of this study constituted both male and female student participants. Unlike the findings in Sung and Padilla’s (1998) study, none of the students in this study perceived gender differences in motivating them to learn a L2, which was Mandarin in this case. However, two female student participants mentioned that they learned about gender differences in the Chinese culture from the nature of the Chinese characters and from interacting with Chinese speakers. All of the students expressed their desire to be able to communicate effectively in Mandarin and were investing time and effort in learning to reach that goal. Many wished to start learning Mandarin at an early age and failure to offer access to it in elementary public school education environment was criticized by one participant. Motivational strategies emerged as a category where goal setting was widely recognized as one motivational strategy among students whose responses touched upon that category. It was pointed out that learning Mandarin enabled new experiences and made the students more open. Side effects such as confidence building, discipline training and fostering introspection were perceived by some student participants.

Positive attitudes towards the Chinese culture were reported and the students asserted that the culture played an important role in their language learning. The students displayed cross-
cultural understanding and respect towards the Chinese culture. When asked about Chinese speakers, the student participants either displayed positive attitudes or refrained from generalizations. Because I am Chinese, I was aware that my presence in the interviews as a Chinese researcher might have had some impact on shaping the participants’ responses. Based on the interview transcripts, Mandarin learning offered the learners the accessibility and opportunity to interact with Chinese speakers and some attributed their attitudinal change towards Chinese speakers to this. When interacting with Chinese speakers, the students’ actions were enacted within a setting that was informed by Chinese speakers’ cultural knowledge. The Chinese speakers could not help but view the students’ expressions as meaningful within the human sphere of their own culture. Thereby, the students were able to acquire cultural knowledge from the interactions. This verified Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory that learning occurs initially on the social plane. Language learning became meaningful to the students when they experienced the possibility of using Mandarin to interact with other Chinese speakers. Therefore, the available resources at the meso level and what is made available to L2 students could have a huge impact on what the students would work on in the context of Mandarin learning, and would thus affect their motivational maintenance and/or termination. Strategically to sustain their motivation, those around the students could create opportunities for them to be in contact with the Chinese culture and Chinese speakers.

From the student accounts, it seemed that the goal stated in the NSLI\textsuperscript{18} – promoting understanding and conveying respect of other cultures – was partially achieved, based on the sample in my study. Through Mandarin learning, they started to develop an understanding of and respect for the Chinese culture and Chinese speakers, which were evident in their responses.

\textsuperscript{18} www.aplu.org
They were in the process of preparing themselves to be able to communicate in Mandarin, and hopefully as a result, would act as cultural ambassadors to provide an opportunity for others to learn more about America and its citizens, to fulfill the NSLI goals. This would be a rewarding experience on a personal level, help to relieve the prevailing tensions in the realm of national security, and make a contribution to world peace on a global level.

**Parents’ Attitudes towards Language Learning**

This section is designed to address research sub-question 2.3 – How do parents describe their attitudes towards their children learning Mandarin? The findings will be divided into two parts: (a) Parents’ attitudes towards Mandarin learning and (b) Parents’ attitudes towards foreign language learning.

**Parents’ Attitudes towards Mandarin Learning**

As much as Gardner recognized the important role parents play in their children’s L2 learning and thus called for research in this respect, there has not been an extensive amount of literature focusing on the attitudes of parents. From my interviews with the parent participants, it appears that parents, as “important socializing agents,” “present their children with a vast array of messages about the importance of language study, their expectations concerning performance, their own feelings about the other language community, etc” (Gardner, 1985, p. 122). The following findings are from the interviews I conducted with 10 parent participants and some parents contributed to more categories of responses than others. It is important to remember that the numbers below represent responses, not parents. Numbers and examples of responses to their children learning Mandarin are shown in the table below.
Table 4

*Responses to Their Children Learning Mandarin*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Utility (n=10)</td>
<td>To communicate with a group people she might otherwise have deemed inaccessible based on language and culture; It’s extremely useful; It’s going to be in high demand to know how to speak that language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning both language and culture (n=10)</td>
<td>It’s very important to not only learn the language but also the culture in some way; Language is a good way to learn about another culture and appreciation for another civilization. China is a great civilization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early childhood Mandarin education (n=10)</td>
<td>It’s better to start early; Is that much more impressionable to start that young?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excitement (n=8)</td>
<td>I’m excited for her; I’m excited. I’m happy that he’s learning it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ interest in Chinese language, culture and speakers (n=7)</td>
<td>I’m interested in Chinese people and culture; The language is very interesting. I love the culture also.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge (n=6)</td>
<td>Take on a challenge; It was considered the hardest language.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Parental pragmatism.** The parent participants all demonstrated positive attitudes towards their children’s learning Mandarin. All parents considered learning Mandarin opened their children’s horizon to a whole new world. Three parents mentioned specifically about accessibility to the largest world population through learning the most spoken language in the world. They believed that because their children were learning Mandarin, communication was made possible for them to interact with the Chinese population, a situation that their children might otherwise have deemed inaccessible. While learning a foreign language opens a channel for communication, these parents considered learning Mandarin as opening a huge opportunity for their children to communicate with large numbers of people in different parts of the world.
As Adam’s father put it, “You want to communicate with other people, there is no other better language to learn in terms of numbers.” The Chinese population as the largest population in the world was kept in mind by these parents and therefore, the perceptions of utility occupied an important place in their attitudes towards their children learning of Mandarin. The extreme case was Peter’s father who found a Startalk summer program online and introduced Mandarin learning to his son. This learning opportunity hence occurred neither because of any school influence, nor any influence of the Chinese speaking communities in New York City. It was Peter’s father’s perception of the utility of Mandarin and how acquisition of this language could open possibilities for Peter in the future:

I think it made Peter more prepared to relate with the most influential country and people. … We are in a global economy and China is a very important part of this global presence in economy.

China as a formidable power and the fact that it conducts a lot of business with the U.S. were mentioned by the majority of the parents in their interviews. It was felt that Mandarin was certainly one language that was now in more demand than previously. Grace’s mother commented on where Mandarin could take her children:

We knew that if they had never been to China, they could go to other places in the world right here in the United States. They can go to California. They can go to Chinatown where nobody speaks English and have a conversation. They can go to Vancouver. They can go to certain parts of Africa.

She expanded the territory from China to overseas Chinese communities showing the usefulness she believed in acquisition of Mandarin. From a professional point of view, Andrea’s mother
spoke about her friends’ fantastic packages for teaching English in China and how she related this to her daughter about her studying Mandarin:

I was telling her, you may not understand it right now but Mandarin is definitely going to take over. I know African Americans that had terrific experiences [in China], learning from the culture and teaching English. But one of their disadvantages was that they didn’t know the language prior to going. They were forced to learn the language when they got there. If you’re able to know the language, know the custom, be with the people…

Sometimes you may not get into your field and it is maybe a backup field. You know English, that’s your first language. You have been in the States, that’s another plus. You may really want to really concentrate and take this language so at least you learn more about it.

Andrea’s mother was connecting the utilitarian expectations with Andrea’s effort in learning Mandarin, trying to show her daughter the future opportunities involved Mandarin. Among others, Andrea’s mother considered learning Mandarin offered her daughter advantages in her college application and in the job market. It was Mandarin that was seen as advantageous as well as different:

I was telling her you’re going to be doing something that is going to help you. … You’re already at a disadvantage of being African American. You do not constantly need to live in a disadvantage. You need to be above that disadvantage. You know there are certain things people really do not expect that we can even grasp or even know.

The widely-believed difficulty to acquire Mandarin signals competence about its learners, which makes its learners stand out when accessing educational and professional markets. The families supported their children investing in Mandarin, with the belief that their children would acquire a
wider range of symbolic and material resources (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Mandarin learning has become part of these students’ identity as they enter the educational, professional, and social world.

The acquisition of Mandarin was considered a skill set which carried a high degree of utility that could be realized in the present as well as in the future. It could give student participants an advantage that would make them special among their peers:

I think [Mandarin learning experience is] a key thing because I think it really makes Abby stand out as a person and a student. It’s much more unusual in the broader neighborhood. For the most part other kids her age that she’s going to elementary school with, if they’re not at her school they’re not taking Mandarin. That really is key and I think she’s taken that on as part of her identity again because of all the influences she’s had. (Abby’s mother)

The uniqueness of being a Mandarin learner within the student participants’ immediate social context was felt by both students and their parents. In response to “why not a normal language,” when questioned by her friends regarding the choice of foreign languages, Andrea’s mother stated, “I said we all have choices. If you take up a basic language, then that’s exactly how your kid will be. Basic. The goal has to be long term.” Andrea’s mother considered Mandarin, one of the less commonly taught languages, as going beyond the basics. Her belief that this less commonly taught language can expand her daughter’s horizons and take her somewhere represented other parent participants’ belief in the benefits that Mandarin can bring to their children.

Besides the linguistic knowledge of Mandarin, all parents felt that the Mandarin learning experience also enhanced the development of the children’s cross-cultural understanding:
Not just the language but the culture. So my kids can tell you about the Mooncake Festival. They can tell you about Lunar New Year. There were just so many things that we know. (Grace’s mother)

As much as the parents shared an understanding that Mandarin is a hard language, some of them weighed more on the development of cross-cultural understanding than on the development of fluency in Mandarin. Abby’s mother expressed her opinion on this when commenting on Abby’s Mandarin learning experience:

It’s important for me that it’s not just the language piece. That whole cultural part is really there too. I think allowances can be made that there’s no language fluency. But sometimes, if it’s not a cultural understanding, that’s kind of harder to deal with. I think if someone makes a mistake with speaking a language or writing, they say, “Oh okay. Well that person, they’re not fluent.” That’s easy to understand. But if someone makes a misstep in terms of cultural expectations, you kind of don’t have that same easy answer. Like, “Oh well, they’re American,” or whatever. Or maybe you do have that, “They’re American. That’s bad” even if the person didn’t mean it, sort of come across the wrong way or something. So the whole piece about cultural differences, and learning and appreciating those, I think is very important in increasing globalization of everything.

Abby’s mother touched upon the stereotype people held about Americans’ ignorance in understanding other cultures and believed that it was important for her child to develop a cross-cultural understanding through the Mandarin learning experience. It is the social dimension of foreign language learning that made her consider that the acquisition of the cultural piece was even more important than the language piece. Some other parents echoed the necessity for Americans to learn foreign languages.
All parents except one expressed their preference in having their children start early in learning Mandarin, because of their general belief that a younger mind has a better ability to acquire languages. To native speakers of Indo-European languages, starting early in learning Mandarin is especially meaningful because, according to Abby’s mother, “It’s better to start early. It’s easier to get something out of a year of Spanish than a year of Mandarin, especially if there’s a whole different way of writing.” The linguistic distance between Mandarin and Indo-European languages suggested to most parents that it takes longer to master Mandarin and therefore it makes sense to start early. For the same reason, Sarah’s mother however, did not feel that it would be a good idea to start as early as in kindergarten. She considered a good time to start would be in middle school:

I thought that middle school age. That’s when we chose our language too. So I don’t see why that needs to differ. There’s so much to learn out there and I feel confident that they could learn this language between middle school and finishing high school and continuing in college. Is that much more impressionable learning it that young? … Do you think a six year old is still going to want it? I feel like Mandarin is just something you have to keep going. I don’t feel it’s like Spanish where you can pick it back up after two years. At six years old do you want to still be doing it when you’re twenty six? Well clearly this child will be picking up another one.

Sarah’s mother was concerned that the constant involvement needed when learning Mandarin would be lost if starting too early. She understood the linguistic distance between Mandarin and English and the fact that it takes constant studying to become proficient in Mandarin. She was afraid that starting Mandarin learning too early would cause relatively early termination of this, and would hence adversely affect the acquisition of proficiency as a consequence.
The parents’ hopes for their children to gain proficiency in Mandarin were evident throughout the interviews. The issue of whether to start early was based on the premise of whether they believed this would help their child gain proficiency. Most felt starting early could definitely help the process of gaining proficiency, while one parent believed that starting early would possibly end the learning process prematurely without being able to gain proficiency.

**Parental enthusiasm.** Parents expressed their excitement about the fact that their children were studying Mandarin. Many mentioned their observations on how much their children enjoyed learning Mandarin and their satisfaction on seeing their children progress:

> We are pleased that Peter is able to learn Mandarin. For many people they say he’s the first in the family to go to college. For us he’s the first in the family to start learning Mandarin. So for us it’s something that pleases us. He likes it. I think it’s a very good thing. (Peter’s father)

This resonated with the findings in Sung and Padilla’s (1998) study that parents on the whole had positive attitudes towards their children’s foreign language learning. The positive attitudes these parents held were a clear message to their children as they either involved themselves in the decision making process of which language to choose or looked for extracurricular activities for their children to enhance their Mandarin skills. Even when they were not directly involved in the Mandarin learning process, it was clear that they played a supportive role in their children’s education in general:

> From my perspective as long as he gets what he wants, I will support it. I would never say that is not important. I would never say that because I know it is important to him. ...
> Because if you push your children to do what you want them to do, a lot of time they will fall back. Because this is not what they want out of life. You are going to have to allow
them to grow and decide what it is they are going to do and if Mandarin, whether it is the language that they want to speak, you will have to support it. (Edward’s mother)

It was also found that the parent participants were exposed to Chinese language and culture to different extents. Some parent participants mentioned their personal interest in the Chinese language, its culture and speakers. One had been to Taiwan and had studied Mandarin in a formal setting before. Two had travel experiences to mainland China. The rest of the seven parents neither had travel related nor Chinese learning experiences. Regardless of the extent of their exposure, they demonstrated interest in the Chinese language, and its culture, and speakers. The Chinese characters turned out to be the main attraction in terms of positive aesthetic evaluations of the language. Adam’s father considered his secret desire to learn Chinese characters was one of the factors that influenced Adam to take Mandarin:

I have always had a secret want to be able to write and understand Chinese characters, because it is such a different idea. It is a whole other concept of what communicating means that I have a secret desire to know it. These forms are stunningly beautiful and so even in the abstract they are very very appealing. … They are stunning beautiful as forms of things and so for me that, sometime you kind of want to see, see your children achieve what you were not able to achieve. So for me I could enjoy the vicarious aspect of Adam’s studying. … So it’s just intrinsically rewarding thing.

Adam’s father even self-taught himself how to write Kanji (Japanese characters which are derived from Chinese characters) early in his career as a chemistry professor and was currently learning how to write Chinese characters through one of his graduate students from China. To him, he felt strongly that Adam’s taking Mandarin had nothing to do with the global economic changes but because of the interest he had in this entirely different way of communication. He
was not the only one who was fascinated by the artistic aspect of Chinese characters. Clark’s mother described her enjoyment of Chinese characters in an aesthetic way by doing calligraphy as “so relaxing” and she “really got into it.”

While some parents were fascinated by Chinese characters, other parents had experiences interacting with Chinese people through friendship or work relationship and were fascinated by the Chinese culture and considered China as a welcoming country. The positive attitudes towards China as a country seemed to play an important role for students’ future access to the country. Abby’s mother commented on the possibility of her daughter studying in China for ten months in her sophomore year that was sponsored by the NSLI:

Our trip to China helps me as a parent, helps me feel comfortable with the idea that Abby would be away for a year learning. She’s already had a taste of it. Otherwise it’s more of a question mark of what it’s like.

Abby’s mother obtained first-hand experience with China as a country on their trip with Abby’s aunt to China when Abby was in fifth grade. This experience ensured her to go through the complicated application process in order to help her daughter spend next academic year in China, in spite of Abby’s food allergy. From one’s own interpersonal networks, Andrea’s mother also formed a positive attitude towards China:

I know more of the cultural aspect of it. China I would be more trusted to, Japan no.

Because Japan I’ve learned and heard so many negatives in terms of African Americans being there in the country. China is more open to the world. Korea it depends on where in Korea. Because certain parts I won’t send her in Korea.
The positive attitudes parents held towards China as a country made it possible for them to look for extracurricular programs that could engage their children in Mandarin learning, and these could be located either in the U.S. or in China.

Learning Mandarin as a foreign language appeared to many parents to present an intellectual challenge. It was certainly not easy to study Mandarin, but they felt the results of facing this challenge was positive rather than negative:

I think the language is hard. But I think it forces your brain to think in a different way, and the more ways that your brain can think, the stronger you are academically and more ways of dealing with things and coping with things, just in life in general. So I like that piece of it. (Abby’s mother)

As Mandarin is “sufficiently challenging and sufficiently rewarding,” perceived Adam’s father, it was also felt that the acquisition process and the hard work it involved provided an effective way to build their children’s confidence:

With any subject to which a student is successful you take pride in it and it spills over into other areas. If you can succeed here, you can succeed there. … She’s more confident in doing all the things. Absolutely, it’s a matter of pride. (Bella’s mother)

Bella’s mother believed that there was a connection between Bella’s challenging experience studying at the Startalk summer program and her ability to take double math courses at her school in the current academic year. The parents recognized the challenging nature of studying Mandarin to their children, but did not necessarily consider this played a negative role in their children’s learning process.
Parents’ Attitudes towards Foreign Language Learning

All parents except one reported experiences studying L2, regardless of their self-assessment of being monolingual or multilingual. All of them recognized the benefits of knowing a foreign language.

Peter’s father, originally from Spain, believed that it was vital for people to learn a foreign language based on his own experience of going to France where he felt the necessity to speak French in order to communicate with the French people. He explained three aspects of how he felt foreign language learning could benefit children: communication with others; business with others; the development of cross-cultural understanding. He emphasized the importance of cross-cultural understanding and how this could serve the processes of communication and business with others:

I mean it’s basic to learn the culture of other people. Because if not when you communicate, when you do trade, you are going to mess up. Because they are saying one thing and you understand another thing because we are different. … The possibility to be open to new languages and cultures makes it easier to communicate with people. [Otherwise] you don’t realize that you may be insulting someone because they think or act differently. So I think it’s very important to learn languages, but not only languages also the culture in some way.

The parents generally recognized the pragmatic utility of their children learning a foreign language as a school subject. As Clark’s mother commented: “There are a lot of things we learn in school and never use but a language, you can use that.” The social dimension of foreign language learning can make it relatively easy to sustain the learning as long as the opportunity for immersion in the language environment is provided. Clark’s mother’s believed that one
needed to practice using a language in order to be proficient. She expressed her opinion on the current reality of foreign language education in U.S. by stating:

The problem I have with languages in this country is that people go and they learn to read and write but they never speak. I know the only way to become proficient in a language is you have to speak and you have to hear it. They get good grades and everything but I’m not impressed with it because I know they usually leave high school with whatever they’ve learned and they really don’t know how to speak it.

She portrayed foreign language learning in the classroom more as a knowledge acquisition process than one designed to gain the proficiency to achieve the social function of learning a foreign language.

In addition, knowing a foreign language was considered “a human courtesy,” mentioned by Adam’s father, some parents questioned why Americans cannot learn foreign languages if other parts of the world can learn English. The arrogance was perceived again by Clark’s mother:

I think it’s really important for Americans to learn foreign languages because we’re illiterate when it comes to foreign language as a culture. It’s not really a problem with communicating because most people speak English. But it’s a certain arrogance that it carries. It’s like “I can go anywhere in the world and I can talk to anybody in the world because they speak English.” You don’t feel the need to do it, and what comes with that is without even knowing it is a little bit of arrogance. “That’s not important.” But it is important. It’s important to your own growth. It’s important to your own intellectual being. I mean it’s really hard to learn a language.

Illiteracy in foreign languages was to her part of American culture. She acknowledged the current language status of English as a world language. However, parents felt learning a foreign
language was an intellectual challenge that could benefit the individual intrinsically, even if not taken advantage of later in life.

In order to make the learning process less difficult and to foster students’ proficiency, starting the process early on was mentioned frequently when parents expressed their attitudes towards foreign language learning:

It is a real scandal because we all know what is effortless for a young brain can never again be had. … It is so easily achieved for small kids. The fact that we give away [foreign language education at a young age] is a national scandal. (Adam’s father)

It was criticized by Adam’s father as a national scandal that foreign language education is not required in early childhood education across the country despite the fact that the parents held positive beliefs regarding the importance of learning as many languages as possible at an early age. The idea of starting foreign language education early not only came from parents in the study with multilingual backgrounds, but also from parents with monolingual backgrounds. Regardless of how their foreign language learning experiences had unfolded and how proficient they themselves were as foreign language learners, all the parents who mentioned early childhood foreign language education felt that the earlier this starts, the greater the proficiency of the language is likely to be.

In addition to proficiency, parents talked about how learning a language opens up opportunities for the learner to better understand another culture; opportunities to communicate one’s ideas in different settings; opportunities to help someone; opportunities to live somewhere else; and opportunities to gain multiple perspectives. It was felt that learning a foreign language would help to develop better cross-cultural understandings and therefore enhanced human communications. As Adam’s father stated:
Let’s make sure that every American is learning another language because if you can communicate with people that are not necessarily like you, you will be less likely to drop bombs and I see that as the motivation rather than retaining economic dominance.

Cultivating a trait of empathy among Americans through understanding other people’s language and culture was anticipated as an end product of improved human communications in the age of globalization where geographical barriers are disappearing.

**Summary**

All parent participants reported positive attitudes towards their children learning Mandarin. All of them mentioned their belief in the necessity of learning both the language and something about the culture for their children to be able to communicate effectively with Chinese speakers. Similar to the parents in Torres-Guzmán et al.’s (2011) study, the parents in this study also recognized the utility as the main reason why they would want their children to study Mandarin. There were various aspects of utility that the parents mentioned in their responses such as a means of communication with a group of people; benefits in college applications; and future job opportunities. Based on the numbers of Mandarin learners available to them in their immediate social context, some parents considered learning Mandarin as part of fostering their children’s identity, especially helping them to stand out from their peers. It was believed that the investment in this language would give their children “access to hitherto unattainable resources” (Norton Peirce, 1995). Mandarin was portrayed as unique, and a skill that might not only bring future benefits in symbolic and material ways, but also to provide challenges to their children. The parents welcomed these challenges and supported their children in different ways to their best ability. Similar to parents in Dagenais’s (2003) study, it was clear that the parent participants played an important role in encouraging and assisting their children to invest their
time in acquiring multiple languages, a broader education, a transnational identity, and to engage in imagined communities through Mandarin learning.

As much as their children felt learning Mandarin was important, these parents perceived that it was also important to learn any foreign language even though many Americans are “illiterate” in a foreign language. The development of cross-cultural understandings was valued as an outcome of foreign language acquisition and the lack of early childhood foreign language education in the U.S. was criticized by some of the parents. There was a general call for greater valuing of foreign language learning and including it in schools at a young age to ensure the development of language proficiency.

**The Meaning of Learning Mandarin**

Having answered the three sub-questions, the next section responds to research question 2 – What does it mean to secondary level students to learn Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language in the U.S.? From the analysis of the variations of students’ motivation, their attitudes towards Chinese language, culture and speakers, and their parents’ attitudes towards their learning Mandarin, it can be inferred that Mandarin learning was a socioculturally situated social practice co-constructed by the Mandarin learners and those around them. It was schools, families, teachers, peers, extracurricular Mandarin programs (summer, weekend, afterschool, and study abroad), local and overseas Chinese speaking communities, and media at the meso level that provided support in facilitating the individual Mandarin learners to gain access to linguistic resources and interactional opportunities. Throughout the process, “such seemingly internal and psychological factors as attitudes, motivation, or language learning beliefs have clear social origins and are shaped and reshaped by the contexts in which the learners find themselves” (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 280).
Giles et al. (2006) introduced the communication action context to provide a background for helping us to understand why the immediate social situation at the meso level took the shape that it did. The communication action context at the meso-macro level comprised local features that by and large, in the cases explored in my study, enabled rather than constrained communication and access to new information resources. The communication action context was conceived as a set of layers. If the physical spaces in which members of different ethnic groups can interact out of necessity exist, for example, non-Asian Mandarin learners and the Chinese population in Chinatown, the possibility of spontaneous intergroup communication increases. Psychological features, meaning the degree to which people felt free to engage each other, also played a role, as many students reported positive experiences interacting with Chinese speakers in the U.S. (including their teachers) and in Chinese speaking countries. The parental influence of valuing foreign language learning and a global view along with the schools’ mission on diversity and preparing students for success as global citizens, positively affected the students’ interpretation of the similarities and differences between ethnic groups. In the economic dimension, the schools, student family’s social economic status, and other local educational institutions (some funded by the NSLI) offered resources available for these Mandarin learning students to engage in interactions with others in the Mandarin-speaking community. Technological features, such as internet connections, facilitated Mandarin learning not only in instructional settings, but also in non-instructional settings, such as online news and movies, to help the students connect with the imagined communities.

In all these layers, how many elements in each layer were present and absent, how the elements were distributed in a local space, and how the elements were interrelated, all determined the character of each Mandarin learner’s particular communication action context in
the present study. The generally positive experiences in Mandarin learning from each learner’s communication action context had an impact on why and how the student participants were learning Mandarin. This does not mean that they did not have any negative experiences. Each student struggled at times in order to participate in the communities of practice. For instance, in Grace’s communication action context, she experienced discrimination in the physical spaces at her dual language school, where she and the Chinese teacher and student population interacted out of necessity. Despite the negative experiences, she was also gained recognition in the same physical spaces by winning the speech contest. Her experience in the China trip sponsored by her school influenced her and her family psychologically in the context of how they perceived overseas Chinese people. Both her family and her school placed emphasis on knowing how to speak Mandarin. She was financially supported by her family, her school, and the U.S. government to study Mandarin. She also took advantage of Chinese news on TV to practice her Mandarin. The interplay of these layers resulted in her preference for learning Mandarin and in seeking spontaneous interactions to foster her learning. Clark, on the other hand, experienced rejection from his school at the beginning of his enrolling in the Mandarin class. His mother fought against his school for his opportunity to study Mandarin. Then he struggled in his Mandarin class as he sometimes failed the tests. He was strongly supported by his parents to continue learning Mandarin though. They financially supported him by hiring tutors and sending him to Taiwan to study. Even though he had been to Taiwan and the Chinatown in New York City, he did not have to frequently interact with Chinese speakers out of necessity. Furthermore, psychologically he did not consider his Mandarin good enough for spontaneous conversations. Therefore, he had been actively learning Mandarin in instructional settings. It can thus be seen from these examples that although each student’s learning trajectory was different due to
differences in the communication action context, the overall effect of the different layers in the context provided the students in the study with continuous access to Mandarin learning. The interplay of the different layers is always subject to change, positive effects outmatching negative effects or vice versa, depending on the context.

In order to illustrate how the micro level and the meso level interact with each other in the communication action context at the meso-macro level, Figures 4 and 5 were created to demonstrate these dynamics graphically. As outlined, the process is not unidirectional. In this particular study, the player components (represented by boxes in the diagram) at the meso level offered the students access to linguistic and interactional resources of Mandarin in two stages.

Stage 1, as displayed in Figure 4, refers to the stage when Mandarin learning was initiated. It was initiated mainly because of the language requirement at school, either Mandarin as the only choice or one of the choices. There was one case, Peter, whose Mandarin learning was initiated by his father. When there were choices, either initiated by the school or by the family, the decision making process was reported mainly due to external influences. Because the students had no prior systematic exposure to the linguistic aspect of Mandarin, their parents or family members played an influential role in forming the decision. They either possessed linguistic knowledge of Mandarin, as can be seen in Abby’s and Clark’s cases, or envisioned a return of the investment in learning the language, as can be seen in many cases such as Andrea’s and Grace’s cases. For the case of Sarah, where she was the one who made her own decision to study Mandarin over Spanish based on her interest, the decision was attributed to her mother’s assistance in offering her exposure to those two languages relatively systematically before making the decision.
The parental attitudes currently surveyed impacted the students’ attitudes towards foreign language learning and specifically Mandarin language learning. Not only did the parents convey their values regarding foreign languages and cultures or the utility of knowing a foreign language...
in conversations with their children, but they showed their children how they valued them by attending foreign cultural events or enjoying foreign cultural products (e.g., foreign films) with or without their children. In the student accounts, their views often reflected that of their parent’s. This confirms Giles et al.’s (2006) argument that information gathered from trusted others through their experiences can and do serve as mediated experiences that can be integrated into a person’s interactions, beliefs, and attitudes.

Stage 2 shows that after the students stepped into the Mandarin learning context, more player components appeared at the meso level. While school and family continuously offered the students access to linguistic and interactional resources, Mandarin speaking family members, teachers and peers from school and extracurricular Mandarin programs, local and overseas Chinese speaking communities, and media also made their own contributions. These newly participating components did not simply offer access, they also served as Mandarin practicing partners for students. The students made their own choices on how to interact with these newly participating components in order to facilitate their acquisition of Mandarin. The student participants reported that teachers played an essential role in their Mandarin learning experiences. Teachers became one of the key factors affecting the sustainability of language learning. Because of the uniqueness of the Mandarin language, which shares little similarity with Indo-European languages, it was reported that it would be very hard to learn the language on one’s own. Teachers were considered as experts who possessed not only the linguistic knowledge of Mandarin, but also the resources to practice Mandarin. From the students’ accounts, it was shown that teachers had a positive effect on exposing students to Mandarin speaking communities of practice. They either introduced the communities to their students directly or through other player components at the meso level in order for students to be able to practice
Mandarin outside of their classes. The teaching methodology employed by the teacher also played an important role in affecting the sustainability of language learning. If the teacher did not know how to motivate students and utilize scaffolding with his or her teaching methodology, the student participants felt that the learning came to a standstill. This seemed to affect the sustainability of language learning, quite negatively. When such a situation occurred, it was fortunate the students in the study were able to find alternative ways to compensate for their Mandarin learning in order to continuously make progress, by either enrolling in other Mandarin programs taught by teachers with effective teaching methodologies or by actively engaging in other kinds of Mandarin speaking communities of practice. It was made clear that access to linguistic and interactional resources is crucial in sustaining students’ involvement in language learning. However, since the study sample did not include students who discontinued with Mandarin study, it would be advantageous to find out how the teacher and the teaching methodology affected their decision to drop out of Mandarin classes.

It is also necessary to mention the role of peers as observed in the present study. Peers influence was not reported as a primary reason for student participants enrolling in Mandarin classes and many friends of the students in the study actually did not study Mandarin. This finding stands in sharp contrast to “the wealth of studies that identify friends and peers as major influences on pupil attitudes” (Bartram, 2010, p. 68). But once the students started Mandarin learning, peers had some impact in the following areas: (a) influencing how the students perceived themselves as Mandarin learners. The implications here could be multiple because the students were learning Mandarin in different sub-contexts (e.g., top student in one program but struggle in another). (b) as partners to work together to improve Mandarin proficiency. This appeared to be especially important when the teacher was not perceived to be effective in certain
sub-contexts. And (c) offering access to other linguistic and interactional resources. As can be seen in Adam’s and Edward’s cases, they obtained information about extracurricular Mandarin programs through their peers. Other player components also impacted students’ Mandarin learning in similar ways. Overall, the sociocultural environment in which each student participant was situated was formed by all the player components at the meso level, as illustrated in Stage 2 of Figure 4. Each one’s sociocultural environment was unique because the resources each student was offered access to by those player components were different.
Figure 5. Organizing Resources in Two Settings

In response, students exercised their agency by choosing what resources to take advantage of as shown in Figure 5. Schools, extracurricular Mandarin programs, local Chinese speaking communities, overseas Chinese speaking communities and media all provide spaces for
students to apply their linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge they have acquired through Mandarin learning. While linguistic and interactional resources are provided in both instructional settings and non-instructional settings, students filter the resources and decide what to use to facilitate their Mandarin learning. On the one hand, some rely on non-instructional settings a great deal. For example, Eric frequently went to Chinatown to engage himself in the local Chinese speaking communities and learned Mandarin by participating in cultural practices with Chinese speakers and using media to read news, listen to music, and watch movies in Chinese. Grace interacted with one local Chinese community by going to a school that offered her access to overseas Chinese speaking communities by taking her on a trip to China. Through the interactions with Chinese speaking teachers, peers, staff members, and other speakers local and overseas, these students not only learned how to speak Mandarin by using it but also acquired cultural knowledge on how to engage in Chinese speaking communities appropriately.

On the other hand, there were students who made commitments to enrolling in different Mandarin programs, in order to maintain their exposure to Mandarin and achieve language socialization: that is, by employing instructional strategies. For instance, Bella consciously planned her Mandarin learning by enrolling in different programs. She obviously acquired linguistic knowledge in different classrooms and from field trips. In addition, she gained non-linguistic knowledge by interacting with Chinese speaking teachers and peers in different programs and by interacting with other Chinese speakers in the local communities in order to complete the various language learning tasks. She was also exposed to non-linguistic knowledge in other subject areas at her school and was introduced to Chinese films in her school Mandarin class. Clark, in a similar manner, was busy attending different Mandarin classes and had welcomed his mother’s suggestions regarding extracurricular Mandarin programs. He was able
to engage himself in Mandarin learning activities because he was conscious of the importance of constant exposure and also because his mother was very resourceful due to her interpersonal networks.

The observation of these two different learning patterns found in the present study is not intended to create a distinct division between the two groups of Mandarin learners. They are not mutually exclusive. The patterns only showed how the student participants organized the resources they had access to. One group showed a tendency to take advantage of non-instructional settings, while the other preferred using formal instructional strategies to learn Mandarin. Both groups did use the resources in both types of settings. The difference lay in what degree the resources were used in the two different types of settings, thus making each learner’s experience unique. Through the students’ participation in both instructional settings and their interaction in non-instructional settings, the student participants experienced attitudinal changes that afforded them a new interpretation of the Chinese language, and the Chinese culture and its speakers.

On the whole, it is the availability of resources to which they were offered access by the components at the meso level and how they were organized by the student participants at the micro level that made a difference in student’s Mandarin learning trajectories. The dynamics in this process led to the ongoing negotiation and renegotiation of what could be done and how it could be done in order for the students to learn Mandarin. The findings of the study showed that the relationship between the meso level and the micro level was dialogic and verified that agencies “are shaped by particular sociocultural environments” and “are co-constructed with those around the L2 users” (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 293). The student participants expressed their agency by choosing which settings to rely on most, instructional or non-instructional, but they
may only have been able to act upon their wishes when their sociocultural environments allowed for such agency. The access to linguistic and interactional resources is the prerequisite and that is where educational interventions are possible. That is also one way that the larger forces at the macro level can provide a channel for reaching individuals at the micro level. This qualitative study has shown what it meant to the secondary level students with non-Asian heritage to learn Mandarin in the U.S., and the rationale behind each student participant’s learning trajectory, which was unique.
Chapter V

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

In this study, I investigated the motivation and attitudes of Mandarin learning secondary school students and those of their parents and review my research questions and summarize my findings in this section. In order to answer my research questions, I used six data collection procedures: (a) Interviews were conducted with 10 student participants to understand their perceptions on Mandarin learning experience; (b) interviews were conducted with 10 parent participants to gain their perceptions on their child’s Mandarin learning experience; (c) two news articles were chosen from 15 examined articles for student and parent participants to discuss in relation to the larger social context (one conducted during interviews with each individual participant and the other one conducted during focus group); (d) a focus group discussion was conducted to discuss and clarify preliminary findings; (e) one article was examined to gain more background information on one parent participant’s choice of school as a supplement to the individual interview; and (f) web content was collected to understand the missions of the seven schools that offered the student participants Mandarin as a school subject. Through a sociocultural lens, I examined how the students and their parents developed subjective meanings to students’ Mandarin learning experiences. I argue that L2 learners are not only learning a linguistic system but learning a diverse set of sociocultural practices. I adopted the Communication Ecological Model (CEM) developed by Giles, Katz and Myers (2006) to look at how L2 motivation and attitudes were negotiated through multiple levels in order for the students to acquire linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge in both instructional and non-instructional settings.
My first research question addressed the macro level as it explored how the social context in which students live provides motivation for them to take on Mandarin Chinese learning. The economic development China has made in the current global economy and its impact on the U.S. economy serves as one larger force that shapes students and parents’ attitudes towards Mandarin and provides the students motivation to study the language. The student generation foresaw a more peaceful connection than their parents’ generation with China in the future based on the current social context they lived in. The U.S. national security establishments emphasizing the Americans’ communicative competence in critical need foreign languages was another force at the macro level that set up the context where students were able to gain access to critical need language learning through the meso level. The National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) provided educational opportunities for the student participants to engage in Mandarin learning. More crucial to some of the families, it funded the Mandarin education which those families would otherwise not able to afford, as was mentioned by three parents in the interviews. In the economic dimension, both the U.S. government and Chinese government played an important role in promoting Mandarin education in the U.S. as they worked together to offer Mandarin learning scholarships and pay for teacher’s salaries. Under such a climate, schools responded to the societal call. Government funded Mandarin programs were implemented in public schools and other educational institutions. Private schools established their own Mandarin programs to make themselves appealing to prospective students and parents. The schools responded to societal visions by framing their current policies and practices to prepare students with skill sets needed to participate in the society, as one student participant described the schools’ reaction as being “forward thinking” and “preparing for an ever changing world.” The reaction of the schools also involved the belief Mandarin learning would help them become financially lucrative.
It was the larger forces that shaped the features in the local context. The desire for a more prominent status of the U.S. in the world economy and its national security concerns led to the moves in promoting Mandarin learning, in order for greater participation in the global community.

The second research question – What does it mean to secondary level students to learn Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language in the U.S.? – focused on the micro and meso levels and how they interacted in the communication action context at the meso-macro level. In exploring the variations of motivation each student participant had, I adapted Wen’s (1997) idea of separating the construct of motivation to differentiate the motivation to sustain one’s involvement in Mandarin learning from the motivation to begin learning mandarin, in order to explore the possible reasons why some students persist in Mandarin learning, while others do not. The research findings indicate that the student participants with a non-Asian background presently interviewed started Mandarin learning mainly for external reasons such as to fulfill a language requirement, either Mandarin being the only choice or one of the choices. When there were choices, the decision making to choose Mandarin was again mainly due to external influences. Because there was no systematic prior exposure of the participants to the linguistic aspect of Mandarin, students’ parents or family members heavily influenced the students’ decision because either they possessed the linguistic knowledge of Mandarin or envisioned a good return on the investment of learning the language. Only one student participant had been deliberately exposed to the linguistic aspects of Mandarin by their parents and was thus able to choose Mandarin over other language options based on intrinsic interest. Appropriate exposure to the linguistic aspect of Mandarin would empower students to take ownership in making such decisions.
The study results showed that the role schools and parents played in starting the students’ Mandarin learning process overshadowed the students’ role. For secondary level students, the findings did not support Dörnyei’s (1998, 2005) claim that individual motivation provided the primary impetus to initiate the learning process. The schools and parents exerted a powerful influence on the students and, thus, the motivation to start learning Mandarin was more of a socially constructed one, than an individually generated choice. When faced with choices regarding which FL their children should learn, the parents, as more knowledgeable members, engaged in social mediation to bring their children into the Mandarin learning process, which validated Vygotsky’s (1978) assertion. Even for the single case where the student participant made her own choice, it was observed that this was because her mother introduced her to the social activity of exploring different language options. Therefore, the findings indicated that social factors involving both the parents and schools played a key role in explaining where the variations of motivation to start learning Mandarin came from. The sociocultural theory provided a sound framework for helping to understand motivation by and guided the focus of the research towards uncovering the dynamics of how individuals’ cognitive processes were influenced by the social interaction and cultural milieu, which has been reported on very rarely in the prevailing literature.

In terms of what the variations of motivation were to sustain involvement in Mandarin learning, two patterns were found across the present cases. The first was the agentic pattern and the second was the traditional institutional pattern. In the agentic pattern, students attended Mandarin classes operated by different educational institutions, but they also exercised agency in non-instructional settings to access additional linguistic and interactional resources. In the traditional institutional pattern, despite access to spontaneous interactional resources, students
continued to be mainly active in Mandarin language socialization in instructional settings. Each student participant was situated in their particular sociocultural environment where schools, teachers, families, peers, local and overseas Chinese speaking communities, extracurricular Mandarin programs (summer, weekend, afterschool, and study abroad) and media came into play at the meso level. In each case, it was the degree to which these components were integrated that affected students’ variations of motivation in Mandarin learning, reflecting the dynamic and temporal nature of motivation. In the first pattern where students relied on non-instructional settings in acquiring Mandarin to a great amount, the components at the meso level, which varied in each case, provided information or offered the students access to spontaneous authentic linguistic and non-linguistic resources. These could range from casual interactions with Mandarin teachers at school to shopping experiences at Chinatown. Because of the frequency of exposure to authentic interactions and the positive responses and feedback the students received, which was initiated by components at the meso level, the students demonstrating the agentic pattern expanded their communities of practice to non-instructional settings. The students demonstrating the second pattern, however, utilized the components at the meso level differently by consciously engaging themselves in activities under instruction to achieve language socialization. They relied on instructions when accessing the linguistic and non-linguistic resources either inside classroom or outside classroom. They were also provided with spontaneous interactional opportunities that were similar to those of the students in the agentic pattern. Yet these opportunities might not have been frequent enough for them to become familiarized with the communities of practice in non-instructional settings or based on the responses and feedback they received, they did not feel proficient enough to participate in those communities as far as spontaneous interactions go. As a result, the students in the traditional
institutional pattern kept their communications in Mandarin localized mainly to their
instructional settings.

When it came to the variations of motivation to sustain involvement in Mandarin learning, it was how the components were organized at the meso level that made a difference in how students expressed their agency in accessing communities of Mandarin practice. As can be seen from the two patterns, only when components at the meso level initiated the social mediation, were the students able to respond depending on how the social mediation was carried out. The students were then separated into two groups based on their reliance on mainly either instructional or non-instructional settings. However, social mediation had to occur before the students could form their conceptualization of communities of Mandarin practice. This substantiated Vygotsky’s (1978) assertion that any function in a child’s cultural development appears first on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. Nonetheless, this did not mean that the students were simply regarded as social recipients of input. They had to decide whether to initiate a long-term investment in L2, and, for some, a never-ending process of acquiring Chinese-related knowledge and how to make use of the resources they could access. In this sense, the relationship between the students at the micro level and the components at the meso level was dialogic.

The negotiations underpinning the students’ motivation to sustain involvement in Mandarin learning was illustrated by the analysis of four case studies that revealed fluctuations in motivation along the learning process. Because the nature of motivation is dynamic and temporal, it is critical to look at motivation in terms of what makes it dynamic and temporal. Motivation generated by the individual learners provides the driving force needed to sustain the long-term learning process, as Dörnyei (1998, 2005) argues. However, the driving force of
individual learners cannot be formed without those around them (e.g., parents, schools, etc.) engaging in social mediation. Especially if/when the students struggle to learn, either because of the difficulty in memorizing Chinese characters or the incompatibility with the teacher’s pedagogical approaches, the components at the meso level such as parents or extracurricular programs can strategically compensate for the temporary motivational loss and can thus help students to sustain their involvement in Mandarin learning. It is the dynamics between the individual and the social that influences the fluctuations of motivation. Therefore, I argue that the examination of motivation should move beyond the individual micro level, to focus on the interactions between the micro level and the meso level. Only when these dynamics are studied, will it become possible to understand the rationale of why each student’s learning trajectory is what it is and, thus, it may become possible to know how to intervene educationally when facing variations of motivation, in order to assist students who come from different sociocultural environments more effectively.

The research findings also indicated overall positive attitudes were held by the student participants towards the Chinese language, and its culture, and speakers. The difficulty they felt in studying Mandarin was not necessarily associated with a lack of enjoyment in doing this. The fun experience of learning Mandarin and interacting with Chinese speakers they had in both instructional and non-instructional settings was recalled by all student participants. The linguistic uniqueness of the Chinese language, the utility of Mandarin, the goal to communicate effectively, and the investment in learning Mandarin emerged as major categories across all cases. Motivational strategies, new experiences enabled through Mandarin learning, and side effects were also mentioned by some student participants. The student participants displayed cross-cultural understanding and considered that Mandarin learning offered them opportunities to
interact with Chinese speakers which otherwise would be deemed inaccessible. Based on the student accounts, it can be inferred that the goal stated in the NSLI was achieved from the student end as Mandarin learning developed their understanding and respect of Chinese culture.

The parent participants also reported positive attitudes towards their children learning Mandarin. All of them attributed the utility of Mandarin to their support of their children learning Mandarin while believing in the necessity to learn both the language and the culture. Every participant expressed their positive attitude towards early childhood Mandarin education with one exception considering middle school as the perfect time to start. Many were excited about their children learning Mandarin while acknowledging that it was a challenge. Some mentioned their personal interest in Chinese language, culture and speakers.

Parents’ attitudes influenced how their children valued Mandarin education. In the student accounts, a large number of point of views mentioned resonated with what was told in parent interviews. Parents, as a component at the meso level, also helped their child channel through the Mandarin learning process, either by seeking resources for their child to extend learning or providing mental support when their child encountered difficulties. The students’ information gathering process on how to access Mandarin learning opportunities was not only through their parents but also through educational institutions and teachers. Educational institutions in fact played a crucial role as they offered the students the initial access to Mandarin learning. In the case of this study, the student participants all started Mandarin learning as a school subject at each of their schools with one exception where a student started Mandarin learning at a Startalk funded program provided by an educational institution. The findings confirm Kanno’s (2003) argument that educational institutions have the power and expertise to navigate students’ learning towards the schools’ visions of what kind of adult the students will
grow up to be in a systematic manner beyond the capacity of individual learners and parents. Teachers played an essential role in offering linguistic knowledge of Mandarin as well as in introducing various Mandarin speaking communities of practice. They either brought students to the communities to practice Mandarin in instructional settings or introduced linguistic and interactional resources to students and other player components at the meso level. Nevertheless, no one can afford to neglect the influential role that parents play in their child’s attempts to learn a L2 (Gardner, 1985). They might not always serve as the initial drive to involve their child in L2 learning, but their influence tends to be long lasting and sensitive to the dynamic and temporal nature of L2 motivation and attitudes. In short, parents, educational institutions, and teachers together helped the students invest in the construction of the identity as multilinguals with access to more symbolic and material resources and imagined communities than monolinguals. All of them socially mediated the students into the communities of Mandarin practice among particular groups, either interacting with other Mandarin learners or with experienced Mandarin speakers in different settings. The students were not simply exposed to linguistic resources during the process but were given opportunities to come to understand those non-linguistic interpersonal conventions in order to appropriately interact in Mandarin with its speakers.

The macro level connects to the meso-macro level by forming a backdrop for the communication action context. In this context the meso level and the micro level interact to create a sociocultural environment where the learning is situated, either in the instructional or non-instructional setting. The interactions between the meso level and the micro level co-construct what it means to learn. Engaging or disengaging in communities of practice is a process of negotiation between the meso level and the micro level within the larger social context. Students are offered access to communities of practice by player components at the
meso level. Based on how much they are exposed to those communities of practice and what responses and feedback they receive from their communication with members in the communities, some students preferred to participate in communities of practice in a spontaneous fashion, while others favored institutional communities of practice. A bidirectional process occurs to finalize each learner’s unique prevailing learning trajectory. In the case of this study, the positive experiences overcame the negative experiences through the negotiation process carried out between the student participants and their schools, teachers, families, peers, local and overseas Chinese speaking communities, extracurricular Mandarin programs and media. The possibility of becoming a proficient Mandarin speaker with many available options and resources was welcomed in general by the student participants within the multiple communities where they held memberships. They expressed agency by responding to how Mandarin learning was organized, acquiring knowledge mainly in instructional settings or in non-instructional settings. As Duff (2012) argues, although students fulfilling language requirements may have relatively little choice or control over their L2 learning, reaching advanced levels of L2 proficiency arguably requires concerted effort, sustained and strategic practice, and opportunity – all manifestations of personal and social agency. Given access to linguistic and interactional resources directly from the meso level, the student participants managed to sustain involvement in Mandarin learning, which in turn would have an impact at the micro, meso, and macro levels.

Implications

On Theory

Bourdieu (1977) suggests that the value ascribed to speech cannot be understood apart from the person who speaks and that the person who speaks cannot be understood apart from larger networks of social relationships. Under the historical background of the popular
interpretation of Gardner’s (1985) socio-educational model as the integrative-instrumental dichotomy and thus predominantly applying quantitative approaches to study L2 motivation and attitudes, Crookes and Schmidt (1991) raised the issue of expanding the long dominant social-psychological theoretical framework to adopt new theoretical approaches and to set up new research agendas.

My study, which adopts a sociocultural constructivist framework, is my response to this call. The sociocultural context was in fact recognized by Gardner (1985), “the socio-cultural milieu is important not only for the development of attitudinal/motivational characteristics but also for the role played by attitudes, motivation and language aptitude in second language learning” (p. 109). However, the later research influenced by Gardner (1985) failed to address the sociocultural context in which learners live in a profound manner. The main focus was placed within the individual rather than on the relationship between the individual and the sociocultural context. As Ushioda (2001) points out, “These patterns of interaction with other factors in their experience were clearly a significant aspect of how subjects perceived their motivational evolution, though this relative perspective has perhaps received little attention so far in existing studies of language learning motivation” (pp. 111-112). While Ushioda (2001) used a qualitative approach to study L2 motivation, she herself refrained from stepping into the social world of learning by viewing motivation as a complex set of cognitive-mediaational processes.

As another attempt to understand L2 motivation and attitudes with a qualitative approach, my study moves beyond individual learners towards considering the sociocultural context in which learners as agents negotiate their identities in communities of practice with those around them. The sociocultural perspective integrates the individual and the social to explore why it is that a learner may sometimes be more motivated, extroverted, and confident and sometimes less
motivated, introverted, and anxious and why in one place there may be a social distance between a specific group of language learners and the target language speaking communities whereas in another place the social distance may be minimal. No activity occurs in absolute isolation from the sociocultural context no matter how individual it may seem. The sociocultural approach provided a way to analyze the context which was lacking in the previous studies of motivation and attitudes.

While my qualitative case study illustrates the socially constructed nature of language motivation and attitudes previously seen as individual, I did not seek to undermine the wealth of literature on L2 motivation and attitudes that has evolved in the quantitative research paradigm but to present an alternative way of exploring motivation and attitudes in L2 learning, not by measurable causal relationships but through an ongoing negotiation between the individual and the social. My analysis through a sociocultural lens echoes Ely’s (1986) critique on the prevailing integrative-instrumental dichotomy which was a misinterpretation of Gardner’s (1985) socio-educational model, by showing that L2 learning is not simply an individual endeavor, but a negotiation that involves different people and institutions at multiple levels. The dichotomy does not capture the full spectrum of L2 motivation and attitudes.

In response, I adopted the notions of investment and imagined communities to examine what drives individuals to learn L2. The view of language learning as an investment in acquiring symbolic and material resources that eventually increases the value of an individual’s cultural capital has a significant advantage over the notion of instrumental motivation in a sense that it links the individual and the social, “tracing the process by which particular linguistic varieties and practices become imbued with values or devalued in the linguistic marketplace” (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 284). It explains not only the reason why each individual decides to sustain learning, but
also the reason why the parents and the institutions individuals participate with want to support the individuals. The futuristic views of individual learners with more opportunities and better prepared to participate in the global community legitimize the current investment in L2 learning. By the same token, the notion of imagined communities explains the relationship that what has not yet happened in the future can be a reason and a motivation for what individual learners do in the present. The process of contemplating imagined communities may hence offer a way to connect the individual learners’ past, present, and future. As Wenger (1998) states, “by taking us into the past and carrying us into the future, [imagination] can recast the present and show it as holding unsuspecting possibilities” (p. 178). The notion of imagined communities allows for the construction of future memberships through imagination and makes sense of the endeavors individual learners are currently making. It strategically encourages the learners to study towards the goal of participating in the imagined communities in the future. By assisting the learners in constantly expanding their horizon of what imagined communities of practice can be, the player components at the meso level are able to better foster interventions that will promote the learners’ learning trajectories. When families, schools, teachers, peers, local and overseas Chinese speaking communities, extracurricular Mandarin programs, and media offer the learners opportunities to communicate using Chinese in oral and written forms, the learners’ futuristic views of themselves might change based on the responses and feedback they receive from the communication. Without the player components at the meso level initiating social mediation, it would be impossible for the learners to move forward on the learning trajectory and to make continuous progress and sustain their motivation. While attribution theory is able to connect the past with the present, the notions of investment and imagined communities deal with the past,
present, and future and are able to capture the interactive nature between the individual and the social in the desire for acquiring symbolic and material resources.

**On Methodology**

The sociocultural approach to the study of L2 motivation and attitudes suggested qualitative methods to apprehend the negotiation between the individual and the social were likely to be useful. Qualitative methods supported Vygotsky’s dialectical approach that has three central tenets, “(a) that phenomena should be examined as part of a developmental process; (b) that change does not occur in a linear, evolutionary progression, but through qualitative transformations; and (c) that these transformations take place through the unification of contradictory, distinct processes” (Mahn, 1999, p. 342). Additionally I conducted a review of studies in the current literature that used a quantitative approach and that reported a decrease in motivational and attitudinal changes. This was done because I agree with Ushioda (1996a) in that traditional quantitative research methods are not properly suited to capture motivational fluctuation. The value of qualitative research lies in its potential to cast a different light on the phenomenon under investigation. In order to study motivation and attitudes in the view of Mandarin learning as a socially mediated process, I thus adopted qualitative methods which allowed me to tackle the complexity of the individual’s sociocultural histories that was not easily captured through quantitative methods. In terms of motivational and attitudinal changes, I did not find a linear decrease in motivation, but a fluctuation of motivation depending on the individual learner’s historically specific needs, desires, and negotiations, which determined the extent of his/her investment in learning Mandarin.

Spolsky (1989) argues that the language learner can have exposure to and practice in the target language in two qualitatively different settings: the natural and informal environment of
the target language community or the formal environment of the classroom. Through my data analysis, I found those two different settings were only able to partially cover the spaces in which the individual learner became a member of the community of practice. What about the situation when a student participant was carrying out an interview project in Chinatown? This may be considered informal, but it was not spontaneous strictly speaking because she had a list of questions to ask in Mandarin. What about the situation when another student participant casually talked to his teacher in the classroom while waiting for other classmates to arrive class? This was hardly considered formal. Only because I was using a qualitative approach, was able to view those situations directly, and expand those two qualitatively different settings into instructional and non-instructional settings. In this way the natural spontaneous settings could be separated from the formal instructional settings, regardless of the physical space involved. In addition, interactions in mainstream SLA research have been explored mainly in language classrooms, rather than in non-instructional settings (Pavlenko, 2002). Using qualitative methods, I was able to explore what happened in non-instructional settings with the student participants based on introspective accounts of the students’ experiences and perceptions and I triangulated my data by asking the parent participants about those experiences.

Based on my literature review the most commonly used language outcome in quantitative research tradition is language achievement mainly measured by grades. However, the validity of using grades to measure language achievement appeared to be questionable to the student participants in the study. The student participants in the focus group denied grades were a relevant criterion for them as far as describing their progress in Mandarin. They disagreed that final grades could accurately represent their achievements in Mandarin. Traditionally defined successful language learners may get a high test score, but getting a high test score does not
necessarily indicate the ability to communicate in Mandarin, according to the student participants. Knowing Chinese characters well was the precondition for getting a good grade from a test but merely knowing Chinese characters would not enable them to communicate. How they could use the characters to communicate was reported by several students as more “motivating.” Seeing their work, not the grades, such as the writing and the speaking was believed to “motivate” them more and showed them the progress being made more than a test. They also reported that sometimes the grades may reflect that one knew less than they actually did because the tests did not cover the entire knowledge base. They concluded with the statement that the real test was fluency, on how much one could apply it to a real-life situation. This was considered as the only test that actually would matter because if one could not communicate with people who knew the language then it would be completely useless no matter how much one had learned the language. How to find a measurement criterion that embodies the validity of language achievement should be something for the quantitative research paradigm to work on, if there is to be continued research interest in correlational findings between motivational factors and language achievement.

**On Educational Practices**

In this section, I would like to offer some educational implications. All of the suggestions that I will make are grounded in my findings. While my study focuses on Mandarin learning, I believe my suggestions can be applied to all L2 educational practices.

**Policy makers.** It is important to signal that the majority of the families in my study had middle-class resources which allowed their child to enjoy some educational possibilities. Even within this group, there were parents who claimed they lacked enough financial ability to fund their child’s extracurricular activities. Language and educational policies that ensure equal access
to linguistic and educational resources will have a huge impact on students especially those with low socioeconomic status. As Kanno and Norton (2003) state “[i]magination at even the most personal level is nonetheless related to social ideologies and hegemonies,” it is crucial to implement policies that can free societal constraints on an individual’s capacity to imagine a different future (p. 247). Offering scholarship programs of critical need languages as well as less commonly taught languages (LCTLs) will provide students including socioeconomically disadvantaged students access to linguistic and non-linguistic resources which can equip students with skill sets that eventually help them to reach personal goals that otherwise they dare not imagine. The study showed that non-linguistic knowledge from L2 learning was desired by different stakeholders and could help sustain students’ involvement; and hence funding should be provided to programs that promote understanding of the cultural, historical, and social aspects of the contemporary communities of the target language, in order to educate students and train teachers, especially non-native speakers. Institutionally there should be contact hours merely set for education of non-linguistic knowledge, not necessarily with an aim for students and teachers to gain linguistic knowledge on the same topics simultaneously. Because when learning linguistic knowledge alone is included in the learning process, the depth of the topics tends to be limited, and could prevent students and teachers from developing deep cross-cultural understandings.

School administrators. School administrators play a crucial role in connecting students, parents, and teachers together and in institutionalizing collaborative curriculum implementation, which affects students in every single classroom. Therefore, there are some educational implications I would suggest for school administrators to consider based on the findings from the participants’ perceptions in this study. For schools that respond to societal visions and prepare
their students for future membership in the global community, introducing the critical need for languages, which are usually LCTLs, will potentially help to initiate students’ investment in a skill set with a possible return of adequate symbolic and material resources, compared to the situation where they have no such access. However, the schools should prepare for the reality that there will most likely be some incomprehension and anxiety as regards learning such languages by some parents and students. For the students in the study, they were motivated Mandarin learners in terms of the commitment they made to study the language, because they were supported by their educational institutions, families, local and overseas Chinese speaking communities. If we regard the L2 learning experience to be mediated by how students negotiate with those around them, interventions become necessary to make it possible to help more students to sustain involvement in L2 learning, in both commonly taught languages and less commonly taught languages. For languages to which students are less likely to have prior exposure, it may be helpful to offer them some exposure so that they can make an educated choice of which L2 to learn. As a result, the number of continuing learners to reach proficiency will be increased. The ideal approach would be that schools have students exposed to each of L2 options for a certain amount of time, for example, one language for one semester before asking them to make a decision. If that is hard to realize based on the school reality, schools can also offer workshops (e.g., on teacher-parent conference day) to introduce the linguistic aspect of L2 options and explain the rationale to include those L2 in the school’s curriculum to both students and parents, especially for those LCTLs. In addition, schools can gather information from teachers and send out newsletters with information regarding extracurricular programs in L2 learning. In this way it will be possible to reach out to parents so that they can concretely support their children to enhance their L2 learning.
Moreover, schools administrators should ensure the study of the products, practices, and perspectives of cultures represented by those L2 options are included in the school curriculum across subjects. Interdisciplinary work should be encouraged to offer students massive exposure to the target culture and understanding of how cultural products connect with different subjects. Time for preparation and execution of interdisciplinary work should be institutionally provided. School administrators should also supervise the design of assessment of students’ L2 performance. From the student participants’ feedback in the present study, how well they did on tests did not necessarily accurately reflect their language proficiency and did not necessarily help them realize their progress. In addition, methods to assess students’ L2 performance are important in ensuring program quality and can possibly impact a student’s future participation in the communities of practice. With LCTLs, the current reality at school often is that the language teachers are the only ones who possess the knowledge of the language. However, that does not mean school administrators have no expertise in that at all. The person who plays an administrative role in the world language department for example, usually tends to be aware of the current developments in the L2 teaching field. As an administrator, this person has the expertise in L2 assessment and should supervise and assist language teachers to design assessments that can better represent students’ L2 proficiency. The supervision is indispensable as a way to ensure program quality especially in the field of LCTLs given the reality of mixed backgrounds and training in the teaching force.

**Teachers.** Besides the traditional teacher role as someone who passes the knowledge down to students, teachers should also regard themselves as sufficiently experienced L2 learners and share their learning experiences with students, even when their L2 is not the target language they are teaching. As novice L2 speakers, students might have less experience in L2 learning and
it makes sense for teachers to help students realize that motivational fluctuation is normal, reflecting on their own experiences. Motivational strategies should be shared by teachers and students as part of the instruction. It is important to know that a teacher’s responsibility is not limited to facilitating knowledge acquisition of L2 and its culture, but demonstrating how to learn. Time should be spent on language-specific learning and enhancing motivational strategies in order for students to better acquire the desired linguistic knowledge. For teachers who are from countries where the target language is the lingua franca, in the case of LCTLs possibly the very first speakers encountered by their students, the awareness of their own role as native speakers of the target language may offer many non-linguistic educational opportunities during the course of instruction. They may be able to offer another perspective and through their interactions with students, may help to educate students on sociocultural cues that are appropriate in the communities of the target language.

As can be seen from the study findings, students come to learn L2 for different reasons and develop qualitatively different motivations and attitudes through the learning process. The changing quality of their motivations and attitudes allows for possibilities of educational intervention. Teachers should unite those around students such as parents to help develop students’ interest and increase involvement in L2 learning. Sharing information with parents on language programs and cultural activities can possibly help students to attain more opportunities to be in contact with L2 speakers and to develop a relationship with them. Creating interactional opportunities between students and their counterparts in the same age group from countries that speak the target language will motivate secondary school students to use the L2 in spontaneous conversations. Because students tend to be socially interested in what their counterparts are like, using technology such as Skype or social media can assist students to communicate with their
counterparts in both oral and written forms. By doing this, students can develop language proficiency and cross-cultural understandings at the same time. Introducing linguistic and cultural resources through media can open another door for students to explore imagined communities, which may have an even more powerful impact on students’ L2 learning than the usual past-present connection of students’ learning history.

Teachers should move beyond the conventional separation that considers learning inside and outside physical classrooms towards collaboration of educational practices in both instructional settings and non-instructional settings. The possible opportunities of interacting with L2 speakers mentioned above might form the basis of effective educational practices in non-instructional settings. That is why it is necessary for teachers to gather relevant information and share this with their students and those around them. Teachers’ casual interaction with students at school can also be highly effective educationally speaking in that teachers can deepen students’ understanding of the cultural conventions in L2 speaking communities. In instructional settings, teachers should expand their teaching practices to sites outside the physical classrooms. They can go on field trips to highlight possible communities of practice students could participate in and fill the field trips with tasks for students to complete. In order to promote spontaneous interactions, teachers can have students practice conversations with sentence structures necessary to complete field trip tasks in the classroom. On the field trip, they could free students from structured interview questions to have students experience spontaneous conversations with L2 speakers when completing tasks, thereby familiarizing students with the new communities of practice. Preparing students to know how to ask questions is one effective strategy for encouraging students to participate in spontaneous and sustained conversations with
L2 speakers. Moreover, teachers can invite guest speakers to the class and develop trips that can open students’ horizons on the possible return in the future if they invest in L2.

Going back to the traditional classroom, activities building up communicative competence that students can apply in real-life situations are welcomed by them. Some of them tend to feel frustrated when they have learned some linguistic knowledge, but still cannot sustain a conversation. To avoid the frustration of thinking that they do not know everything that they might want to say, conversational practice between peers comes to the rescue because that way students can sense their agency and feel communicative when they talk to people with a similar linguistic knowledge background. When integrating non-linguistic resources into the classroom, teachers should develop more explicit instruction about the target culture, going beyond celebrations and the holidays and delving into products, practices, and perspectives of culture. The introduction of the target culture can also be integrated into the acquisition of linguistic knowledge. In Mandarin learning, for example, learning how to write Chinese characters can also be a process of learning about the Chinese culture. Instructions on the rationale of how each character is formed will also help them to uncover deeper aspects of culture – how Chinese people perceive the world and what they value. Learning Chinese characters may allow for insights into the important role memorization and attention to details play in Chinese culture. Students also see calligraphy (as a segue from characters) as having aesthetic attributes and this should thus be made available to increase their desire to learn Chinese.

Awareness of multiple realities that students face in L2 learning is crucial for teachers to understand apart from their observations of the students’ performance in their classroom. In the present study, the student participants generally reported the relative disconnect between the easy and slow-pace of learning they may experience in the classroom at their school and the intense
experience from peer pressure when they were put together with other highly motivated students in summer programs. How the multiple realities encourage or discourage classroom participation and how to meet students’ needs based on those realities are concerns for teachers if the goal is to educate students optimally. Last, but not least, teachers need to exert efforts in designing assessments that can examine to what degree students are able to communicate in real-life situations. The results can offer feedback to students on their progress and insights to teachers as to what areas they need to reinforce through instruction.

**Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research**

The current study examined the perceptions of non-Asian Mandarin learning students from secondary schools in New York City and their parents on their Mandarin learning experiences in regards to motivation and attitudes. It adopted purposeful sampling to include the target population and uses interviews and documents as data collection methods. The intention of this qualitative case study approach was not to generate findings that could be generalized to a population. Nonetheless, it is important to note a few limitations related to the nature of the present study. First of all, since the participation was voluntary, students and parents in the study were willing to spend time to meet face-to-face with the researcher for interviews. The participants may not be representative of the target population. They may have been more motivated to take part in the study than others. Although I asked for parents’ occupations, I did not collect direct socioeconomic information about participants. It is difficult to say exactly how demographically representative the sample was of the population. Based on the education the student participants received, they can be divided into three categories: (a) students that received only private school education; (b) students that received only public school education through a public school and a charter school; and (c) students that received both public and private school
education through tuition or financial aid. The majority of the students’ families seemed to be able to afford private school education to some extent and could be categorized as middle class. In my sample, there was only one student that received Mandarin education in a public school setting and this was a dual language school. Mandarin programs in regular, non-dual language public schools were not included in my study. To sum up, because my sample was not a random sample, the findings of the study cannot be generalized.

Furthermore, there was a great deal of information about the students’ motivation and attitudes that this study was not designed to access. I did not consult with administrators or teachers at different educational institutions about their perspectives on the students’ motivation and attitudes. In addition, I did not conduct any direct observations of the phenomena reported in this study. It is very possible that, if I had observed what the students and the parents were actually doing in reality or if I had consulted with the students’ teachers and administrators, I might have arrived at a different interpretation of the events presently discussed. However, this study focused specifically on examining the meanings of Mandarin learning solely to the students who volunteered for the study. Thus the students’ present responses, while limited in scope, which were collected and designed to serve as a fair representation of how they interpreted their Mandarin learning experiences at the time of the interview and what motivated them to pursue this process, provide some noteworthy and rich descriptions of their views that can fill the research gap. I undertook this study because I felt the necessity to consider the significance of this type of knowledge in the context of L2 research. It is the students who are on the receiving end of L2 education, and they are the ones who stand to benefit the most. Through improving the negotiations that occur between the individual and the social, more students might
eventually become multilingual speakers. Their voices are thus invaluable and important to reveal through careful research as was presently conducted.

Future studies might however, expand on this study and its study questions in a number of different ways. For example, many comprehensive parts of this present study regarding students’ motivation and attitudes could be revisited in new contexts and settings. It would be fascinating to explore programs of other LCTLs, interview students from different age groups, or different settings (e.g., students in a different part of the U.S.) in order to see if the findings of this study apply to different contexts in L2 education. A future study could also capture the responses of individuals whose voices were not heard in this study. In the interim it is hoped that this study will shed light on the importance of conducting future research in the context of LCTLs, the area where little literature has been established.

Since the sociocultural approach looks at L2 learning experiences as a co-constructed experience and students’ motivation and attitudes as negotiated through multiple levels, it would be especially meaningful to use this approach to examine the negotiations that take place between socioeconomically disadvantaged students and those around them to see how their motivation and attitudes towards L2 changes across time and space. How the negotiation unfolds appears to influence students’ access to linguistic and educational resources. That is also why a longitudinal study of students’ investment in L2 and their participation in the previously imagined communities would be a very interesting topic to explore. A different degree of accessibility to available resources might lead to different learning trajectories and communities in imagination. Students’ retrospective accounts on how imagined communities play a role in their L2 learning would verify whether imagined communities have a stronger impact on L2 investment than local communities, as Kanno and Norton (2003) conjectured.
In addition, because the present study only included students who chose to continue with Mandarin study, it would be helpful to design a complementary study to explore the perceptions of students who discontinued with Mandarin study as regards their motivation and attitudes. One might uncover what is not presented in the current study and how negotiations across multiple levels can impact a student’s decision to discontinue L2 endeavors. Such a study would also possibly shed more light on what should/should not be done to affect the sustainability of language learning. The present study mainly covers Mandarin programs in private school settings and one in a dual language public setting. Future research can hence examine students from Mandarin programs in regular public school settings and see what role the Common Core State Standards might play in the negotiation process of language learning. The present sample was constituted by both majority and minority students. It would be interesting to conduct more studies on minority students’ motivation and attitudes towards studying Mandarin, in order to examine how Mandarin learning impacts their lives. Moreover, the present study explored students’ perceptions on their learning experiences in both instructional and non-instructional settings. While the majority of SLA studies are located in instructional settings, specifically in the classroom, research on what happens in non-instructional settings is thus called for.

Given that technology is currently markedly reducing geographic barriers, for example, through the internet, how this tool may help in creating new communities of practice in efforts to expand students’ communicative repertoire would be a further possible research question to explore in depth in the future. Prevailing social media provides social contact with other people in an interactive manner, and excitingly in a written form. Due to the difficulty in acquisition of Chinese characters, even to Chinese native speakers, increasing one’s literacy level in Chinese becomes a far lengthier process than that observed in the context of many other languages. Social
media offer a great opportunity for Mandarin users to practice Chinese characters when interacting with counterparts and can bring Mandarin users into more communities of practice than would otherwise be considered as imagined communities. Through social media more communities of practice may become available at a relatively early stage of Mandarin learning. How that will impact students’ proficiency remains to be seen.

Finally, this study has shown that the use of qualitative methods holds a great deal of value for the field of L2 motivation and attitudes research. The qualitative approach helped to uncover the negotiations and struggles student participants had with those around them and the changes in motivation and attitudes they experienced as a result. It helped to explain the context in a way existing quantitative measures would find hard to capture and, thus, have not revealed. For example, the changing nature of motivation is illustrated by the cases in the study across time and space whereas a linear decrease in motivation is usually found using existing quantitative measures. The dynamics between the individual and the social environment should be researched more in the future to discover how motivation functions in L2 learning and what we can do to help increase motivation. The findings from qualitative research might offer new insights to quantitative researchers on how to adjust their variables and measurement criteria in order to increase the validity of their models for a better understanding of the phenomenon. Therefore, future research should certainly take advantage of qualitative methodology to study L2 motivation and attitudes.

Looking at students’ motivation and attitudes in Mandarin Chinese learning through a sociocultural lens offers new understandings for parents, teachers, school administrators, and policy makers who are interested in improving Americans’ ability to navigate other languages and cultures. Under the societal influence, the support from the meso level can push students
further on the exciting journey to become someone new, someone filled with future possibilities.

This is also why this study was conducted:

The possibility of being fluent and the opportunities it presents are exciting. The path getting there might not be so exciting. It might be hard and something boring and sometimes I’ll be frustrated and feel like I’m not getting anywhere. But the exciting part is knowing I could become fluent and if I did I have that many more opportunities.

(Adam)
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Article One

Mandarin Chinese becoming first choice as second language

By Nancy Lofholm

The Denver Post

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Fifth-grader Lucy Miller, 11, works on speaking Mandarin Chinese during class at Erie Elementary School. More than 60 schools in Colorado are offering Mandarin classes to help students get a foundation in international business. (RJ Sangosti, The Denver Post)

Ivie Hunt was barely 6 last spring and had just finished kindergarten when she shocked the hostess at a Denver Asian restaurant by chatting comfortably in Mandarin Chinese.

“Here was this little blond, white girl having a full conversation with the hostess in Mandarin,” said her mother, Ann Hunt, who admitted to being a bit stunned herself.

That kind of surprise may wear off as Mandarin Chinese becomes the first choice of a growing number of second-language learners.

More language students are saying adios to the recent stampede to learn Spanish and huan ying — or welcome — to mastering a Chinese dialect now spoken by an estimated 100 million non-Chinese.

In Colorado, there are many Ivies — ages 3 to 99 — twisting their tongues and brains around the foreign concepts of Mandarin grammar, tones and characters.
More than 60 schools around the state — ranging from primary-level immersion schools to universities to private language enterprises — are teaching this most widely spoken language in the world. More online classes are popping up. Chinese-language clubs are taking over tables in coffee shops. Chinese tutors are becoming a hot commodity.

The popularity of Mandarin has been driven by several factors: China’s ascendency in the global economy means anyone doing business on an international basis is likely to encounter Mandarin speakers. The spotlight on the 2008 Beijing Olympics increased tourism to China and heightened interest in Mandarin. Also, more Americans are traveling to China to adopt Chinese babies and want to be conversant with their children.

Speaking Mandarin has become a hot ticket on college applications as well as a starred addition to executive résumés.

“If you are going to get around in the world, you are going to need to speak Chinese. It’s a language everyone is going to be speaking,” said aviation consultant Mike Boyd, who

A fifth-grader takes notes during Mandarin Chinese class at Erie Elementary. *(RJ Sangosti, The Denver Post)*

studies Mandarin for one intense hour a week at the Colorado Chinese Language Center in Denver.

That message may be catching the attention of the younger set — and their parents — the most.

It is no longer so unusual for preschoolers to be signed up for Mandarin instruction. At least one school district has dropped Spanish classes and added K-12 Chinese. Some charter schools are offering total immersion in Mandarin beginning in kindergarten. That’s how Ivie could chatter in Chinese after one year at the Denver
Language School without ever being anywhere near the Great Wall or the Ming Tombs.

And that’s why Trinity Jones, 12, thinks nothing of having conversations in Mandarin while socializing with her classmates at the Denver Center for International Studies.

Trinity had the option of immersing herself in French, Italian, Spanish, Japanese or Lakota, but she was fixed on learning the language spoken by more than a billion people in the world.

“I knew it would help me in the future,” said Trinity, who already has her sights set on being a government translator or working for a company such as Apple in China.

Mandarin has become such an important language around the state that the University of Colorado at Boulder has added a program called Teaching East Asia. It is geared toward training more Chinese instructors and furthering learning about China for more students. It is also aimed at getting a handle this year on just how many

Chinese-language schools and learners are out there. The program uses funding from an initiative called STARTALK that was developed under President George W. Bush to promote teaching and understanding of “strategically important” languages.

Jon Zeljo with the Teaching East Asia program said one focus of the summer institutes held for teachers and students the past three years has been to make Mandarin classes sustainable by giving Chinese teachers more resources and to expose more students to Mandarin at a young age.
The Chinese government is assisting in this endeavor by funding half the salaries of Chinese teachers through Chinese Language Council International programs called Confucius Institutes or through a Chinese Ministry of Education program called Hanban.

Kuo Li teaches Mandarin and Chinese culture to 144 students at Battle Mountain High School in Edwards with Chinese government help and said his students are learning much more than how to pronounce Chinese tones correctly.

“Chinese gives these students a larger horizon in their future lives,” he said.

Amanda Sauer is principal at Erie Elementary in the St. Vrain Valley School District, which has embraced the teaching of Mandarin more than any other district in the state. Four Chinese-language teachers are half funded by Hanban.

Sauer echoes Li’s statement.

“Our district looked at how to prepare kids for 21st-century jobs — to help them have a global view,” she said.

Students in kindergarten through second grade in Erie start out with sessions every other week that focus more on Chinese culture than on learning grammar. Students move on to weekly classes focused on writing characters and language-building in third grade. They can then choose whether to continue learning Chinese in middle and high school.

Ann Hunt is pretty sure Ivie will continue her Chinese studies. She and her husband, Dr. James Hunt, have already decided their 2-year-old son will also have the chance to learn Mandarin. They have mused over what it will be like to eventually have two teenage children in the house who are fluent in a language that is a mystery to them and to the two older children in the family.

Already, they struggle with not being able to help Ivie with her Mandarin homework.

“Overwhelming is how I would describe it,” she said. “Overwhelming but amazing.”

Or, as her daughter might tell her, in Mandarin it is jīngrèn — amazing.
Appendix B

Interview Questions for Students

Part One – Language learning history

1. How do you identify yourself in relation to ethnicity?

2. How many languages do you speak? What is your native language? What languages have you studied? What languages have you been consistently exposed to?

3. How many languages do your parents speak? What are their racial backgrounds? What are their occupations? What are their highest degrees in education?

4. What languages are spoken at home? (to parents; between siblings)

5. Tell me about your family. What are your parents like?

6. Tell me about your experiences in school. What is your school like? Are you participating in any clubs or groups? Are you studying any foreign languages?

7. What are your friends in school like? What language do you speak with them? Do they study foreign languages?

8. What was it like to grow up in your neighborhood? Do you have any chances to get access to cultures that are not native to you? Could you describe it with specific examples?

9. Have you travelled outside of the U.S.? Can you give me some examples?

Part Two – Details of experience with Mandarin learning

1. How do you feel about learning Mandarin? (Do you think Mandarin is important to learn? Do you enjoy learning it? Why or why not?)

2. How did you come to be taking Mandarin at school?

3. What goal do you have in learning Mandarin?

4. What are the activities inside the classroom that make you excited or not excited to learn Mandarin? What is your favorite thing and least favorite thing? Why do you think this might be so? When you are in Mandarin class, do you volunteer to answer questions?

5. Now think about other students in your Mandarin class. Tell me about some activities that make other students are excited or not excited about learning Mandarin. You can talk about your friends, or things you hear other students say.
6. When it comes to Mandarin homework, what do you do? If your teacher wanted someone to do an extra Mandarin assignment, what would you do? When you get your Mandarin assignment back, what do you do?

7. Has anything happened in your school that has influenced the way you feel about Chinese language, culture, and speakers? Did it happen in the classroom? Or did it happen in some school events? How did it influence you? Could you describe this with specific examples? (If there were a Mandarin club in your school, would you attend?)

8. Compared to other courses, how do you like Mandarin?

9. Have you ever been really proud about the fact that you can communicate in Mandarin? Have you ever been nervous about communicating in Mandarin? Do you want to be able to socially communicate in Mandarin?

10. What are your experiences outside the school that make you excited or not excited to learn Mandarin? Why do you think it might be so? How do you use Mandarin outside of class?

11. What do you feel is important in your Mandarin learning experience?

12. Tell me some memories or stories about learning Mandarin. It can be a good memory or a bad memory, or both. Do you remember a time when you were frustrated, or really happy, or having a lot of fun? Why do you think that you remember this so much? Are there any other things you really remember?

13. What is necessary in order to do well in learning Mandarin? Do you have any strategies for dealing with your motivation in learning Mandarin? Can you tell me a story to describe this?

14. Are you going to continue taking Mandarin in college? Why or why not?

15. Tell me about the Mandarin language. Do you think it is good to know Mandarin? Is it helpful? How is it helpful or not helpful?

16. Tell me about Chinese speakers that you know. What are they like? (Even you don’t know any, tell me how you see Chinese speakers.) Do you want to know Chinese speakers better?

17. Do you think your parents would agree with most of the things you have said in this interview? Tell me about how they talk about you studying Mandarin. Do you think your parents influence you on how you feel about Chinese language, culture, and speakers? If so, can you tell me a story about it?

18. How do they participate in your Mandarin education? (Do your parents try to help with your Mandarin? Do they encourage you to devote more time to your Mandarin studies? Do they show considerable interest in anything to do with your Mandarin courses/ Mandarin learning? Do they encourage you to practice Mandarin as much as possible? Do they encourage you to seek help from your teacher if you have problems with your Mandarin? Do they encourage you to continue
learning Mandarin? Have they stressed the importance Mandarin will have for you when you leave school?)

Part Three – Reflection on meaning

1. When you think about being a Mandarin learner, what is that experience like for you?

2. In the future, do you envision yourself trying to learn more about Chinese language and culture? If so, how and why? If not, why not?

3. In the future, do you envision yourself using Mandarin in your life? If so, how and why? If not, why not?

4. What keeps you going? What motivates you? What do you feel can be done to sustain involvement in Mandarin learning?

5. What advice do you have for students who might be interested in taking Mandarin?

6. What has been one of the most significant experiences you have had since starting to learn Mandarin?

7. What have you been most proud of this year as a Mandarin learner?

8. What role does Mandarin learning experience play in shaping the person you are today?

9. What role do you think your parents play in your taking Mandarin at school? How about the roles of your school, neighborhood, and the society?

10. What/Who do you think has influenced your attitude towards Chinese language, culture, and speakers?

11. From your point of view, how can the Mandarin program be improved or strengthened?

12. In general, do you think it is important or good for people to learn a foreign language? Why or why not? Would you study a foreign language in school even if it were not required?

13. Is there anything that I did not ask about but you’d like to tell me?

14. Is there any question you thought I would ask but I did not ask?
Appendix C

Interview Questions for Parents

1. How many languages do you and your spouse speak? What are your racial backgrounds? What are your occupations? What are your highest degrees in education?

2. Has your family travelled outside of the U.S.? Can you give me some examples?

3. How do you feel about your child learning Mandarin? (Do you think Mandarin is important for your child? Why or why not?)

4. How was the decision made to take Mandarin at school? (Please describe factors in the decision, such as child preference, geographic considerations, options to take other languages or sports, etc.)

5. Has anything happened in your personal life that has influenced your attitude towards your child learning Mandarin? Do you think it is good to know Mandarin? Is it helpful? How is it helpful or not helpful?

6. Has anything happened in your child’s school that you think has influenced your child’s attitude towards Chinese language, culture, and speakers? (Do you think the school environment is good for your child to improve his/her Mandarin?)

7. Has anything happened in your child’s personal life that has influenced your child’s attitude towards Chinese language, culture, and speakers? (Do you think the social environment is good for your child to improve his/her Mandarin?)

8. How does your child use Mandarin out of the classroom?

9. From your point of view, what do you think motivates your child learning Mandarin?

10. How do you think of your influence on your child’s attitude towards Chinese language, culture, and speakers? (What is your role in your child’s Mandarin education? How do you participate?) Could you describe this with specific examples?

11. What do you feel is important in your child’s Mandarin learning experience?

12. Do you want your child to be able to socially communicate in Mandarin?

13. How do you view your child’s decision to study Mandarin at school?

14. From your point of view, what role does Mandarin learning experience play in shaping the person your child is today?
15. How do you envision your child in the future? (Twenty years from now, what do you think or hope that your child will be doing professionally?) (Will Mandarin be involved?)

16. What roles do you think your child’s school, neighborhood, and the society play in your child’s taking Mandarin at school?

17. From your point of view, how can the Mandarin program be improved or strengthened? What are your concerns about your child’s Mandarin learning?

18. In general, do you think it is important or good for people to learn a foreign language? Why or why not?

19. Is there anything that I did not ask about but you’d like to tell me?

20. Is there any question you thought I would ask but I did not ask?
China’s Job Market Tightens for Young Foreigners

By LARA FARRAR
The New York Times
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BEIJING — Michal Sliwinski decided to buy a one-way ticket to China in 2010 after reading a newspaper article about the Asian giant’s breakneck economic growth. He had just graduated with a political science degree in his native Poland, could not find a job and feared that his prospects at home were not going to improve soon.

“I didn’t give it a second thought,” said Mr. Sliwinski, now 26 and living in Beijing. “I checked into a hostel, and I found a job in like five days and started to teach English.”

Two years later, Mr. Sliwinski says he is tired of teaching English, but is having trouble securing other work. That is how he found himself among the 1,200 expatriates searching through about 60 booths at the Job Fair for Foreigners, which was held in Beijing at the end of October. The fair also has annual events in Shanghai and Guangzhou.
To his disappointment, most of the companies represented were looking for English teachers.

“There are probably some jobs that are really good,” Mr. Sliwinski said. “But there is huge competition among foreigners, and it is not like they will give you a job just because you are white.”

There is a perception among some graduates from economically struggling Western countries that China is the new land of opportunity. But strong economic growth there might not mean good employment prospects for everyone. Foreigners, particularly those who do not have specialized technical skills or Mandarin fluency, may only be able find teaching jobs that pay less than what they might at home.

Even those with quite good qualifications might have a hard time.

“There is this idea that China is up-and-coming so it is the place to go,” said Adam Clark, 23, who is currently in an exchange program at Nankai University in Tianjin as part of a master’s of Chinese studies degree at the University of Edinburgh. His program also covers international business, as well as Chinese politics, culture and media; but that still might not be enough.

“In reality, I think it is a lot more difficult than that,” he said. “Having two degrees — one in Mandarin and another in something else — and then only to be able to teach English is not entirely desirable.”

According to the 2010 national census, there were about a million expatriates living in mainland China, although almost half of those counted were residents from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macau who had moved to the mainland. Of the 593,000 “foreigners,” large numbers came from the rest of Asia: 120,000 from South Korea, 66,000 from Japan and almost 40,000 from Myanmar. Westerners made up a smaller portion, with 71,000 from the United States, almost 20,000 from Canada, 15,000 from France, 14,000 from Germany and 13,000 from Australia.

According to George Xu, chief executive of eChinacities.com, a Web site that provides employment and lifestyle tips for expatriates, 65 percent of their job postings were for English-teaching positions. The others were mostly related to information technology, sales and procurement management.
The site has 50,000 résumés from expatriates in a database available to recruiters. Mr. Xu said that the site had 20,000 daily visitors.

“For foreigners to find a job in China, there are still many obstacles,” he said. “If you don’t speak Chinese and want to work in this country, it will be quite difficult.”

For positions that do not involve teaching English, near fluency in Mandarin is no longer an added bonus, but a prerequisite.

A generation or two ago, fluent English and overseas experience were considered special skills. Today, there are more qualified applicants on the market, particularly Chinese students returning with overseas university degrees, multiple languages and an international outlook.

According to the Chinese Education Ministry, more than 70 percent of Chinese students who went overseas to study have returned home. There were 186,200 such returnees last year.

“The competition against local graduates or Chinese with a little bit of work experience is intense,” said Andy Bentote, managing director for China at Michael Page, a recruitment agency. “The entry-level jobs or maybe second-jobber opportunities, there are just not as many of them. If you don’t speak Mandarin and you don’t have any Chinese work experience, it will be very difficult.”

Outside of teaching positions, the jobs at the Beijing fair tended to be highly specialized, requiring specific technical skills and years of experience. A young recent graduate with shaky Mandarin as a second language would have a hard time trying to break out of the so-called English-teaching trap.

“All of the people who came here are very nice,” said Zhu Yujiao, a recruiter with Beijing Wellintech Development, which makes software monitoring systems for manufacturers. “But they are not very suitable for our positions.”

Wellintech, which had openings for international sales representatives and software engineers, hoped to find candidates with at least five years experience and a background in technology.
Beijing Meidan Food was looking for people to help expand its cracker export business to Africa and Southeast Asia. Fluent Mandarin was required, as most of their staff did not speak English, a recruiter said.

Himin Solar, a manufacturer in Shandong Province, had positions for designers and installers of high-end energy-efficient windows and doors.

Brett Edman, who moved to Beijing in February after studying Chinese and engineering in Australia, said he approached Himin and had no luck. “I can understand if they are looking for specific things, but they didn’t seem interested in talking to me anyway,” Mr. Edman, 25, said. “Even my major is directly related to their business, so that was a bit surprising.”

“I was hoping to find some companies that would be like, ‘Oh, you are looking to be here for a while. We can give you experience while you learn about China at the same time,’” Mr. Edman said. “But those opportunities don’t seem to be there. Maybe I might have to go home and get some work experience for a while and then come back. But that is not ideal.”

Max Scholl, 23, who studied environmental engineering at the University of Vermont, has been in China for 10 months teaching English at a kindergarten. His salary is 10,000 renminbi, or $1,600, a month. Most of that is sent home to pay off student loans, and he is concerned that he cannot find employment in his chosen field. “It is a little frightening, the situation I am in,” he said.

Those who have taken extra time and effort to learn Chinese language and culture seem to have an easier time.

Bart Bucknill arrived in China in 2009 after getting a philosophy and politics degree from the University of Sheffield in England. For two years, he taught English and also studied Chinese at Yanshan University in Hebei Province. Last year, at the Beijing job fair, he found a position as the business development manager for Zhuzhou Times New Material Technology, a manufacturer of engineering products based in Hunan Province.

He was back at the fair this year — as a recruiter himself. Now 26, he says he has a higher position and more responsibility than he would have in his native Britain.
“I guess I impressed them with my Chinese level and also my ability to kind of fit into a Chinese organization,” he said. “Those were my qualifications. They are soft skills, you could say, but they are very important for working in a Chinese company.”

Elisa Conterio, 25, arrived in China a few weeks ago with a bachelor’s degree in Chinese language and culture from a university in Venice and a master’s degree from a university in Lyon. “It is difficult to find a job in Italy, so I decided to come to China,” she said. “I will probably stay here for one or two years and see how things are going.”

While she did not find anything at the fair, she managed to secure an internship at an event-planning company she contacted before arriving in Beijing. “I was pretty surprised,” she said about her reaction to their initial salary offer of 2,500 renminbi a month. (They have since doubled it to 5,000 renminbi.)

“It’s a start,” she added.