
Linguistic anxiety, insecurity, and fulfilment of bilingual parenting: Emotional complexities experienced by Chinese immigrant families

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Abstract

This study explores the emotional dimensions of language within three Chinese–Australian families raising Mandarin–English bilingual children. Employing ethnographic methods including interviews, observations, and the collection of literacy evidence, it delves into the families’ migration stories, language ideologies, and emotional experiences. Additionally, the study examines the factors influencing family language policies (FLPs) and the emotional climate surrounding language within these households. The research reveals that these families grappled with the dual challenges of maintaining their children’s heritage Chinese while ensuring their competitiveness in mainstream English. These societal and familial pressures conditioned parents’ emotions and the decisions they make regarding FLPs. The study uncovers the intricate interplay between parents’ emotional states, their children’s bilingual dynamics, changes in FLPs within the hierarchically constructed linguistic landscape. It underscores the significance of power relations in shaping FLPs and highlights the pivotal role of children’s heritage language bilingualism in contributing to the overall well-being of the immigrant families.

Keywords: linguistic anxiety, bilingual parenting, emotion, heritage language, societal language

Résumé

Cette étude explore les dimensions émotionnelles du langage au sein de trois familles sino-australiennes élevant des enfants bilingues en mandarin et en anglais. Utilisant des méthodes ethnographiques, elle se penche sur les histoires de migration, les idéologies linguistiques et les expériences émotionnelles des familles, tout en examinant les facteurs influençant les politiques linguistiques familiales (FLP) et le climat émotionnel dans les foyers. Les familles font face au défi de maintenir le mandarin tout en favorisant l’anglais. Ces pressions conditionnent les

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émotions des parents et leurs décisions sur les FLP. L'étude révèle une interaction complexe entre l'état émotionnel des parents, la dynamique bilingue de leurs enfants et les changements dans les FLP, soulignant l'importance des relations de pouvoir dans leur formation. Le bilinguisme en langue patrimoniale des enfants joue un rôle essentiel dans le bien-être global des familles immigrées.

Mots-clés : anxiété langagière, éducation bilingue, émotion, langue patrimoniale, langue sociale

Introduction

Transnational living has emerged as a prominent migratory trend in the 21st century (Fuentes, 2020; Hua & Wei, 2016). In the context of Australia, the Chinese-born population increased significantly in this century. As of 2021, China ranks third, after England and India, as the largest source of permanent migrants (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Notably, the recent influx of Chinese immigrants to Australia has occurred at a time when Australian immigration policy emphasizes economic and skill-based criteria. As a result, the recent China-born immigrants in Australia comprise a highly skilled, highly educated, and high-income group (Colic-Peisker & Deng, 2019; Gao, 2015). The arrival of these diverse, well-educated immigrants from various regions of China has brought about a remarkable transformation within the traditional Chinese–Australian community. This community was previously characterised by a predominance of Cantonese heritage and language (Jupp, 1988/2001). The changing demographics bears witness to the expansion of Mandarin as the new lingua franca within the Chinese diaspora in Australia, resulting in the decline of Cantonese. In 2021, the number of Mandarin speakers in Australia has significantly surpassed that of Cantonese speakers, with approximately 685,274 Mandarin speakers compared to 295,281 Cantonese speakers (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Mandarin has now become the most widely used non-English language in Australia, with 2.7% users among the entire Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

A specific definition of the terms of *heritage language* and *heritage speaker* is consequential for understanding the concept of *heritage language bilingualism* explored in the study. Drawing from the definition given by Rothman (2009), heritage language in this context refers to the language (e.g., Mandarin Chinese) spoken at home but not considered the dominant language (e.g., English) of the larger society (e.g., Australia). While a broad categorization of heritage speakers may include individuals who have cultural ancestry with a particular language but never heard the language spoken, the

definition of a heritage speaker in this study goes beyond “a mere cultural connection”. Here, a heritage speaker refers to those who “have some level of competence” in the heritage language (Rothman, 2009, p. 156). So, heritage language bilingualism, which is different from societal language bilingualism, is defined in the study as the coexistence of the heritage minority language, which is naturally acquired as the primary language at the family level, and the societal majority language, which typically serves as the main linguistic medium for educating children at the societal and institutional level. The way that transnational families cope with migratory challenges such as settlement, identity, connection, education, and mobility is deeply associated with how languages are managed, learned, and negotiated, in particular how they manage the acquisition of the societal language and the maintenance of the heritage language (Fuentes, 2020). Parents from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds wish their language to be transmitted to their children (De Houwer, 2020; Guardado & Becker, 2014; Sevinç, 2020), and consider heritage language bilingualism as a necessity and an opportunity (Hua & Wei, 2016). This form of additive bilingualism, though often celebrated for the expected benefits of adding a second language and culture without replacing or displacing the first, cannot be romanticised as universally positive experiences (Hua & Wei, 2016). In a predominantly monolingual society, the rapid language shift of migrant children to the dominant language, usually English, is the well-established sociolinguistic fact and this language shift pattern typically occurs within three generations (Clyne, 2005; Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Piller & Gerber, 2021). Even though heritage speakers might acquire certain communicative skills in the family domain, they, without academic support for the language during their school years, often miss the chance to develop literacy skills (Rothman, 2009). Despite parents’ well-intentioned efforts to nurture their children’s heritage language proficiency, they often find themselves powerless against the “natural” course of language shift experienced by their children (Shin, 2006).

Heritage language maintenance of transnational and minority families carries heavy social and psychological baggage, and often leads to negative emotions and experiences such as pressure, anxiety, and intergenerational tensions (Sevinç, 2018, 2020). The formulation of FLP distinctly aligns with “orientations towards emotional exchanges, intimacy, and family-bound affection, as well as orientations towards trajectories of success and mobility” (Sevinç & Mirvahedi, 2023, p. 146). Given the critical role of emotionality within FLP, emotional domains should be investigated to better account for transnational families’ language planning, multilingual practices, educational desires, intergenerational relations, social connections, and psychosocial well-being (Karpava, 2022; Sevinç & Mirvahedi, 2023).

Literature of emotions in FLP, which to a large extent has quantified

emotions (e.g., through questionnaires, standardised assessment, and statistical analysis) in multilingual settings, has placed a considerable emphasis on relational patterns of affective style and language proficiency (Jee, 2022; Pavlenko, 2004; Tannenbaum & Howie, 2002), overlooking the fluid, dynamic, and subjective nature of emotionality in individual's linguistic repertoires (Sevinç & Mirvahedi, 2023). In fact, the emotional climate at the familial level constitutes a critical domain for forming children's linguistic environment and language practices as well as parent-child communicative modes and affective ties (De Houwer, 2020; Guardado & Becker, 2014; Sevinç, 2020). Emotions and multilingualism should be studied as individual experiences in socially constructed norms, which can bring out our true identities in connection with different multilingual contexts at family levels and beyond (Sevinç & Mirvahedi, 2023). To capture the dynamics, complexity, and subjectivity, the present study explores the nuances of emotional fluctuation experienced by three Chinese immigrant families in their Chinese and English language practices. The study particularly focuses on how emotions interact with parental attitudes, bilingual planning, FLP decisions, and education goals, which are largely conditioned by the power structure inherent in the sociolinguistic market.

In what follows, I construct the theoretical framework by examining linguistic hierarchies in broad societal settings and the interplay between FLP and emotionality in familial discourse. This is followed by an introduction to the research participants and data sources. After that, I put the focus on the emotional climate of the three case-study families, considering their settlement trajectories, educational ideologies, language decisions and practices. This study concludes with a summary and discussion of key themes concerning emotion, FLP, education, and migration in the Chinese diaspora.

FLP and power relations

FLP can be defined as explicit/implicit and deliberate/subconscious planning in relation to language choices, use, and practices within the home among family members (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009, 2018; King et al., 2008). For transnational families, FLP presents "the critical domain" (Spolsky, 2012, p. 3) in understanding why some children become bilinguals while others become monolinguals despite similar social linguistic environments (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013).

FLP, though seemingly a private family matter, interacts with a wide range of political, educational, and economic forces external to families (Curdt-Christiansen, 2014, 2016). That is, parental agency in FLP usually gives priority to social prestige, educational empowerment, and socioeconomic gains (Curdt-Christiansen, 2016). For example, Hakka Chinese families in Malaysia

place English, Mandarin, Malay, Hokkien, and Hakka respectively as tokens of global lingua franca, Chinese lingua franca, national language, regional language, and home language (Xiaomei, 2017). This hierarchical order results from parental valorization of the so-called instrumental, communicative, and sentimental values attached to these languages. Despite the important roles of all the languages in the family members' lives, they are ranked in terms of the importance in the socioeconomic and sociolinguistic marketplace as well as the scope of usage (Curdt-Christiansen, 2018, p. 438). Against such a realistic ideology, conscious language management at the home domain is only given to Mandarin—the preferred identity marker, and English—the tool of internationalization. The lesser role of the national Malay and the heritage Hakka in the family domain is attributed to the complexity of linguistic ecology surrounding the Chinese families. They perceived limited functional utility of Malay in the Chinese diaspora and outside Malaysia, the uselessness of Hakka in the increasingly materialized market, and the growing significance of Mandarin in global affairs (Xiaomei, 2017). Despite the pronounced disparity between the national policy and FLP in the usage of Malay, family-level policies normally align with the societal standing, academic pathways, and economic advantages afforded by a language in a given society (Curdt-Christiansen, 2016; Tannenbaum & Yitzhaki, 2016; Wang, 2020). Thus, language policy at state and institution levels is often one of the most influential factors contributing to parental decisions on whether they should provide continuity for language transmission or succumb to language shift (Wang, 2023; Wang et al., 2023). Similar to the Hakka families in Malaysia, the Chinese families living in Singapore, regardless of their ancestral dialects, unanimously value Mandarin Chinese as the symbol of Chinese identity and as a tool of economic betterment (Curdt-Christiansen, 2016). But a dilemma arises from the competition between Mandarin and English, the latter being the societal language that holds higher prestige. The families' decision to prioritize English is grounded in the educational landscape of Singapore, where success is prominently determined by a person's level of English proficiency (Curdt-Christiansen, 2016). While these Chinese Malaysian/Singaporean families take a broad perspective on languages considering factors from the familial, local, national, and global contexts, their FLP choices are ultimately informed by the relative position of languages, which prioritizes power, prestige, and economic returns instead of heritage and linguistic values.

Language and emotion of transnational families

FLP research has conventionally focused on the three established components: language ideology, which encompasses family members' perceptions of particular languages; language management, which delves into the efforts

they undertake to uphold languages; and language practices, which examines the actual utilization of language (see Curdt-Christiansen, 2018; Curdt-Christiansen & La Morgia, 2018; Xiaomei, 2017). More recently, FLP studies have underscored the significance of emotions that affect language choices, decisions, and practices within a family context (Curdt-Christiansen & Iwaniec, 2022; De Houwer, 2020; Sevinç, 2020). In reality, emotionality and FLP are mutually constitutive, each influencing the other in shaping the concept of *familyness* (Curdt-Christiansen & Iwaniec, 2022).

Studies exploring the intersection between language and emotion highlights two distinct dimensions: the language of emotions and emotions about language(s) (Sevinç & Mirvahedi, 2023). Within FLP, investigations into the language of emotions revolve around language's role as a vehicle of emotional expression, socialization practices, and familial bonding (Sevinç & Mirvahedi, 2023). In the context of transnational families, members such as first-generation parents, who were raised and culturally molded in their native language, attribute a particular significance to this language in their emotional and cultural lives (Curdt-Christiansen & Iwaniec, 2022). The choice of their initial or heritage language is viewed as intimate, right, and natural when seeking emotional connection. In contrast, other languages may be construed as artificial, false, and untrue (Pavlenko, 2004). While studies often reveal strong correlations between emotional depth and the first/heritage language, with comparatively weaker connections to later acquired languages (Curdt-Christiansen, 2016). The language of emotions can also be culturally or habitually framed (Pavlenko, 2012). Parents often use their heritage language for expressions of endearment, discipline, and reprimands (De Houwer, 2020; Sevinç & Backus, 2019), while they may find it easier to use the later acquired language for swearing (Dewaele, 2004, 2016). Differing from first-generation parents, children like those of the second generation, who are immersed in societal language from an early age, often perceive the societal language as their primary medium for emotional expression (Tannenbaum & Yitzhaki, 2016). Consequently, parent-child divide in language preference could contribute to the emotional climate of families, potentially impacting family dynamics (Tannenbaum & Yitzhaki, 2016), which incur the topic of emotions of language.

Research on emotions of language has mainly attended to how various emotional states (e.g., positive, negative, and mixed feelings) interplay with language acquisition, linguistic repertoire, multilingual development, and practices (Curdt-Christiansen & Iwaniec, 2022; Wang, 2023). Emotion can be a result from language choices, decisions, and usage within multilingual families, while it can also be the factor that contribute to or even govern them (Sevinç, 2020; Sevinç & Mirvahedi, 2023). Within transnational families,

the disparity between parent's and child's bilingual repertoires presents a key factor affecting the harmonious relationship among intergenerational members (Pavlenko, 2004; Tannenbaum & Howie, 2002). In some cases, a child's loss of his heritage language causes parental emotional pain, shame, and regret (Sevinç, 2016; Wang, 2023). Among Chinese immigrant parents, the emotional and linguistic disconnect from their children has evoked profound sorrow, prompting them to liken their children to foreigners inhabiting a parallel realm, unable to bridge the divide into each other's inner world (see Wang & Piller, 2022). Parents might grapple with feelings of guilt and regret for not passing on their heritage language (Mills, 2004; Sevinç, 2016), yet they also feel an urgent need to privilege the societal language due to economic prospects and educational opportunities (Curdt-Christiansen, 2016; Wang, 2023). This conveys that parents frequently find themselves caught in the competing dynamics manifested "in the duality of minority versus majority, heritage language versus societal language, and monolingual versus multilingual" (Curdt-Christiansen & Iwaniec, 2022, p. 162), which often result in mixed and conflicting emotions. In contexts like Israel, where Hebrew is viewed as an asset, investment, and advantage, the Arab transnational families often opt to enroll their children in Hebrew-speaking preschools. However, this decision engenders an array of mixed emotions and intricate emotional scenarios tied to aspects like home language proficiency, familial closeness, and overall well-being (Tannenbaum & Yitzhaki, 2016). The parents' decision-making mechanism, which emphasizes the advantage of *passing as Jewish* while mitigating the emotional cost arising from compliance with the Arabic language, is intricately linked to the hierarchical power dynamics of Hebrew and Arabic within their immediate society (Tannenbaum & Yitzhaki, 2016). Emotions, as a pivotal factor in FLP, encapsulate parents' perceptions of their heritage language, but these perceptions are often influenced by educational opportunities more readily accessible through the dominant societal language (Curdt-Christiansen & Iwaniec, 2022). Thus, emotions tied to language are not solely influenced by linguistic factors, but they are deeply rooted in social contexts encompassing language prestige, social bonds, identity preferences, and family relationships (e.g., Pavlenko, 2004; Tannenbaum & Yitzhaki, 2016; Wang, 2023).

Methods

Participating families

This study is a sociolinguistic ethnography of three Chinese immigrant families who participated in the larger research investigating heritage language maintenance within a cohort of thirty-one Chinese immigrant families (Wang,

2020). While purposive sampling presents limitations in terms of generalizability, this case study facilitates the exploration of the dynamics and complexities of individual trajectories, often omitted when considering a larger cohort (Venturin, 2019). The three families were chosen and prioritized over others as subjects for this case study primarily due to the following two reasons. First, these participating families showcased the most pronounced emotional responses when discussing the subject of bilingualism. The prominence of their emotional encounters becomes evident through the adoption of evocative language (e.g., super anxious, most proud, etc.), and emotional behaviour (e.g., scolding their children, looking delighted, etc.), when parents recounted their experiences related to the practices of English and Chinese languages. Second, these families had forged an intimate rapport with me over the course of my data collection, consistently entrusting me with a substantial portion of their migration narratives. This sharing occurred over a span of three years within private spheres, particularly focusing on themes like child education, FLPs, and the ebbs and flows of their emotional journey.

The three involved families are identified by their children's pseudonyms as Xia Tian's family, Yang Mei's family, and Xing Dan's family. The family profiles, presented below, provide an account of their migration experiences, educational histories, and professional situations. These aspects form the basis of parents' language ideologies and anticipations regarding their children's education, specifically concerning language and emotion, as explored in the discussion section.

Xia Tian's family

In 2010, Xia Tian's parents migrated to Australia, and in 2012, at the age of five, Xia Tian joined them. During the data collection period, Xia Tian was living with her parents and two younger brothers in Australia. At the time of interview in 2017, Xia Tian was ten years old, enrolled in Year Three,¹ and had been in Australia for five years. Both of his parents held bachelor's degrees, which they had obtained in China. Xian Tian's father, formerly a government civil servant in China, faced challenges finding a comparable position in Australia and eventually took up manual labour. This role shift had brought about significant mental difficulties in his initial period of adjustment. His wife confided that he even cried privately when starting this labour work. Meanwhile, Xia Tian's mother, a nurse by profession in China, found herself fortunate due to the high demand for nurses in Australia. Despite having ample opportunities in her field, she shuttled between part-time jobs and being a

¹Years One/Two/Three/Four in Australia usually incorporate students aged between six-seven/seven-eight/eight-nine/nine-ten years old.

homemaker while juggling her role as the primary caregiver for their three children. This situation resulted in Xia Tian's father becoming the primary breadwinner for the family. Xia Tian's mother often expressed that her husband had come to terms with the reality of being deskilled in Australia, recognizing the scarcity of prospects for securing a job deemed "decent". As a result, their primary focus shifted towards affording their children a solid education, rather than pushing forward their own professional trajectories.

Yang Mei's family

At the age of eight, Yang Mei migrated to Australia with her mother in 2015. Within their family, she was the sole child. In the interview held in 2017, Yang Mei, then ten years old, was attending Year Four and had already spent two years in Australia. Yang Mei's mother obtained a master's degree in China and held the position of a medical director at a reputable hospital there. Following their migration, her mother transitioned into the role of a homemaker and became Yang Mei's primary caretaker in Australia, while her father continued to work in China, providing for the entire family. Yang Mei's mother frequently recounted the obstacles she encountered (e.g., communicating with her daughter's school, interacting with doctors, and shopping at local stores) due to her limited English proficiency during her early years in Australia. Despite these challenges, she considered herself fortunate to have received substantial emotional and practical support from the local church. This support not only aided her in overcoming language barriers in her everyday life but also fostered connections with her daughter's school community. In 2019, she underwent a conversion to Christianity, after which she actively engaged in church activities. This involvement included organizing Christian events tailored for Chinese immigrants. She expressed having two primary missions in Australia: ensuring Yang Mei received a quality education and spreading the Christian faith among fellow Chinese immigrants.

Xing Dan's family

Xing Dan, the sole child in his family, migrated to Australia at the age of eight with his mother in 2014. During the initial interview in 2017, Xing Dan, then eleven years old, was enrolled in Year Five, and had spent three years in Australia. His mother possessed a master's degree earned in Australia back in 2002. Following her studies, she returned to China and worked as a university lecturer in a northern city. Tragically, Xing Dan's father passed away in an accident when he was very young, serving as the primary impetus for their family's decision to migrate. In Australia, assuming the role of Xing Dan's sole

caregiver and recognizing the challenges of securing a professional position, his mother opted to be a homemaker. She dedicated herself to nurturing Xing Dan's growth and education, given her focused attention in his development.

Data sources

To comprehensively encompass FLP and its associated emotional nuances, this study incorporates three distinct sets of data: (1) audio recordings of open-ended semi-structured interviews; (2) fieldnotes from interviews, informal conversations, and observations; and (3) photographic evidence of children's literacy resources, practices, and outcomes.

The interview data were collected in 2017. In the case of parents, Mandarin was tacitly adopted by both of us as the interview language. Interviews with each parent spanned from one to three hours, covering a wide array of topics such as motives behind migration, settlement in Australia, attitudes toward language, educational philosophies, language practices before and after migration, as well as aspirations for bilingualism and academic achievement. While interacting with the children, I encouraged them to communicate in the language they felt most comfortable with. Yang Mei and Xing Dan both chose Mandarin, while Xia Tian opted for English during the interviews. These three children shared their narratives regarding language learning and practices, both at home and in schools. The interviews with each child typically lasted for around thirty minutes. Throughout the interviews, both with parents and children, instances of code-switching to either Mandarin or English did occur frequently. All the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

The established rapport with all these subject families afforded me the opportunity to engage in private conversations and observations during various casual occasions such as chance encounters and family gatherings. The pertinent fragments were noted down in my fieldnotes as soon as was practical after they occurred, and the collection of fieldnote data spanned over a lengthier period from 2017 to 2020. The informal interactions with family members allowed me to capture the lived dynamics of how both children and adults navigated FLPs, what emotions were evoked during language practices and the settlement journey, as well as what tensions arose between parents' emotional needs and their educational goals.

Evidence regarding biliteracy practices was collected and photographed during home visits with participants' consent. The collected artifacts primarily consisted of textbooks and literature books used at home, children's writing samples of both English and Chinese, and academic reports from mainstream schools. Only the selected transcripts and fieldnotes (if Chinese) for analysis were translated into English by the researcher. The photographed samples or

reports used in the analysis served as tangible proof of FLP, language practices, and scholastic performance.

Following previous ethnographies as models (e.g., Fuentes, 2020; G. Li, 2006a), I present distinct narratives of the three families' experiences, with a particular emphasis on aspects such as migration status, language and education beliefs, FLPs, and language-relevant emotions. Subsequently, I delve into an exploration of the intricate dynamics between ideology, power, and emotion.

Case study of emotional experiences in heritage language bilingualism

Xia Tian's family: "We are really proud of his language progress, both English and Chinese"

Xia Tian's Australian life commenced with his enrolment in kindergarten. To overcome initial financial difficulties after migration, Xia Tian's family experienced a series of relocations before eventually acquiring their own home. Interestingly, the socio-economic volatility that characterized this settlement phase did not appear to have a detrimental impact on their child-rearing efforts. On the contrary, Xia Tian's mother expressed gratitude for the hardships, attributing them to the positive influence on Xia Tian's personal growth. She mentioned in Excerpt 1:

- (1) From a young age, he has witnessed our struggle as parents in this new country. He understands our difficulties. He is very cooperative and well-behaved during our frequent moves. (Fieldnotes, 09/2019)

At the time of the interviews, Xia Tian was merely ten years old. However, his demeanor displayed a sense of maturity, responsibility, and ambition that seemed to transcend his age. Notably, unlike many of his peers aged nine or ten who typically require parental supervision for homework tasks (Wang, 2020), Xia Tian demonstrated a distinct level of self-discipline in managing his time. This was evident in his proactive approach to scheduling his post-school activities and studies with precision. His daily routine included a 30-minute gaming session, followed by around an hour dedicated to homework, an hour for piano practice, and outdoor exercise after dinner. Xia Tian's mother frequently used the terms *reasonable* and *cooperative* to describe his behaviour, a sentiment consistently echoed throughout the section.

Considering Xia Tian's education, their family, during Xia Tian's second year, leased out their own residence and rented another within the catchment area of a top-ranked primary school. Xia Tian's parents viewed this move as a meaningful investment in ensuring a more promising future for their child. As articulated by the mother in Excerpt 2:

- (2) We want to give him the best education we can. His new school is academically strong, and parents in the school attach great importance to academic performance. Xia Tian is our biggest child, and we hope he can be a role model for the other two kids. (Fieldnotes, 12/2017)

Given that education is of utmost importance in Chinese culture (G. Li, 2002, 2006b; J. Li, 2001, 2004; Mok, 2015; Wu, 2011), all these Chinese parents attached significant importance to, and actively engaged in, their children's academic activities. The prevailing aspiration for academic achievement could potentially be intensified by the perception of a minority disadvantage faced by Chinese immigrants, including the families under study, in their host country (J. Li, 2004). Throughout the study, parents, excluding Yang Mei's mother, shared their initial financial hardships upon migrating to Australia, and except for Xia Tian's mother, endured disruptions in their careers due to migration. Nevertheless, they held a strong belief that their children's academic accomplishments would not only reshape their own destinies but would also radiate a positive influence onto other family members. In the specific case of Xia Tian's father, his dismay over career setbacks was considerably alleviated by Xia Tian's academic achievements in school. Proudly, Xia Tian's mother showcased quite a few certificates and medals, acquired from diverse activities (e.g., piano performance) and academic performances (e.g., English competition), illustrating Xia Tian's accomplishments. The parents held exceptional high expectations for Xia Tian, viewing his achievements as a triumph that could act as a beacon of inspiration for his younger siblings (see Excerpt 2). Throughout the data, parents exhibited a strong commitment to investing in their child's education. This commitment was apparent not only in their deliberate choice of desirable catchment areas and prestigious schools (as observed above), but also in their careful navigation of linguistic choices and engagement in multilingual practices (as elaborated in the subsequent analysis).

During my home visits, what struck me the most was the sight of ten-year-old Xia Tian engrossed in reading an array of sophisticated Chinese books. In my previous larger project, the same level of Chinese literacy skills as Xia Tian's was rarely observed among children of comparable ages upon arrival (e.g., age 5 or below) (Wang, 2020). Likewise, Xia Tian's family stood out as an exceptional case, displaying a profound pride in their language maintenance strategies and a high-level of contentment with the outcomes of their maintenance efforts. When I expressed my admiration for this accomplishment in the Chinese language, Xia Tian's father proudly showcased a bookshelf brimming with a diverse collection of Chinese books (see Figure 1). These books were meticulously chosen to enhance various skill sets as Xia Tian's father conveyed with a distinct sense of achievement (see

Excerpt 3):

- (3) We purposefully chose these books. These ones [pointing to books] have a lot of useful examples which can guide children in social communication. These encyclopedias can enhance his overall knowledge . . . And these comics explained math problems in an interesting way . . . He has great interest in them. I always say to him, “Whenever you have difficulties, remember to turn to those specific books for help”. (Fieldnotes, 12/2017)



Figure 1

A sample of Xia Tian's reading collection which includes books on learning strategies, personal development, encyclopaedias, etc.

Xian Tian's father prided himself in the effect of their FLP— extensive but selective Chinese reading. As he provided an example in Excerpt 4:

- (4) Last time when he felt he was wronged in school, I advised him to read [the name of a specific Chinese book] for guidance. (Fieldnotes, 12/2017)

The efficacy of reading Chinese books resonated with Xia Tian as well, as he added in Excerpt 5:

- (5) I was criticized in school and felt sad . . . These books taught me how to deal with relationships with people. It helped me. (Fieldnotes, 12/2017)

The bidirectional positiveness in heritage language maintenance within the context of Xia Tian and his parents is a rare occurrence among most Chinese

families, as evidenced in my research (Wang, 2020, 2023). In fact, the families I studied, including those of Yang Mei and Xing Dan, generally exhibited a prevalence of negative emotions and experiences in their bilingual child-rearing efforts (e.g., anger at children's resistance and anxiety about language erosion) (Wang, 2023; Wang et al., 2023). This positivity in language retention and emotional exchanges can be attributed to multiple factors, particularly the parents' consistent and strategic FLP, and the child's agency. Xia Tian's family employs FLP that goes beyond spoken language, emphasizing the significance of expanding reading capacity. Notably, an individual's reading ability significantly influences their overall literacy proficiency (Wang, 2020), which in turn enhances their speaking skills. Furthermore, the materials they thoughtfully select for reading are not just tools for language transfer, but also serve as vehicles for conveying values, morals, and their way of life to the next generation. Xia Tian's mother pleasantly shared that Xia Tian was an "easy child to accept my Chinese way of thinking" and she attributed Xia Tian's displayed "sensibility" to his grasp of "Chinese elements" (Wang, 2023). The knowledge of the Chinese language and culture established a synergy between an Australian-grown child — Xia Tian, and his parents who identify strongly with Chinese culture, forming a foundation for intergenerational communication and collaboration. Although Xia Tian did momentarily shift to English in Year Two while conversing with his parents and siblings, he quickly returned to speaking Chinese. As his mother elaborated (Excerpt 6):

- (6) I encouraged him to speak Chinese, setting an example for his brothers. Now he actively communicates in Chinese at home. He's a reasonable boy who's open to our advice. (Fieldnotes, 12/2017)

The language used by Xia Tian's mother, including terms like *active*, *reasonable*, and *willing*, not only reflects the parents' sense of fulfillment in fostering linguistic engagement but also signifies the harmonious rapport between parent and child through the utilization and practice of Chinese, the child's heritage language. In fact, the perceived success in language transmission and the positive emotional atmosphere fosters a benign circle, interconnecting parental dedication, the child's achievements, and emotional bonds within the family (see also Wang, 2023). This linguistic harmony underscores the potential of establishing a state of "harmonious bilingualism" within immigrant and minority families, as well as emphasizing the importance of the heritage language for the socio-emotional "well-being of families in bilingual settings" (De Houwer, 2020, p. 63).

When I asked about the driving force behind Xia Tian's parents' substantial efforts in facilitating his Chinese learning, his father explained that Chinese was important because (Excerpt 7):

- (7) China plays a more and more important role in the international world, whether economically or politically. (Fieldnotes, 12/2017)

His mother then expanded on the instrumental value of Chinese, stating that it was now such that “even foreigners learned Chinese”, as she continued, “so why don’t our children learn? I have confidence in China” (Fieldnotes, 12/2017). The sentiments voiced by Xia Tian’s parents have demonstrated that the political and economic position of their home country (China) empowers its social agents (Chinese immigrants) in migration contexts (Australia) to preserve their heritage languages and cultures (Wang, 2023). Strengthened by the perceived socio-economic and political potential, Xian Tian’s parents discovered a heightened impetus and unwavering dedication to preserving Chinese as their heritage language. As the Chinese heritage language increasingly assumes the role of a valuable asset for investment, the potential erosion of this linguistic connection can evoke parental apprehension and concerns regarding the anticipated economic impact (Wang, 2023).

The strong aspiration for Chinese heritage language maintenance does not always translate into consistency and enduring action, especially in priority competition with English—the world lingua franca (G. Li, 2006a). Despite their dedicated commitment to supporting Chinese language learning, Xia Tian’s parents suspended his Chinese tutoring for a period when he was in Year Three, which coincided with the initial interview. During this period, they channelled their concerted effort into preparing for a significant Year Four assessment—Opportunity Classes exams, designed for gifted and talented students in Year Five and Year Six. Xia Tian’s mother explained the necessity of altering their FLP in Excerpt 8:

- (8) Right now, our main goal is to do well in the OC [Opportunity Classes exams]. So, all the things we’re getting ready are meant for the OC tests . . . I believe we should often put the most important things first. (Interview, 07/2017)

Language decisions are not merely a matter confined to individual families but are also constantly informed by national language policies and the education system (Curdt-Christiansen, 2014). Perceiving limited benefits of Chinese proficiency for success in standardized tests, Xian Tian’s parents found themselves grappling between linguistic loyalty and educational reality. This dilemma resulted in a higher emphasis on subjects deemed more *useful*, typically those related to English, at the expense of allocating fewer resources for Chinese literacy.

In this study, Xia Tian’s family is not unique in giving priority to their child’s English language skills and English-related subjects, sometimes resulting in the decision to temporarily suspend or even discontinue Chinese language tutoring (as also evidenced in both Yang Mei’s and Xing Dan’s

families, discussed in the following sections). However, FLPs tend to be fluid, ever evolving, and even conflictual. This dynamic nature of FLPs emerges from parents' contextualized evaluation of their children's potential opportunities, as well as weighing the associated economic gains and losses. During my subsequent visit to Xia Tian's home, which took place five months after the first interview, I discovered that Xia Tian's Chinese tutoring had been reinstated. His mother provided an explanation for this decision in Excerpt 9:

- (9) I believe he won't have problems in passing the OC test. What makes me really happy is how well he's doing in English—all high distinction [showing the report of ICAS exams].² Since we don't need to worry about his English, our main focus right now is to shore up his Chinese. (Fieldnotes, 12/2017)

The centrality of instrumental English in FLP becomes evident through the mother's emotional response. What she takes the most pride in is Xia Tian's excellence in English, marked by the term *distinction*, rather than his achievements in Chinese. The emotional bias stems from the elevated value attributed to English proficiency, particularly due to its immediate relevance in the Opportunity Classes (OC) test. While parents, including Xia Tian's mother, view English as the gateway to quality education in Australia and a means of upward social mobility, they also acknowledge Mandarin's global significance, which could yield economic opportunities later in life, as discussed previously. Parental confidence in their children's English skills often arises from external validations offered by institutions like the OC test or Selective High School test. In cases akin to Xia Tian's mother, when parents are reassured about their child's academic advantage and are certain that dedicating time to Chinese language learning will not jeopardise their English excellence, they reintegrate Chinese learning into their child's routine, mirroring Xia Tian's experience. Essentially, Chinese language learning can remain consistent only if it is believed to be achieved at no cost of their children's English-focused education. In fact, both the present study and the larger project (Wang, 2020) highlight Xia Tian's family as an exception in successfully balancing their child's English proficiency and Chinese language development. In contrast, many other Chinese families, including Yang Mei's and Xing Dan's, grapple with significant emotional challenges while attempting to prioritize English while also preserving Chinese (detailed in the following sections). Despite parents holding dual expectations within the FLP—pertaining to maintaining the heritage language and acquiring excellence in the societal language, the side that leads to success in the dominant society may often, if not always,

²ICAS stands for International Competitions and Assessments for Schools. It is a skill-based assessment of six subjects, including English, Mathematics, Science, Digital Technologies, Writing, and Spelling Bee, designed for primary and secondary students.

prevail over the other (J. Wang, 2012). The legitimacy of parents' language decisions ultimately appears to be shaped by unbalanced power dynamics among linguistic resources (e.g., prioritizing superior English over perceived inferior Chinese) at institutional and societal levels, irrespective of the potential consequences of language loss and shift.

Yang Mei's family: "I am really worried when her Chinese/English jumps out"

Yang Mei commenced her education in an Australian public school at Year Two following migration. Hailing from a relatively affluent family, her mother appeared relatively unburdened by financial constraints in the migration context, despite not pursuing work in Australia. What most concerned Yang Mei's mother was the perceived inadequacy in English proficiency, which, as she expressed, impeded her ability to effectively assist Yang Mei's education in Australia. This language-related anxiety seemed to exert a substantial impact on her life during the initial two years of migration. She often lamented (Excerpt 10):

- (10) I didn't know how to communicate during parent-teacher meetings. I even struggled to write a sick note to the school when Yang Mei caught a cold. (Fieldnotes, 07/2020)

Yang Mei's education became the main factor influencing her family's choice of their initial residential community, which was located in an area boasting reputable public and private schools. Yang Mei transitioned to a high-ranking private school when a vacancy opened in Year Four. Her mother found greater contentment with the private educational system compared to the preceding public one. She held the conviction that private schools, including the one her daughter attended, offered superior resources for enhancing academic achievement and fostering extracurricular pursuits. In contrast, she believed that public schools provided only the rudimentary aspects of children's education. Like numerous Chinese families in the larger project (Wang, 2023), Yang Mei's family placed considerable emphasis on her academic education. Differing from many other Chinese children in the study (Wang, 2023), Yang Mei did not engage in the competition for admission to Selective High Schools. Yang Mei's mother acknowledged that their well-off financial status spared her from the pressures associated with competing for premium resources within the public educational system.

Before migrating, Yang Mei had already developed a strong reading ability, evident from the range of Chinese chapter books she delved into during her first year in the new country. During family gatherings, Yang Mei's mother emphasized the importance of the Chinese language for transmitting their cultural heritage and values. Acknowledging the importance placed on

Chinese, I inquired why the mother had not enrolled Yang Mei in Chinese community schools to enhance her proficiency. In response, Yang Mei's mother explained in Excerpt 11:

- (11) It is not the right time for learning Chinese. The most urgent thing is to get better at all aspects of English — speaking, reading, and spelling. Currently she should focus on English tutoring classes. (Fieldnotes, 09/2017)

Recognizing Yang Mei's English limitations as a potential threat to her academic performance, her mother deemed it essential to enhance Yang Mei's proficiency in all aspects of the English language. While valuing the importance of Chinese for cultural preservation, the decision was made to postpone Chinese learning until Yang Mei reached a satisfactory level of English competence. During our initial private interactions, Yang Mei's mother frequently shared her concerns about Yang Mei's habit of frequently interjecting Chinese words when conversing in English with her peers. There were numerous instances where the mother expressed her frustration over Yang Mei's inclination toward Chinese, stating (Excerpt 12):

- (12) Whenever she feels nervous or struggles to express herself, her Chinese jumps out ... She even reads Chinese novels in secret during class! (Fieldnotes, 09/2017)

I noticed that Yang Mei's mother consistently reminded her that Chinese should not be used in public. In fact, at that stage, the pressure to adapt to the English environment became a heavy emotional burden for Yang Mei. Her mother reported that Yang Mei's difficulty in speaking 'proper' English caused her to feel inadequate at school, resulting in a persistent negative mood at home. Yang Mei herself shared her sadness over her limited English skills, which had caused her to feel excluded by English-speaking peers of the same ethnic background at her school. She noted in Excerpt 13:

- (13) They [the Chinese girls at school] didn't like me. They avoided playing with me because I couldn't speak English well. (Interview, 07/2017)

In situations where English proficiency serves as a criterion for newcomers like Yang Mei to gain acceptance within social circles, such as her schoolmates, achieving fluency in English for assimilation and inclusion becomes an urgent task, pressing both children and their parents. This situation generates significant anxiety for the entire family. Beyond the apprehension of potential exclusion, the mother's worry regarding Yang Mei's academic disadvantage in an English-dominant school further intensified her concerns. Throughout the first and early second years following migration, the mother constantly expressed this anxiety during our private discussions, saying (Excerpt 14):

- (14) She [Yang Mei] can't understand everything taught at school. But I don't know how to help her. My English is poor, and I even struggle to communicate with her teachers. (Fieldnotes, 07/2020)

However, towards the end of the second year after migration, I noticed a shift in Yang Mei's mother's language-related concerns—her anxiety had transitioned from English to Chinese. That is, the pressure tied to English had eased, but apprehension regarding Yang Mei's Chinese language proficiency was on the rise. She started voicing dissatisfaction about Yang Mei's frequent switches to English when speaking within the family. Concurrently, she expressed a hope for Yang Mei to interact in Chinese with other children of Chinese background in Australia. During gatherings of Chinese families around that period, Yang Mei's mother frequently urged her to use Chinese more often, even though Yang Mei often overlooked this request. Rather than the previous concern of “her Chinese jumping out when speaking with peers”, she now exhibited anxiety about Yang Mei's new tendency of “English jumping out at any time”. From my observations, Yang Mei's previous habit of reading Chinese books seemed to have been replaced by a preference for English literature, evident from the stacks of English books she amassed from libraries. Yang Mei's mother was then taken aback by the declining proficiency in Yang Mei's Chinese, including her spoken expressions. She illustrated this with an example (Excerpt 15):

- (15) Now what she says even fails to convey what she means. She made herself the laughingstock of our family in this spring festival. I asked her to greet her grandparents with *Gou nian da ji* [狗年大吉, Good luck in the year of the Dog]. Can you guess what she actually said? She was anxious, and her words came out as *Gou ji tiao qiang* [狗急跳墙, a desperate dog tries to jump over the wall].³ Oh, our family laughed their heads off. (Fieldnotes, 02/2018)

Children often experience a shift in their language use within one or two years of starting school, as observed in various studies (G. Li, 2002, 2006a, 2006b; Zhang, 2008). This shift inevitably alters language usage patterns both within and outside the family, as evident in Yang Mei's transition from using Chinese to preferring English. When exposure to and use of the heritage language decrease significantly both in quality and in sheer quantity (as seen in Yang Mei's case), a child's proficiency in the family language can be affected over time (Rothman, 2009). Yang Mei's diminishing ability in the proper use of Chinese can be attributed to both reduced engagement with Chinese reading materials and increased exposure to an English-dominant society. Given the lack of effective institutional support for heritage language

³The two four-character idioms, *Gou nian da ji* [狗年大吉] and *Gou ji tiao qiang* [狗急跳墙], sound similar but have different meanings.

education (Lo Bianco, 2008; Piller & Gerber, 2021), finding a balance between English language competence and Chinese language maintenance is seldom accomplished by individual families (Wang, 2020). But the result of either inadequate English language skills or loss of the Chinese language often triggers negative sentiments (e.g., the sense of embarrassment experienced by Yang Mei's mother) and impacts on the socio-emotional well-being of immigrant and minority families (Wang, 2023).

It should be noted that, when Yang's Mei's mother's concern shifted from English to Chinese, she dedicated more time to assisting Yang Mei with her Chinese studies. For example, besides reminding Yang Mei to speak Chinese at home, she invested her weekends in watching Chinese program with Yang Mei. She even mentioned her intention to find a tutor to help Yang Mei with her Chinese. In reality, FLPs, shaped by emotions, undergo continuous change, contingent on the families' current requirements and the evolving dynamics of the children's bilingual abilities.

Xing Dan's family: "Learning Chinese is more than a heritage issue, but Selective school is a worthier investment"

Xing Dan embarked on his Australian schooling journey in Year Two following migration. Prior to that, he had completed Year Three in China. During the interview, I met eleven-year-old Xing Dan, who was currently a Year Four student at an academically high-ranked primary school situated within a predominantly Chinese community. Xing Dan's mother exhibited contentment with his English language proficiency at school, showcasing samples of his award-winning English essays. She held high aspirations for Xing Dan's prospects of securing admission to a Selective High School. However, she also expressed her uncertainties, pondering (Excerpt 16):

(16) What if Xing Dan doesn't pass the Selective High School test? (Fieldnotes, 10/2018)

She elaborated in Excerpt 17:

(17) Public schools aren't ideal, and private schools are too expensive, so a Selective School is the best choice for us. (Fieldnotes, 10/2018)

In addition to her aspirations for Xing Dan's success in English-related schooling, his mother actively engaged in Xing Dan's Chinese studies. Dissatisfied with the literacy programs offered by Chinese community schools, she assumed full responsibility for tutoring Xing Dan in Chinese using textbooks from China. To efficiently manage his learning, she also utilized Chinese math books to cover both math and Chinese studies, terming it *yi shi er niao* [一石二鸟] (killing two birds with one stone). Much like Xia Tian's

parents, Xing Dan's mother firmly linked her goal of preserving the Chinese language to anticipated socio-economic benefits. In her perspective, Chinese learning is "more than a heritage issue" because she sees Chinese as "super-useful in the future" (Interview, 11/2017). She extended the practical value of learning Chinese by pointing out that even the families of celebrities were embracing the language, offering examples in Excerpt 18:

- (18) You know, even Trump's granddaughter is learning Chinese, and the former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd can speak Chinese, as well as the children of many big financial CEOs are learning Chinese ... So, why wouldn't our children learn Chinese? (Interview, 11/2017)

Recognizing the growing significance of Chinese, Xing Dan's mother employed various strategies, including exclusively using Chinese at home, reading Chinese texts, and assigning Chinese math homework, with a hope to maintain and develop Xing Dan's Chinese oracy and literacy. However, it appeared that she felt a considerable sense of frustration due to the limited progress in Xing Dan's literacy skills. She expressed her disappointment, saying in Excerpt 19:

- (19) Oh! His Chinese seemed to be disappearing rapidly, almost like taking a step back a thousand miles a day. He actually forgot many characters. Oh, my goodness! On that day, he was reading an article and there was a sentence that said, 'Tears in my eyes dropped one by one', but he read out as 'my eyeballs dropped one by one'. (Interview, 10/2017)

Parents generally desire their children to grow up fluent and literate in both their heritage language and the dominant societal language. But the responsibility of maintaining the Chinese heritage language, if solely placed on families, becomes a laborious task, often without a satisfying outcome (Wang, 2020). The feeling of disappointment or incomplete success experienced by parents (e.g., Xing Dan's mother), draws attention to the importance of policy support and institutional intervention in promoting heritage/minority language education. Despite Xing Dan's mother attaching great importance to Chinese, she struggled to sustain her efforts in maintaining it, especially when juggling the pursuit of academic excellence in high-stakes assessments. Much like other parents in the larger project (Wang, 2020), Xing Dan's mother suspended Chinese tutoring at home when Xing Dan reached Year Four. This pause aimed to prioritize his English learning and mastery of English-related subjects, which are crucial for the Selective High School entrance test. As Xing Dan put it in Excerpt 20:

- (20) My mother said she will let me continue learning Chinese after the Selective High School test, but for now, my focus should be on English since Chinese isn't part of the exam. (Interview, 10/2017)

This preference for the *superior* language over the *inferior* one further legitimizes within the home environment the English-only norm, which children are well-informed of in schools. However, this norm can have a negative impact on children's attitudes towards their heritage language. As Xing Dan highlighted in Excerpt 21:

- (21) English is my main language ... My teachers told us not to speak languages other than English at school. (Interview, 10/2017)

This inconsistency in FLP with respect to heritage language learning reflects parents' uncertainties and insecurities about their children's education in a new society. It also reveals a strong trend towards linguistic instrumentalism in the context of heritage language bilingualism. In fact, all the parents in the study hold Chinese in high regard, whether as a cultural heritage or a valuable skill. However, they tend to prioritize the language of formal schooling. This is driven by concerns that emphasizing Chinese might hinder their children's academic achievements in the mainstream education system.

Understanding the families' language decisions and the emotional climate: A discussion

This study delves into the emotional experiences of three Chinese immigrant families, exploring how migration status, educational priorities, and FLP decisions intersect. The dynamics between emotions, language, and migration observed within these case-study families highlights three key characteristics: the significant impact of heritage language bilingualism on socio-emotional well-being, the fluid interplay between evolving emotions and shifting FLPs in connection with bilingual practices, and the prevailing influence of instrumentalism within FLP decisions.

Heritage language bilingualism is critical to the socio-emotional well-being of immigrant minority families

In the study, emotions of parents raising bilingual children is closely related to the transmission of Chinese heritage language and the development of English in the societal context. Among the three children participating in the study, all demonstrated sufficient Chinese communication skills during the interview, leading to parents' emotional investment being more closely tied to their children's literacy levels and advanced fluency in the heritage language. The desired level of Chinese heritage language proficiency, as revealed in the study, encompasses multiple aspects such as the ability to read complex Chinese literature (as evident in Xia Tian's, Yang Mei's, and Xing Dan's families), comprehend Chinese culture and parental perspectives (noted in Xia Tian's and Yang Mei's families), and appropriately employ Chinese words and

idioms (emphasized in Yang Mei's family). The fear of children losing their Chinese language abilities triggers emotions of embarrassment (as experienced by Yang Mei's mother), as well as frustration and inadequacy (as expressed by Xing Dan's mother). Conversely, the advancement of children's Chinese literacy skills is celebrated with feelings of contentment, accomplishment, and pride (as observed in Xia Tian's parents). All parents recognize the pivotal role of English in achieving academic excellence at school and view it as a gateway to quality education, such as gaining admission to Selective High Schools. The predominant status of English in their children's immediate education is reinforced by external validation through test results and school reports, offering parents substantial reassurance about their children's English language proficiency and their educational prospects in Australia (as seen in Xia Tian's case). On the other hand, negative feedback from educators induces parental concern and a sense of urgency (as in Yang Mei's case). In light of these nuances, while parents may have specific expectations regarding their children's bilingual capabilities, their overarching aspiration is to attain heritage language bilingualism — a mastery of English for thriving in school and adequate Chinese for competitiveness in the relevant job market.

Parents' aspirations for bilingualism evoke a spectrum of emotions, ranging from joy and pride to frustration and a sense of loss. These emotional responses significantly influence the family dynamics, shaping either a harmonious bilingualism marked by smooth and enjoyable language acquisition, or a conflicted bilingualism characterized by tensions surrounding language use and acquisition (De Houwer, 2020). For many transnational and minority families, their experiences with bilingualism lean towards conflict rather than harmony, as their efforts in bilingual childrearing or heritage language maintenance often carry negative emotions such as anxiety, pressure, shame, grief, and feelings of failure (Sevinç, 2020; Wang, 2023; Wang et al., 2023). In the research, both Yang Mei's and Xing Dan's mothers grappled with the dual objectives of fostering their children's Chinese language proficiency and ensuring their English language competence for academic success. Xing Dan's mother, for instance, expressed concern about the adequacy of his English skills for excelling in the Selective High School Test, simultaneously experiencing shock at his diminishing proficiency in recognizing Chinese characters and reading Chinese texts. She vividly illustrated the speed of this decline, describing it as a rate of "one thousand miles per day" (see Excerpt 19, as analysed earlier). While individuals can have varying emotional responses to their bilingual experiences, the evident language-related pressures, challenges, and mixed feelings within these two families indicate a likelihood of conflicted bilingualism rather than harmonious coexistence of languages. In contrast, Xia Tian's parents stand out for their positive emotional display concerning their

bilingual practices, a rarity both in this study and in the larger project (Wang, 2020). Xia Tian's parents expressed contentment with his proficiency in Chinese, showcased by his ability to read sophisticated texts and comprehend the Chinese mindset. They also took pride in his excellence in English, as evidenced by his top-tier performance in the ICAS exams. Moreover, they felt gratified by Xia Tian's cooperative attitudes towards FLPs. The harmonious bilingual environment within Xia Tian's family can be attributed to their strategic language planning and Xia Tian's active involvement in his bilingual education. In contrast to the prevalent trend of language shift among migrant children (Piller & Gerber, 2021; Wang, 2020), the uplifting example of Xia Tian's family provides insights into leveraging familial and community resources to preserve heritage languages and offers potential strategies in linguistic and cultural pedagogy to foster children's intrinsic motivation in learning their heritage language.

Thus, a child's proficiency in both their heritage and the societal languages stands as a noteworthy factor shaping the emotional climate within families. This aspect is closely intertwined with their subjective well-being, encompassing various aspects such as their "overall physical and mental health, temperament, and personality" (De Houwer, 2020, p. 64).

Emotional fluctuation and FLP inconsistency are the norms from a quasi-longitudinal perspective

The research conducted a comprehensive follow-up with the three subject families over a span of three years (2017–2020), subsequent to their initial interviews in 2017. This longitudinal investigation facilitated profound exploration into language ideologies, educational aspirations, migration narratives, and professional situations. It also enabled meticulous observation of the families' language usage patterns, education commitment, parent-child dynamics, and social connections. The enduring exploration of ideologies, relationships, migration, and bilingual practices furnishes abundant resources for comprehending the fluctuations of emotions alongside language proficiencies (e.g., language shift or dominance), the reasons behind the infrequent consistency of FLPs within migration and minority contexts (e.g., Chinese immigrant families in Australia), and the interplay of emotions with FLP within a linguistically stratified society, where hierarchical norms (e.g., the superior-over-inferior paradigm) come into play.

Parents' emotions undergo significant fluctuations influenced by their children's bilingual repertoires and are closely tied to changes in their evolving language abilities. For parents like those of Yang Mei and Xing Dan, a constant thread of language-related insecurity and anxiety persists, albeit the specific language that triggers these emotions shifts according to the children's

language dominance. Notably, emotional patterns such as the transference of anxiety from English to Chinese, appear to mirror the children's linguistic shift from Chinese to English. This transition commonly takes place within the initial two years after migration. Over the span of three years of data collection, I meticulously observed the emotional landscape within Yang Mei's family, specifically in relation to the dynamics of her Chinese and English language use and proficiency. In the second year, the focal point of the mother's linguistic unease shifted to addressing the decline in Chinese language literacy and fluency, away from concerns about enhancing Yang Mei's English speaking, spelling, and reading skills. The ebb and flow of parental emotions, entwined with their children's shifting language patterns and dominance, also stems from the parents' dual expectations for their children's proficiency in the heritage language and their competency in English within a profit discourse.

Various facets of emotion are intricately interwoven with both children's linguistic (in)competency and parents' educational aspirations, significantly influencing FLP strategies, choices, and practices (Sevinç & Mirvahedi, 2023). Given the intricate nature and fluctuating disposition of parental emotions, the FLPs adopted by the subject families appear inconsistent and sometimes contradictory, reflecting the tension that arises when the heritage language and the language of schooling contend for prominence within the familial domain. Both Xing Dan's and Xia Tian's parents suspended their children's Chinese language learning while preparing them for the Selective High School test. Recognising the vulnerability of Chinese in an English dominant school, they resumed Chinese tutoring once the high-stakes tests were completed (Xing Dan's mother) or when they felt assured that the child's academic excellence would not be threatened by Chinese learning (Xia Tian's parents). For the acquisition of the *more important* English language, Yang Mei's mother chose to forego her daughter's Chinese language education after migration. However, upon witnessing Yang Mei's rapid shift in language proficiency, the mother became concerned for her daughter's Chinese learning once again. The ever-evolving linguistic preferences and biases reflected in the shifting dynamics of FLPs, exemplify the prevalence of linguistic instrumentalism within the family sphere, which will be further discussed in the subsequent section.

The fluctuation of emotions and the inconsistency of FLPs reflect parents' linguistic insecurities and ambiguities regarding their children's education in a migration context (Wang, 2023; Wang et al., 2023). The emotional nuances observed in the bilingual negotiations within these families reveal the co-constitutive nature of emotion and FLP. Emotions shape language ideologies, management, and practices, while the outcomes of FLP, conversely, elicit an array of emotions.

Instrumental orientation is dominant in FLP ideology and decision

Amidst the trend toward the commodification of language, the value and significance of languages are increasingly assessed based on projected returns and potential profits within a socio-economic marketplace (Curran, 2021; Heller, 2010; Heller & Duchêne, 2012). The pervasive influence of linguistic instrumentalism continues to mold language ideologies, policies, and practices, as enacted in bilingual domains of the three studied families. This influence is evident in their valorisation of both Chinese and English, as well as their navigation of the prioritization struggle between these two languages within FLP.

Throughout the study, all parents actively engaged in facilitating their children's bilingual becoming, such as providing Chinese literacy resources, using Chinese media programs, and seeking external English tutoring. However, a perpetual challenge that they faced was striking a balance between preserving Chinese while simultaneously prioritizing English. In truth, these parents' dual expectations and emotional battles are tightly intertwined with their materialistic orientations. These parents (e.g., Xia Tian's parents and Xing Dan's mother) overtly linked their motivation for maintaining the Chinese language with its socio-economic significance ascribed to Chinese (Mandarin, to be precise), alongside China's considerable political and economic influence on the global stage, even though the value of cultural factors persisted in the expression of parents (e.g., Yang Mei's mother). For these parents, 'heritage' Mandarin, "en-route to becoming the world's other lingua franca" (Seng & Lai, 2010, p. 25), has emerged as a sought-after 'commodity' that they intend to invest in for their children's educational and professional future. Xing Dan's mother, for instance, explicitly stated that the value of Chinese is more in its *utility* than as a *heritage*. However, despite the recognition of Mandarin's heritage value and global prominence, it loses significance when competing against English — the language of schooling and the foremost lingua franca worldwide. The fear that allocating time to Chinese might jeopardize mastery of the more *useful* English led Yang Mei's mother to postpone her daughter's Chinese learning plans. Similarly, Xing Dan's mother halted her son's Chinese tutoring. Even the harmonious bilingual progression of Xia Tian was conditioned by the sense of security derived from Xia Tian's excellence in English and academic achievements. The decision of whether and when to set aside, suspend, or reinstate Chinese education hinges on the child's competence in English and related subjects. Although yielding to the esteemed status of English was a parental choice, they found themselves constantly caught in an emotional dilemma, repeatedly assessing the pros and cons of varying degrees of Mandarin-English bilingualism. Parental apprehension about their children's diminishing Chinese proficiency becomes

more pronounced as they anticipate a greater economic cost associated with the growing importance of Chinese (Wang, 2023). Nevertheless, parents' focus on the profit aspect of heritage language bilingualism reflects the strong aspirations of Chinese middle-class families to ascend the social ladder both within mainstream society and beyond.

About bilingualism, instrumentalism, and emotionality—Conclusions and implications

FLP stands as a pivotal realm for fostering multilingual development, upholding linguistic heritage, and ensuring cultural continuity (Curdt-Christiansen & Lanza, 2018; Spolsky, 2012). The exemplary case of Xia Tian's harmonious bilingual development provides a beacon of inspiration, deftly countering the prevailing trend of language attrition and loss among Chinese migrant children (Wang, 2020). However, the realization of such harmonious bilingualism hinges upon the strategic language planning undertaken by parents, accompanied by effective literacy input, and the child's proactive agency in embracing bilingualism. In practice, the preservation and advancement of the home language often grapple with constraints stemming from educational reality and instrumental orientation. This struggle frequently leads to parental conformity with "institutional structures that promote linguistic hierarchy" (Curdt-Christiansen & Huang, 2021, p. 61). The shifts observed in linguistic policies and practices within the families examined here, which "prioritise school languages and academic matters" (Curdt-Christiansen & Lanza, 2018, p. 128), underscore the previously identified social factors critical to the vitality or decline of minority languages—these encompass "educational demands, public discourse and linguistic instrumentalism" (Curdt-Christiansen & Huang, 2021, p. 61). Accompanying the ascendant influence of language commodification is the gradual erosion of space for sustaining less commercially viable minority languages, particularly those that do not yield immediate profit gains. This study augments existing research on bilingualism, instrumentalism, and transnationalism by delving into the emotional dimension of heritage language bilingualism. This dimension, while pertinent, has not received commensurate attention in extant studies on language and migration. Within the scope of the research, the ups and downs of language-related emotions, such as feeling encouraged to maintain a *profitable* heritage Chinese language but also feeling a sense of loss upon discontinuing investment in the Chinese language, are intimately interwoven with bilingual aspirations and instrumental orientations at both individual and societal levels. The vitality of the linguistic ecosystem and the emotional well-being of migrant minority families underscore the necessity for a harmonious coexistence of societal and minority languages. The accomplishment of

heritage language bilingualism, especially concerning literacy, calls for a collaborative effort involving individual families, state institutions, and public discourses.

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