



**Language learning experiences and the identities of adolescent Chinese
heritage language learners in England**

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On 27 August 2020, I received my PhD offer. That day marked the beginning of the most inspiring, challenging, and adventurous journey of my life – a journey that unfolded alongside the global Covid-19 pandemic. Along the way, I have experienced both loss and growth. As I look back, I feel deeply grateful to all those who have accompanied and supported me throughout this extraordinary chapter.

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Abstract

Globalisation has intensified population mobility worldwide, contributing to feelings of displacement and lack of belonging, particularly in migrant communities. Identity has become a focus in language education research. This study investigates how the identities of adolescent Chinese heritage language learners in England (aged 12–16) are constructed and negotiated through their learning experiences of different languages and language varieties.

Chinese heritage language learners refer to those with a family or ancestral heritage to Chinese language varieties. Identity is understood here as an understanding of his or her relationship to the world across time and space. The research addresses three research questions: (1) What are adolescent Chinese HL learners' attitudes towards their languages and language varieties, and what may inform their attitudes? (2) How are the motivations and emotions of adolescent Chinese heritage language learners constructed and developed in the context of their heritage language learning? (3) How do adolescent Chinese HL learners negotiate their identities in the context of their languages and language varieties?

The study is informed by a social constructionist paradigm and uses a bricolage approach to the theoretical framework, drawing together concepts and theories from different disciplines, including language ideologies, Motivational Self System, and Social Identity Theory.

A qualitative methodology was adopted, involving 10 Chinese families across England, with one parent participating in each case. Each family took part in four semi-structured interviews. A drawing activity (language portraits) was conducted in the first interview to explore linguistic repertoires, emotions and identities. Interview topics included language practices, support strategies, learners' motivation, emotions, and intergenerational dynamics. The social constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic were also considered. Thematic analysis revealed key themes including: the privilege of Mandarin Chinese over other HL varieties; English as the dominant language in England; reconsidering Chinese character writing skills; translanguaging and fluidity of adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities.

The findings contribute to understanding the identities of adolescents in Chinese heritage families in relation to their linguistic repertoires. This study has implications and recommendations for heritage language education and family support practices in multicultural England.

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Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/study-skills/assessment/academic-integrity/academic-integrity>). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Chapter overview

With the rise in global migration due to EU expansion, refugee movements and globalised markets (Office for National Statistics, 2022a), the demographics of school pupils in England have been changing. In the most recent data (2025) the proportion of pupils from a minority ethnic group (i.e., other than White British) has risen to 38.0%, while 21.4% of school-aged children are from homes where a language other than English is spoken (Department for Education, 2025). In state-funded secondary schools, the percentage of multilingual pupils has been steadily rising and is currently at 19.2% (DfE, 2025). Moreover, these upward trends are projected to continue into the future (DfE, 2025), which makes the case for more attention to understanding the language and culture of school-aged children from non-White-British backgrounds.

Valdés (2001) defines heritage language (HL) as a family language other than the dominant language of a society. Accordingly, the term “heritage language learners” refers to people who learn a non-English language which has a particular family relevance to them, and they are capable of speaking or at least understanding this language to some extent (Fishman, 2001; Valdés, 2001). Of the 9 million pupils in England, approximately 2 million children aged 5 to 18 can be considered heritage language speakers. In Section 1.4, definitions of heritage language and heritage language learners are further developed.

Longitudinal studies have shown that children who speak languages other than English at home often experience a gradual decline in their heritage language proficiency from early childhood, with a more significant decline typically occurring after the start of formal schooling (Verdon et al., 2014). This shift can have complex implications for intergenerational relationships and individuals’ sense of identity (Fillmore, 2000). The phenomena of language shift and reversing language shift are discussed in more detail in Section 2.2.3.

In order to maintain heritage languages, many families from a migration background choose to actively support their children’s heritage language learning, using various methods. While a number of studies have explored heritage language maintenance and proficiency (see J. S. Lee, 2002; Montrul, 2010; S. Zhao & Flewitt, 2020), this study draws attention to adolescent HL learners’ identities, focusing on their inner thoughts and feelings about the languages in their

lives. The phrase “language learning experiences” as used in the title of this thesis encompasses adolescents’ attitudes, ideologies, emotions, motivations, and interactions with others within both formal and informal language learning contexts, and how these are linked with their identity construction and development.

In the rest of this chapter, I will introduce the rationale for this research, the research aim and research questions, and the key terms used. I also address my positionality as a researcher. Finally, I outline the structure for the whole thesis.

1.1 The rationale for this research

Generally, identity research examines the micro-level of the individual in a macrosocial context and explores the individual’s sense of belonging to a society or specific social group or community, such as how individuals’ cultural backgrounds influence the way they understand and present themselves (Preece, 2016). The recent rise in identity research has been attributed by Preece (2016) to a growing sense of lack of belonging experienced by some people, suggesting that identity research is more significant for people who are away from their “natural habitat”, where their families or communities used to live (p. 2). With the process of globalisation, there is a rise in population mobility worldwide. Lack of belonging may become a common problem for immigrants and their offspring, which is likely to increase the popularity of identity research.

Block (2009) suggests that identity has long been rooted in the social sciences. Scholarly interest in the concept of identity dates back several decades and spans multiple disciplines and subject areas, including but not limited to psychology (see Tajfel, 1978), sociology (see Erikson, 1968), anthropology (see Sökefeld, 1999), linguistics (see Block, 2009; Bucholtz & K. Hall, 2005; Norton, 2000, 2013), and cross-cultural communication (see Gudykunst, 2003).

This study aims to explore identities and languages in Chinese adolescent heritage language learners’ lives. Language can make significant contributions to the process of an individual’s identity construction (Norton, 2013). Norton also argues that by interacting with each other through languages, people can understand themselves from various perspectives across time and space, and they can recognise their affiliations with specific social groups and communities, fostering a sense of belonging. Therefore, HL learners’ language learning experiences may influence their identities in multiple ways. In Sections 2.2.2 and 2.4, the dynamics between language and identity are discussed further.

The population of Chinese ethnic usual residents in the UK numbers 445,646, of whom about 70,000 are aged under 16 years (Office for National Statistics, 2022). Adolescence is a critical developmental stage during which young people begin to separate from their parents and strive to establish their own identities (T. F. Su & Costigan, 2009). This period can be marked by upheaval, particularly as adolescents navigate the complexities of identity construction and development. In the American context, Chinese HL learners in adolescence often exhibit a strong desire to integrate into mainstream American culture and society, so they may focus on their identity within the English-speaking community, potentially relegating Chinese HL learning to a lower priority (Chao, 1997, as cited in Mu, 2013). Children from immigrant backgrounds may face additional challenges arising from differences in their attitudes and their parents' attitudes towards HL and culture (Little, 2020). Additionally, given that HL learners have a family connection with the HL they learn, the family home is likely to be where they encounter the HL and culture for the first time. Therefore, their parents' involvement likely plays a vital role in the adolescent HL learners' processes of language learning and practice, and their identity construction. In the context of England, in heritage families from various ethnic backgrounds including Chinese, research has found frictions between parents and the children in matters of HL maintenance (Little, 2020). However, there is evidence that adolescent Chinese HL learners in the United States and in Australia report stronger identification with their heritages when they are speaking their heritage languages (Costigan et al., 2009; Shen & Jiang, 2021).

In this study, set in England, adolescents with Chinese heritage were selected as the main research participants. The linguistic context of England is further discussed in Section 1.2. Additionally, because this study adopts a social constructionist paradigm, one parent or legal guardian of each participating adolescent was also interviewed, in order to better understand how adolescents' identities are constructed. More details on participant recruitment and their background information are presented in *Methodology*.

In the past decade or so, there has been increasing research on Chinese HL learners' identities (see Ganassin, 2020; Little & Y. Zhou, 2024; Shin, 2010). However, few of the studies focus specifically on the adolescent age group in the context of Chinese HL learning in England. For example, Ganassin (2020) examines Chinese community schooling among children aged 5 to 18 in England but does not distinguish adolescents as a group. Similarly, Luyao Li et al. (2023) focus on younger children aged 5 to 14, although they also take parents' perspectives into

consideration. Shin (2010), however, explores adult HL learners over the age of 18, thus overlooking the transitional period of adolescence. Studies by Little (2020) and Shin (2010) investigate learners of several heritage languages including Chinese, but without providing in-depth insights into Chinese HL learners specifically. Although Little et al. (2024) examine the identities of adolescent Chinese HL learners across the UK, their research primarily centres on co-production and the perspectives of adolescents. In contrast, the present study also incorporates views and reflections from the parents of adolescents, affording a more comprehensive data set which includes parents' longitudinal perspectives on children's development. Furthermore, some studies (e.g., Luyao Li et al., 2023; Little et al., 2024) address the broader UK context rather than focusing on England in particular, despite the unique educational and sociolinguistic environment it presents, overlooking that the other countries of the UK also have unique contexts.

This study selects adolescent Chinese HL learners in England as the focus in order to explore identity and language learning experiences, thereby addressing a gap in the existing literature. As a Chinese person who has lived in England for several years, my own background gives me an understanding of Chinese immigrants and the social context in England. In Section 1.5, I discuss my positionality as a researcher, how it led me to this research topic, and its influence on this research.

In the next section, the social context of this study is discussed further.

1.2 Social context of this study: the linguistic environment in England

Since this study focuses on language learning and the identities of language learners, it is important to consider the linguistic environment in which Chinese heritage families with adolescent Chinese HL learners are immersed, in the context of this study (Curdt-Christiansen & La Morgia, 2018).

Hogan-Brun et al. (2009) observe that Western governments often perceive “multilingualism” as a challenge requiring regulation. While the British Council (n.d.-a) acknowledges that English is not the UK's sole native official language, English is widely recognised as the “de facto official language” (Dunbar, 2007, p.112). The dominant status of English in the UK is evident across various domains, including law, politics, and economics (Blackledge, 2005; Cooke & J. Simpson, 2012; Fashanu et al., 2020). English serves as the language of government and parliament, the primary medium for conducting business, and the language used in court

proceedings and legal documentation (Cunningham, 2017). Moreover, the *Casey Review* (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2016) has reinforced public support for the notion of “English as the language of England” (Fashanu et al., 2020, p. 95), further marginalising other linguistic communities. Accordingly, the educational system in England is overwhelmingly English-dominant (Curdt-Christiansen, 2020). In mainstream schools, teachers may forbid pupils speaking other languages or language varieties, through demands that are “othering” or even through covertly racist policies (Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2023; Cushing, 2020, 2021, 2023), in order to maintain the “normative and homogenous linguistic codes” (Cushing, 2023, p. 906).

In essence, language policy in England tends to align with a “one nation – one language” ideology (Fashanu et al., 2020), which may be contributing to the limited investment in foreign language education in English mainstream schools (see Section 2.1.2.1), to language shift in everyday communication (see Section 2.2.1), and to unequal perceptions of heritage and dominant languages (Kanto et al., 2013). These phenomena are discussed further in the *Literature Review* (Chapter 2).

The next section addresses the study’s aims and research questions.

1.3 Research aims and questions

This research aims to investigate and understand the language learning and identity construction of adolescents with Chinese heritage, in the context of the societal and educational system in England. Moreover, the research aims to open up intergenerational dialogue in Chinese heritage families about language learning and belonging in the context of England, the insights from which can offer practitioners and parents guidance for supporting pupils or children more effectively. Finally, this research aims to draw policymakers’ attention to developing the educational system in England in ways that better meet the needs of the many students with heritage cultural backgrounds other than British. In Section 5.2, the contribution of this study is further discussed in relation to the analysis of collected data.

To explore how language-learning experiences may influence adolescent Chinese HL learners’ identities, this study adopts a social constructionist paradigm, employing a qualitative approach. For data collection, interviews were conducted with 11 adolescent Chinese HL learners from 10 families, as well as one parent from each family, regarding the adolescents’ language-learning experiences and identities. Families were living in various regions across England.

Further information about sampling and recruitment is provided in Section 3.4 of the *Methodology*.

To address the research aims, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: What are adolescent Chinese HL learners' attitudes towards their languages and language varieties, and what may inform their attitudes?

RQ2: How are the motivations and emotions of adolescent Chinese heritage language learners constructed and developed in the context of their heritage language learning?

RQ3: How do adolescent Chinese HL learners negotiate their identities in the context of their languages and language varieties?

Research Question 1 explores the attitudes of adolescent Chinese HL learners to the various languages and language varieties present in their lives. This current study acknowledges that “attitudes” is a contested term. In this study, it refers to how adolescents understand and navigate the dynamics between the languages (e.g., W. Li, 2011; Little, 2020). The languages may include the dominant societal language (English), the foreign languages taught in mainstream schools, Chinese language varieties encountered at home and/or in complementary classrooms, as well as other languages or varieties they may learn through diverse means. Aligned with a social constructionist paradigm, this question also investigates the social and interpersonal factors that may shape the adolescents' attitudes. Particular attention is paid to language ideologies concerning the interplay between Chinese language, culture, and identity (as discussed in Section 2.2), which may lie behind adolescents' attitudes. Additionally, this question considers the relationships between Chinese and other linguistic varieties in the adolescents' linguistic repertoires. While previous studies have addressed issues such as the dominant status of English in England (Curdtt-Christiansen, 2020; Fashanu et al., 2020), the limited options for foreign languages in mainstream schools (Collen, 2023; Parrish, 2020), and the prioritisation of Mandarin in HL education (Ganassin, 2020), this study seeks to examine whether such findings align with the contemporary experiences and needs of adolescent Chinese HL learners.

Research Question 2 focuses on how adolescent Chinese HL learners' motivations and emotions related to HL learning are constructed and developed. Interpretations of the adolescents' perspectives are informed by Dörnyei's (2005; 2009) *L2 Motivational Self System*, together with *Investment Theory* (Norton, 2013). Additionally, various factors that may

influence the adolescents' motivations and emotions are considered in line with the study's social constructionist approach.

Research Question 3 addresses how adolescent Chinese HL learners negotiate their identities in the context of their languages and language varieties. Given the close relationship between language and culture, especially in the Chinese context (see Section 2.2), the data analysis for this research question also considers cultural dimensions in relation to language learning and identity. The analysis also probes the factors that shape, contest or affirm adolescents' identities, particularly drawing on the insights from the perspectives of their parents.

In the next section, the key terms used in this study are defined and discussed in more detail, to offer readers a better understanding of the context of the research from the outset.

1.4 Key terms in this research

This section explores the key terms used in this thesis, with reference to various studies of heritage language and heritage language learners. The section concludes by setting out the definitions developed to fit the context of this study.

1.4.1 Defining *Chinese* in this study

The meanings of the term *Chinese* can pertain to ethnicity, culture, language, and/or identity, depending on context (S. C. Huang, 2015; W. Li, 2014a; Shih, 2022). This section discusses the meaning of Chinese in respect of both people and language, in existing studies as well as in the context of this study.

1.4.1.1 Chinese people

The term *Chinese* may refer to people living in various countries and regions (Benton & Gomez, 2011), as there are different understandings in the existing literature. S. C. Huang (2015) and Shih (2022) argue that the term encompasses citizens living within the borders of the People's Republic of China (PRC), including Taiwan. Although both studies also refer to Taiwan as the Republic of China, official PRC government documents recognise Taiwan as one of its provinces. However, some citizens living in Taiwan may prefer the term Taiwanese to emphasise their distinct identities, while some may identify with the term Chinese, reflecting their cultural and racial perspectives (H. Y. Su & Chun, 2021).

Some studies argue that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and the Macao Special Administrative Region (SARs) should be excluded from studies on China and “being Chinese people” (e.g., S. C. Huang, 2015), due to the complex colonial history, long-term separation from Mainland China and recent tensions (de Pina-Cabral, 2020; Kit, 2014).

However, the two SARs are still under the rule of PRC following the “one country, two systems” policy in place since the end of the colonial era. In this study, I use the term “Mainland China” if participants or I need to refer to the PRC without these two SARs or Taiwan. Moreover, when I refer to the China region, I am referring to *Greater China*, which covers Mainland China, both SARs and Taiwan (e.g., Larsen, 2016), unless a certain part of this region needs to be specified.

Multiple layers of meanings of *Chinese* people can also be observed in relation to the various ethnic groups in China. In China, 56 officially recognised ethnic groups coexist, with the Han Chinese constituting the majority at 91.11% of the population, as reported in the latest population census (Akimov et al., 2021). The Han group is also the largest ethnic group in Taiwan, as well as the largest proportion of Chinese immigrants abroad (e.g., Singapore) (Ganassin, 2020). To use the closest English translation, the other 55 groups are regarded as ethnic minorities (少数民族 *shǎoshù mínzú*), but it should be noted that the unity of all ethnic groups and the sense of shared Chinese national community are emphasised in the PRC (Yan & Vickers, 2024). In this study, members of all Chinese ethnic groups are regarded as *Chinese* people. However, none of the participants is from a Chinese ethnic minority background; all are Han Chinese (see Section 3.5 for more background information on participants). This mirrors previous research on Chinese HL learners in England (see Ganassin, 2020). Later in this section, I discuss the demographic composition of Chinese people living beyond Chinese borders, with a focus on England.

Apart from citizens living within China, there are also many people linked with the term *Chinese* who are living in various countries and regions of the world, as migration has long been a recurring phenomenon in Chinese history. In the global context, the concept of being Chinese, which can also be understood as *Chineseness* (A. D. Wong et al., 2021), can be extended to the *Chinese diaspora* and *overseas Chinese*. The former term usually refers to individuals who have migrated beyond the borders of the Chinese state and their descendants (Miles, 2020). Miles also points out that the term *diaspora* originally referred to the Jewish diaspora, but over time its scope expanded to the African diaspora and various other “trade

diasporas”, which may suggest that people of a diaspora have been forced to leave their homeland and not be able to return. Therefore, the Chinese diaspora may carry sensitivities, as it may imply being “not rooted” or be interpreted as China-centric (Tan, 2012, p. 3). The term *overseas Chinese* has ambiguity due to translation issues. It may be considered a generalisation due to the lack of consideration of the difference between people who are of Chinese ethnic origin but nationals of other countries (华人 *huárén*) and Chinese nationals who reside outside the borders of China (华侨 *huáqiáo*) (Ganassin, 2020; W. Li, 2014a; A. D. Wong et al., 2021).

Wang (1981, as cited in J. Huang, 2010, p. 6 - 7) argues that the term 华侨 *huáqiáo* is a narrowly definition, and should be translated to “Chinese sojourners”, which is considered as a subcategory of as a subcategory of *overseas Chinese*. The term *overseas Chinese*, however, is considered more neutral, as it acknowledges that many Chinese immigrants and their descendants may have acquired citizenship and developed identities in their countries of residence (P. S. Li & E. X. Li, 2013). Additionally, some researchers argue that the distinctions between 华侨 *huáqiáo* (overseas Chinese or Chinese sojourners), 华人 *huárén* (ethnic Chinese) or Chinese descent are becoming increasingly irrelevant, due to the diverse Chinese migration patterns, such as hyper-mobility¹, return migration², circular migration³, transmigration⁴, and double diasporas⁵ (see Chan, 2018; Guo, 2016; Hoyer, 2025). Additionally, the backgrounds of Chinese populations outside of Chinese borders have become increasingly diverse because of student migration and the movements of skilled migrants, investors, and entrepreneurs (W. Li, 1994; Miles, 2020). Such diversity should be acknowledged in studies in relation to these people (A. D. Wong et al., 2021).

In the UK, the Chinese immigrant community has historically been geographically dispersed rather than concentrated in specific areas, unlike the pattern observed with the UK’s other ethnic minority groups (W. Li, 1994; S. H. Yim, 2022). Although there are “Chinatowns” in major cities such as London, Liverpool, and Manchester, these locations primarily serve commercial and tourism purposes rather than residential needs (W. Li, 1994). Moreover, unlike

¹ Refers to the migration pattern when individuals, usually privileged, have lived and worked extensively across multiple countries.

² Refers to the voluntary return of migrants to individuals’ country of origin, typically after spending a substantial period living abroad.

³ Refers to the temporary and often repetitive movement of migrant workers between their home and host regions, usually for employment purposes.

⁴ Refers to the movement of workers who resettle in new locations, often following the relocation of the labour-intensive industries that employ them.

⁵ Refers to the pattern when offspring of migrants move “back” to their countries of heritage.

South Asian communities bound by shared religions such as Islam, Hinduism or Christianity, communities of Chinese immigrants in the UK may lack a unifying religious identity (Benton et al., 2011). The diversity of Chinese immigrants challenges the idea that these people are a monolithic entity (Ganassin, 2020; Miles, 2020; A. D. Wong et al., 2021); individuals may differ from each other in terms of social class, linguistic diversity, provincial origins, migration periods, reasons for migration, and geographic separation (Benton et al., 2011).

Shih (2020) suggests that researchers consider *Chinese* (pertaining to people) as a fluid concept, as individuals are constantly negotiating and reproducing the interpretations of *China* and *Chinese* based on their various stances, such as economic, historical, political and ideological positions. As a result, researchers may not necessarily offer universal definitions of *China* and being *Chinese* when they conduct research on China and make contributions.

In this study, unless noted otherwise, the term *Chinese people* refers to anyone who identifies with this term, no matter which country or region they live in. The phrase *Chinese people from Mainland China* refers to people living within the borders of Mainland China, which excludes the two SARs (Hong Kong and Macao) and Taiwan (Ganassin, 2020). The term *overseas Chinese* is adopted in the study to refer to individuals with Chinese citizenship, ethnicities or descent who are living outside of China, such as Chinese immigrants and their descendants.

However, I also try to bear in mind that there are various definitions of Chinese people across different countries and regions, and it can vary from individual to individual, which means that my own interpretation may not be comprehensive. My positionality and how it may lead to this study's limitations and bias are further discussed in Section 1.5. Additionally, I emphasise here that this study values the participants' own interpretations and understandings of being Chinese, which are addressed in the research design in Chapter 3 *Methodology*, as well as explored in Chapter 4 *Findings and Discussion* in relation to the first research question.

Chinese immigrants in England

Within the Chinese immigrant community in the UK, there is great diversity in people's backgrounds. From the 19th century, Chinese immigrants began arriving in Britain, mainly as seafarers recruited from southern China, including Hong Kong (Benton et al., 2011; W. Li, 1994). By the late 19th century, some Chinese immigrants relocated from the United States to the UK, driven by the U.S. anti-Chinese campaigns. These individuals, termed "double migrants," faced unique challenges in their resettlement (Benton et al., 2011, p. 14). Following

World War II, immigration from Southeast Asia to Britain increased, partly due to colonial ties (W. Li, 1994). This group, sometimes referred to as “second-hand” overseas Chinese, leveraged their previous entrepreneurial experiences to establish businesses in Britain (Benton et al., 2011; W. Li, 1994, p. 43). Meanwhile, post-war economic changes in Hong Kong also prompted migration. The global decline in demand for rice destabilised traditional farming livelihoods, compelling many farmers to seek employment in Britain, particularly during the economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s (Benton et al., 2011). Early Chinese immigrants in Britain often entered the catering industry, influenced by several factors (W. Li, 1994). Primarily, the limited employment opportunities in the UK, the feasibility of establishing family-run businesses, and alignment with Confucian values of familial loyalty were all significant drivers. Additionally, many early immigrants had limited education and English proficiency, restricting them to unskilled labour. Finally, the Chinese cultural emphasis on food further contributed to this occupational trend.

However, since the early 21st century, the growth in the number of skilled Chinese immigrants in Britain has outpaced the rate of less skilled incomers (Benton et al., 2011). This is because an increasing number of Chinese students pursue higher education in the UK and often remain after graduation for employment, contributing to a more economically assimilated and skilled workforce (Benton et al., 2011). By 2020, China had become the leading country of origin for international students in the UK, and by 2021, Chinese nationals accounted for one-third of all new international students arriving in the UK (Cuibus & Walsh, 2024). Still, some immigrants, particularly those unable to access more highly skilled work and professions, continue to work in the catering industry, a pattern also observed among participants in this study (see section 3.5). At the same time, recent changes in the British sociopolitical climate present new challenges. With the implementation of the UK government’s *Immigration White Paper*, securing permanent settlement in the UK is expected to become increasingly difficult from 2025 (McKinney & Gower, 2025). Looking ahead, the tightening of immigration policies, as well as a decline in the number of Chinese students arriving in the UK since 2022 (Weale, 2024), may cause significant changes to patterns of Chinese immigration in the UK.

According to the latest UK Census (Office for National Statistics, 2022b), 445,646 usual UK residents are in the category of Chinese ethnicity, making up 0.7% of the population. However, because people who may self-identify as mixed ethnicity were categorised as a separate group, the actual number of people with a Chinese heritage background is likely to be slightly higher. Still, residents who have a Chinese heritage constitute the second smallest group among all

Asian residents in the UK. People who identify as *Asian Other* are the smallest group (Office for National Statistics, 2022a).

1.4.1.2 Chinese language varieties

Linguistically, “Chinese” is regarded as a macrolanguage (The International Organisation of Standardisation 639-3) with various sublanguages. In this study, *Chinese* as a linguistic term is regarded as an umbrella word to include all *varieties* of Chinese. A variety of a language refers to “a set of linguistic items with similar social distribution”, including various *dialects* and *registers* (usually understood as a style of speech) and so on, while a language contains more linguistic items than just one variety (Hudson, 1996, p. 22).

The linguistic diversity among overseas Chinese people (discussed in Section 1.4.1.1) is shaped by their varied regional origins and migration timelines (Mu, 2013). Consequently, not all overseas Chinese individuals speak Mandarin Chinese (also known as *Putonghua* or *Standard Chinese*), which was not established as the standard language for the country until 1949 (B. Huang, 2008) and should only be considered as one variety among many (Hudson, 1996).

Given the prevalence of using *language* in established terminological collocations relevant to this research, the terms *language* and *language variety* are used interchangeably in the comparison of Chinese language varieties and other languages in *Literature Review* (see Chapter 2). However, I bear in mind that various varieties (such as Mandarin and Cantonese) are tied to China’s cultural and historical heritage (G. Wang, 1988) and also include the discussion regarding the prestige of Mandarin Chinese among Chinese varieties in *Literature Review* (Chapter 2) and *Findings and Discussion* (Chapter 4). This awareness also applies to understandings of the terms *heritage language* and *heritage language learners* in this study, which are discussed in section 1.4.2.

In the following subsections, Mandarin Chinese and other Chinese language varieties are discussed further.

Mandarin Chinese and Pinyin

Mandarin Chinese, although often used interchangeably with *Putonghua*/*Standard Chinese* in studies and public discourse, refers to “a broad category of northern varieties of Chinese” (W. Li & H. Zhu, 2011, p.13), while *Putonghua* is a standardised variety that is not tied to any specific geographic region (W. Li et al., 2011; B. Huang, 2008). As well as being the official

language of Mainland China since 1949, *Putonghua* is also one of the official languages in Taiwan and Singapore (H. Y. Su et al., 2021; H. Zhu & W. Li, 2014). However, different writing systems are adopted in Mainland China and Taiwan, which are further discussed in the next subsection. H. Zhu et al. (2014) make the point that *Mandarin* is often used to refer to the language variety taught in Chinese schools and classrooms in the UK. Although Hanban (also known as The Office of Chinese Language Council International, which oversees overseas Chinese education) promotes *Putonghua*, the term *Mandarin* is adopted in Hanban's English-language documents and speeches, acknowledging that not every teacher can deliver lessons in Standard Chinese (ibid). In this study, *Mandarin Chinese* and *Putonghua* are used interchangeably unless a distinction is necessary, while acknowledging that the terms have nuanced differences. Chinese language varieties other than Mandarin Chinese are discussed later in this section.

The standard pronunciation of Mandarin Chinese uses Beijing speech, while the northern dialect is its fundamental dialect, and typical modern Chinese literacy written in vernacular Chinese as its grammar norms (China, 1996). In mainland China, *The Constitution of 1982* states that Mandarin Chinese should be taught to pupils, as well as used as the language for delivering lessons in all primary and secondary schools in China, except in National Autonomous Areas (Yawen Han & Johnson, 2021). With *The Law of the People's Republic of China on the Commonly Used Language and Script* passed on 5 July 2000, Mandarin's legal status as the standard national language was confirmed, further enhancing the authority of Mandarin (China, 2001; N. Liu, 2010).

The State Council Instruction Concerning Spreading Putonghua (E. Zhou, 1956) indicates that Mandarin use across China is intended to build unity among all Chinese nationalities. As a standard language, Mandarin's ascendancy promotes communication and connection between people residing in different regions in China, which used to be more challenging through various regional dialects. As of 2020, 80.72% of the population in the PRC can speak Mandarin Chinese (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2021).

In the five National Autonomous Areas, where the ethnic minority population is bigger than Han Chinese, the Chinese government encourages minoritised groups to develop their own language and culture, in order to promote linguistic diversity in China (M. Zhou, 2004). In the Constitution, minority linguistic groups in China are assured the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages, as well as cultivate their own culture and customs.

Also, *The Law of the People's Republic of China on National Autonomy* (China, 2001) provides that the Han Chinese living in National Autonomous Areas should learn the local languages.

Pinyin, the Romanised phonetic notation system for Standard Chinese in Mainland China, and to a certain extent in Taiwan, was developed with the intention of facilitating the teaching and spreading of Mandarin Chinese (Simmons, 2017). In Chinese language, “pinyin” literally means “spelling the sounds”. Just as the name indicates, Pinyin can interpret the tones and pronunciations of Chinese characters (E. Zhou, 1956).

Unlike English, Chinese is a logographic script, which means that Chinese characters can express meanings but not speech sounds (Ding et al., 2018). Therefore, the invention of Pinyin offers Chinese teachers and learners an efficient tool to link characters and pronunciations together (Ding et al., 2018; Lü, 2017; E. Zhou, 1956). Pinyin can also facilitate learners' access to reading materials that contain unfamiliar or untaught new characters (Lü, 2017). Besides, learners can use Pinyin in their writing to indicate unknown characters, so they can better express themselves (W. L. Li et al., 2016). In addition, Pinyin serves as the fundamental input method for typing on digital devices (Lü, 2017). Therefore, Pinyin continues to play an important role in the early stages of Chinese language learning both in China and abroad.

However, knowledge of Pinyin may not contribute to Chinese literacy skills as significantly as phonological awareness (McBride-Chang & Kail, 2002; Tong & McBride-Chang, 2010; H. Yuan et al., 2022). Phonological awareness refers to “syllable awareness, onset-end rhyme awareness, and tone awareness” (H. Yuan et al., 2022, p. 1). Mandarin Chinese has four standard tones and one flat tone; the meanings of one character could significantly alter just by a change of tone (Ding et al., 2018). Additionally, there are many other linguistic features of Mandarin Chinese that cannot be found in Indo-European languages (Ding et al., 2018). Therefore, the tones in Mandarin Chinese may be a challenge for Chinese HL learners' phonological awareness, which may also influence their literacy development, even though they have acquired knowledge of Pinyin.

Other Chinese language varieties

Chinese language varieties other than the standard variety are often referred to as dialects (方言 *fāngyán*) (J. Yuan, 1983). R. You (2018) classifies dialects into two broad categories: regional dialects and social dialects. The former refers to geographical variations within a language, whereas the latter denotes variations influenced by speakers' social class, gender,

and age (Hudson, 1996, p. 42), encompassing forms such as industry lingos and internet slang (R. You, 2018). Each regional dialect features its own distinctive phonological rules and grammatical differences (J. Yuan, 1983). Consequently, it is nearly impossible to align every dialectal pronunciation with corresponding written characters, rendering most dialects primarily spoken rather than written language varieties (J. Yuan, 1983). However, with increasing population mobility, dialects can no longer be easily categorised solely based on geographical distribution. Furthermore, given that Mandarin is itself one variety of Chinese, it may be more appropriate to refer to other dialects as “Chinese language varieties” in this study as well. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that the term “dialect” is still used in government documents (e.g., China, 1996) and by scholars and research participants to describe non-Mandarin varieties of Chinese.

In *The Language Atlas of China*, a book edited by the Institute of Linguistics CASS (Chinese Academy of Social Science), Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology CASS and City University of Hong Kong (2012), Chinese language varieties can be categorised into 10 linguistic groups: Guanhua/Mandarin, also known as the Northern dialect; Jin, which is used by about 63 million people in China; Wu; Min, also known as Hokkien; Kejia, also known as Hakka; Yue, also known as Cantonese; Xiang; Gan; Hui; Ping and Tu.

Most speakers of each Chinese language variety cannot understand each other’s language variety (W. Li et al., 2011; L. Zhu & Weng, 2025). Due to complex regional factors, the *accent* of each variety can also differ across regions, referring solely to pronunciation differences rather than other aspects of the language variety (Hudson, 1996).

Therefore, a standard language variety such as Mandarin may promote communication among speakers across various Chinese language varieties. However, the promotion of Mandarin Chinese may have influenced Chinese people’s attitudes to the dynamics between Mandarin Chinese and other Chinese language varieties. According to a 2017 survey, children in Wu District, where the main population is Han Chinese, tend to use, speak and learn Mandarin from kindergarten (X. Su et al., 2017). The survey also finds that Mandarin Chinese is commonly the main language variety used for communications among these children and their parents or other family members, even though parents and other family members are able to speak Wu Chinese, the local dialect. The survey reveals that this is because both the children and the adults in the study believe that Mandarin Chinese is more useful than Wu dialects for children’s future development. L. Zhu et al. (2025) also find that Chinese citizens may face

microaggressions if they cannot speak Mandarin Chinese, or if they speak with a Southern accent, although older generations may still show a preference for other language varieties such as Wu Chinese. Overseas Chinese adults also tend to privilege Mandarin Chinese over Chinese dialects (see Ganassin; 2020; Mau et al., 2009), as well as certain accents/dialects over others (Ganassin, 2020; W. Li et al., 2011), as further discussed in Section 2.2.2.

Chinese writing system

There are two writing scripts for Chinese language varieties: simplified Chinese characters or traditional/complex Chinese characters. The simplified script is primarily used by Chinese speakers in Mainland China, Malaysia, and Singapore, and it is also the script commonly taught to many Chinese-as-a-second-language learners. The traditional/complex script, on the other hand, is mainly used in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau. The two scripts are also associated with distinct spoken varieties of Chinese – the simplified Chinese characters with Putonghua, and the traditional Chinese characters with Cantonese – and may also feature some differences in vocabulary (see Tsang et al., 2024 for examples).

Although the PRC government acknowledges every ethnic minority's right to use and develop their own writing systems, they also promote simplified Chinese characters alongside Mandarin Chinese (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2021). The process of simplifying Chinese characters was initiated by the PRC government in the 1950s to increase literacy rates, and continued to develop in subsequent decades. The underlying rationale was that reducing the visual complexity of characters would make reading (and learning to read) easier, thereby improving accessibility to written Chinese for a broader population (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2021). By 2020, 95% of the population in the PRC could understand simplified Chinese characters. Although there are differences between the two scripts from various perspectives (T. Liu & Hsiao, 2012), the grammar, vocabulary, and semantics remain more similar than different across regions, especially in formal writing such as textbooks, newspapers, and official documents (Tsang et al., 2024). Furthermore, the simplification process did not apply to all characters; among the most frequently used 3,500 characters, around 40% were simplified, resulting in approximately 22.5% fewer strokes than their traditional counterparts (D. G. Gao & Kao, 2002), while the remaining 60% of characters remained unchanged across the two scripts. H. Y. Su et al. (2021) argue that the distinctions between the two scripts are partly ideological rather than purely linguistic due to the tensions within Greater China, as discussed in Section 1.4.1.1. Furthermore,

language ideologies among immigrant families with a Chinese heritage are further discussed in Section 2.2.

In the two SARs, Hong Kong and Macao, Mandarin Chinese has been a compulsory subject in primary and secondary education for the past almost 30 years, although the emphasis in the latest curriculum is on Mandarin speaking skills. Meanwhile, the traditional script is the commonly taught and widely used written system (D. Li & Leung, 2020; Moody, 2019). Parallel to the rise of Mandarin Chinese education in Hong Kong and Macao, complementary language schools in the UK have gradually shifted their emphasis from Cantonese to Mandarin Chinese and simplified Chinese characters (see Ganassin, 2020; Mau et al., 2009). This ideology-based change is further discussed in Section 2.2.

1.4.2 Heritage language and heritage language learners

Applied linguistics researchers typically classify multilinguals' language varieties in a numerical way, labelling them as L1, L2, L3 where "L" represents language, based on the chronological sequence in which individuals are exposed to different languages throughout their lives (Hammarberg, 2009). However, applying this numbering system to real-life situations can be challenging, as language contact varies significantly from individual to individual (Dewaele, 2010). In X. L. Wang (2008)'s research, children born in the United States to parents originally from Switzerland and Mainland China were exposed to three first languages from birth. Conversely, some individuals might be born in one country but fail to acquire the official language of their birth country before migrating to another country (Dewaele, 2010). In such cases, identifying a clear first language becomes problematic due to the complex linguistic environments they experience from birth. Consequently, this study adopts the terms *heritage language* and *societal dominant language* to describe and discuss multilingual language use more accurately. The term *dominant language* refers to a language/language variety that is more commonly used within a specific region or societal context (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2017), rather than a language/language variety in which an individual has the highest proficiency of all the languages and language varieties they have acquired.

Heritage language (HL), also known as community language and home language (A. He & Xiao, 2008), is defined as a language learned at home during childhood that is linked to an individual's family or ancestral heritage, but which exists in a societal context dominated by

another language (Valdés, 2001). Fishman (2001, p.169) also emphasises that HLs should have a particular “family relevance” to the learners. However, Fishman also acknowledges that the nature of the HL also depends on the societal and linguistic context; for example, in immigrant communities, it usually refers to the language of the country of origin, while in indigenous settings it can be the ancestral language of a native group.

Valdés (2001) asserts that *heritage language learners* are individuals who possess some degree of competence in a HL – that is, they should speak or at least understand their heritage languages to a certain extent. Montrul (2016) argues for a more expansive definition of heritage language learners that encompasses people with a wide spectrum of linguistic experiences, from those with native-like fluency to those with only passive comprehension or rudimentary skills. Cho et al. (1997) also point out that heritage languages are not necessarily spoken in the homes of heritage language learners, which aligns with Little’s (2019a) observation that such languages can be either accepted or rejected by children from migrant background families. In various studies, heritage language learners have displayed a wide range of linguistic practices due to their different life backgrounds. Some are simultaneous bilinguals or multilinguals who have been acquiring heritage language(s) alongside the dominant language from birth, while others are young immigrants raised in a heritage language community who start learning the dominant language during their school years (see Jee, 2018). Additionally, some learners come from families where the heritage language is no longer actively spoken by any family members (see Kondo-Brown, 2005). Highlighting the agency of heritage language learners, Hornberger and S. C. Wang (2008, p. 27) expand the definition to “individuals who have familial or ancestral ties to a particular language that is not English and who exert their agency in determining whether or not they are HLLs (heritage language learners) of that HL (heritage language) and HC (heritage community)”. As the focus of this research is on HL learners’ identity, which is understood to have fluidity (see Section 2.4), the notion of individual agency in fluid identity is important for the study.

As the study was conducted in England, the term *dominant language* commonly refers to British English, the official spoken language in England. England’s status as a region with only one official spoken language – alongside British Sign Language as an official sign language – helps to clearly differentiate between the dominant language and the heritage language. This clarity is one of the advantages of choosing England as the setting for this study. Accordingly, languages such as Chinese (encompassing multiple varieties) are identified as potential heritage languages for adolescent learners in this study. As previously noted, *Chinese* in this study refers

to all Chinese language varieties, reflecting the linguistic diversity of the Chinese community. Combining the definitions of Cho et al. (1997), Fishman (2001), Valdés (2001) and Hornberg et al. (2008) for the purposes of this research, a learner is considered to be a Chinese HL learner regardless of which Chinese variety they are learning, as long as the individual: (i) has a family heritage connection with Chinese language varieties; (ii) has some comprehension of that language; and (iii) self-identifies as a Chinese heritage language learner.

However, I am also aware that one Chinese language variety (likely Mandarin, in view of the literature) may be predominant among the participants, which may potentially influence adolescent Chinese HLLs' identities too. This will be discussed further in Section 2.2.

1.5 Positionality

In this section I address my positionality as a researcher, explaining the personal motivations underpinning this study.

Positionality refers to how individuals perceive and interpret the world, shaped by factors such as gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual identity, biography, and lived experience (Haraway, 2013; Hastrup, 1992, as cited in England, 1994). It is also dynamic, shifting with changes in social status, networks, and relationships (Maher & Tetreault, 2001).

It is important to scrutinise a researcher's positionality as it influences nearly all aspects of the research process, from the formulation of research questions to methodological choices, data collection, and data analysis (Gilbert & Stoneman, 2016; J. Mellor et al., 2014). Positionality, therefore, is a crucial lens through which to interpret the context and assumptions embedded in a study.

My interest in identity and language learning is deeply rooted in personal experience. Foote and Bartell (2011) categorise life experiences that shape researchers' positionalities into three themes: "being the other" (being/feeling like an outsider); "bearing witness" (being an observer of other people's lives); and "orienting experiences" (which includes salient moments in one person's life) (p. 52). The following discussion draws on these categories to illuminate how my background informs this research.

I was born in Anhui province, Eastern China. Until I was 12, I lived in my hometown with my parents and extended family, most of whom gathered frequently at my grandparents' house for meals. At home and with friends outside of school, we spoke the Anhui dialect, as older

generations had little access to Mandarin. At school, however, Mandarin was the required medium of instruction and communication. In this context, I consider the Anhui dialect to be my heritage dialect.

At the age of 12, my family moved to Shanghai, where I encountered the Shanghai dialect (Wu Chinese), a variety I could barely understand. In school, although Mandarin was spoken during lessons, classmates and teachers frequently conversed in Shanghai dialect outside the classroom. I was linguistically isolated and felt like an outsider. At the same time, my parents viewed the Shanghai dialect as more “modern” and prestigious than the Anhui dialect, which they associated with underdevelopment, so they discouraged the use of Anhui dialect at home.

This shift in Shanghai not only caused me to struggle socially in my new school but also led to a rapid loss of proficiency in my heritage dialect. Some relatives in Anhui began calling me “Shanghainese”, making me feel further excluded. For a long time, I felt displaced and as an outsider in both Shanghai and my hometown.

Learning English eventually became a source of empowerment. Unlike regional Chinese dialects, English was equally unfamiliar to everyone in my new school. As I performed well in English and gained confidence, I eventually chose to major in English for my undergraduate’s degree. For me, English was both accessible and rewarding, especially compared to my fractured relationship with Chinese dialects.

These lived experiences have long motivated my academic interest in the intersections between language and identity. My personal history touches on key themes such as family language policy, foreign language acquisition, language shift and maintenance, and how language shapes individuals’ understanding of themselves in relation to the world. These themes are addressed and expanded in the *Literature Review* (Chapter 2).

The Covid-19 pandemic further shaped my research interests. During this period, I witnessed how overseas Chinese people were perceived with suspicion in both their host and heritage countries. Many who had lived in the UK for years faced hostility online when attempting to return to China, with accusations that they were “basically British” and no longer had the right to come back. These tensions led me to wonder: How do Chinese immigrants and their children perceive themselves? Do parents in Chinese heritage families promote Chinese HL learning, or do they prioritise integration into the host culture? And how do British-born Chinese youth

negotiate their sense of belonging to Chinese language and culture? These questions led me to focus this study on adolescent Chinese HL learners in England.

Acknowledging my positionality helps reveal both the scope and the limitations of my interpretations, while pointing towards future research directions. Throughout this project, I remained mindful of the importance of researcher's reflexivity, especially during fieldwork. My reflections on reflexivity are elaborated in Section 3.6 of the *Methodology*.

1.6 Thesis structure

This thesis has five chapters. **Chapter 1** introduces the rationale and significance of the study, outlines the research aims and questions, reflects on my positionality as a researcher, and provides an overview of the thesis structure at the end.

Chapter 2 reviews existing literature relevant to the research, using a bricolage approach to draw together various concepts and theories, such as family language policies, language ideologies, motivations, emotions and identities, in order to offer a theoretical framework for data analysis of this study.

Chapter 3 presents the research methodology and design. This chapter covers the research paradigm, methods of data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 focuses on the analysis of the data and the discussion of key findings, offering insights and interpretations aligned with the research questions.

Chapter 5 concludes the thesis by summarising its contributions, discussing potential limitations, and suggesting directions for future research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Chapter overview

This chapter draws on the relevant literature to address the language learning experiences of adolescent Chinese HL learners; their motivations and emotions regarding language learning; approaches to a definition of identity for this research; and factors that may influence the identities of adolescent Chinese HL learners. Finally, the chapter presents the study's theoretical framework developed through a bricolage approach that integrates multiple theoretical perspectives.

2.1 Language learning experiences of adolescent Chinese HL learners

This section examines the various languages and language varieties of adolescent Chinese HL learners in England, and their corresponding experiences of language learning and use. Together these languages and experiences form the individuals' linguistic repertoires. As Gumperz (1964) explains it, a linguistic repertoire “contains all the accepted ways of formulating messages. It provides the weapons of everyday communication. Speakers choose among this arsenal in accordance with the meanings they wish to convey” (p. 138). Thus, a linguistic repertoire is understood as encompassing all languages, dialects, styles, registers, codes, and routines used in daily communication, with an emphasis on the subjectivity of individual speakers in selecting among these linguistic resources (Gumperz, 1964).

In Gumperz's work over half a century ago, speakers were associated with relatively stable speech communities, but more recent studies have highlighted the diversity of linguistic encounters and life trajectories experienced by individuals (Blommaert, 2009; Busch, 2017). As Blommaert (2009) contends, “someone's linguistic repertoire reflects a life, and not just birth, and it is life that is lived in a real sociocultural, historical and political space” (p. 17). Furthermore, Blommaert and Backus (2013) stress that both formal language learning and informal language encounters contribute to individuals' linguistic repertoires. Accordingly, *language learning* in this study is conceptualised as an umbrella term encompassing both formal and informal learning, recognising that language acquisition can occur both within and outside institutional settings, and can take place through spontaneous or structured forms of delivery (Azzolini et al., 2022; Eaton, 2010).

Drawing on research by W. Li (2011), Busch (2012) argues that linguistic repertoires can reflect the coexistence of different identities and the formation of new identities. This recognition that language and identity are intimately and dynamically related aligns with the social constructionist approach to identity in this study (see Section 2.4). As such, it is crucial to examine the potential language learning experiences of adolescent Chinese HL learners within the context of identity research.

2.1.1 Language learning experiences at home

This section addresses adolescent Chinese HL learners' language learning experiences in their homes, potentially involving parents, siblings and extended family members.

2.1.1.1 Family language policy (FLP)

Family language policy (FLP), which refers to “how languages are managed, learned, and negotiated within families” (K. A. King et al., 2008), directly influences children's linguistic repertoires and cross-generational relationships (Kędra, 2021).

Unlike monolingual children, bilingual children's language development is shaped by more complex patterns of linguistic exposure, influenced by factors such as parental language choices, societal language dominance, and access to formal education in different languages, and heritage language education (see Hammer et al., 2004). Among these factors, parents' decisions regarding language use at home and among family members – their family language policy – can significantly influence their children's attitudes towards each language variety in their linguistic repertoire, and choices for their language practices (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Kanto et al., 2013; K. A. King et al., 2008). Different families may adopt different or varied family language policies, depending in part on parents' socio-cultural backgrounds (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009). This section explores the literature on the kinds of family language policies that may be adopted in Chinese heritage families.

Across studies on immigrant families with diverse heritage backgrounds in different host countries, several approaches to FLP are found, ranging from strict heritage language maintenance to a more flexible, multilingual strategy (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009). The most common FLP approaches and strategies are: *two parents, one language; one parent, one language; one person, one language; the switching approach; minimum grasp strategy; adult repetition strategy; move-on strategy*.

Two parents, one language refers to the FLP where both parents consistently use the same language variety when communicating with each other and their children. In practice, some families may prioritise the heritage language in all home interactions (Curdts-Christiansen, 2009). To enforce heritage language use, some parents even pretend not to understand when children use the dominant language, a technique known as the *minimum grasp strategy* (Lanza, 1997). Lanza (2007) reports that this strategy can be effective in reinforcing children's heritage language proficiency, though Lanza does not explore how to sustain the approach once children become aware of the pretence. Some parents may adopt the *two parents, one language* policy but they choose to speak only the societal dominant language with their children to enhance both their own and their children's proficiency in that language. Among Chinese heritage families in Australia, this approach is particularly common among parents who experience language barriers in their host country (Zheng, 2009).

Some families adopt FLPs that incorporate two or more languages in order to accommodate social and educational demands. Takeuchi (2006) notes that the *one parent, one language* approach is often used in families where the two parents have different linguistic backgrounds and wish for their children to acquire both language varieties (Takeuchi, 2006). Under this policy, each parent consistently uses their own native language when interacting with the child, expecting the child to respond in that language. However, this approach has been widely criticised as an impractical strategy with disappointing outcomes, particularly in English-dominant societies where the child's exposure to the minority language may be insufficient for robust acquisition (Döpke, 1998).

On the other hand, some parents employ the *adult repetition strategy*. When a child utters words or phrases in the societal dominant language, the parent repeats the message in the heritage language, reinforcing vocabulary acquisition (Lanza, 2007).

One person, one language is a practice commonly observed in families with multiple children, where children use one language when communicating with their parents and another when interacting with their siblings (Zheng, 2009). Siblings, especially older brothers and sisters who have started mainstream schooling, typically provide their younger siblings with extra input in the societal dominant language (Bridges & Hoff, 2014), as children start to favour the societal dominant language from school age (Fillmore, 1991). Rojas et al. (2016) find that having monolingual peers can discourage children's HL learning and practice prior to secondary school. Although the HL learners in the present study are secondary school pupils, they are also

likely to be influenced by peers and older siblings in their language practices. Given that only 21.4% pupils in England can speak a language other than English (DfE, 2025), HL learners will be surrounded by monolingual English-speaking peers in mainstream schools. In Section 2.1.2.1, the foreign language curriculum in England's mainstream schools is discussed.

Some families do not actively manage their children's language use through explicit family language policies. Instead, they allow conversations to unfold naturally without intervention, an approach known as the *move-on strategy* (Lanza, 1997). For example, some parents have flexible practice allowing children's translanguaging in conversation but also strategically inserting *yes/no* questions in the heritage language to prompt responses in that language (Lanza, 2007; Nakamura, 2018). Similarly, the *(adult) switching approach*, which is observed particularly in single-parent households, prioritises fluid communication over maintaining proficiency in the heritage language. In this approach, parents alternate flexibly between the heritage language and the dominant language in their interactions with children (Lanza, 1997; Zheng, 2009).

However, the influence of the linguistic environment in England, in education and wider society, may lead to conflicts between overseas Chinese families' language policies and their actual practice (Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2023). While the linguistic environment in England has been briefly outlined in Section 1.2, Section 2.1.2 sets out a detailed discussion of the marginalised status of Chinese language varieties in the mainstream schools in England and the pragmatic solutions that parents may adopt in response.

2.1.1.2 Other ways that heritage language varieties are supported at home

Besides the language exposure that children get in the home, as shaped by family language policy, children's language learning is also influenced by the community the family lives in, the family's socio-economic resources, and parents' attitudes and practices in parenting (Hammer et al., 2004; Lanza, 1997; Pearson, 2007). Parents from Chinese heritage families may adopt various methods to support children's HL learning, depending on the social situation of families. Parents in Chinese heritage families may use various strategies to support children's HL learning, depending on the social situation of families.

Maintaining connections with extended families

As discussed in the previous section, parents adopt different policies for the use of the heritage language(s) (and the societal dominant language) to ensure that their children get enough heritage language input and interaction at home to support their developing language skills (see De Houwer, 2006; Yamamoto, 2001). Sufficient language input and interaction are crucial for language acquisition (N. Ellis, 2002).

In addition to family language policy, many families also use support from the extended family to promote children's heritage language input. For example, heritage families may maintain regular contact with extended families and friends, often with the aid of communication technologies. This regular contact also helps to sustain or increase the heritage language input for children (see Akhter, 2016; Szecsi & Szilagyi, 2012; S. Zhao et al., 2020). These practices may have intensified during the pandemic due to the limitations for international visits and in-person interactions (Jo et al., 2023).

Visits to heritage countries

Some families may also take regular vacations to their heritage countries, immersing their children in the linguistic and cultural environment. This exposure can enhance children's language proficiency, deepen their cultural understanding, and strengthen their relationships with local relatives (Guardado & Becker, 2014; Little, 2020; X. L. Wang, 2008). Some Japanese and Korean heritage families living in the United States even choose to enrol their children in public schools or volunteering programmes in their heritage countries during visits in order to boost their HL proficiency (see Kwon, 2017). Such strategies can also help children build connections with peers in their heritage countries, but children from migrant backgrounds can only attend these schools for a limited period, which may create emotional challenges as well as disruptions to their academic and social lives (Kwon, 2017).

On the other hand, not every family can afford flight tickets or take time off from school and work. For Chinese heritage families, these challenges may have been exacerbated by the sharp increase in flight prices to China (particularly for Mainland China) due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Asquith, 2020). Additionally, quarantine policies in many countries imposed further constraints on international travel, as mandatory quarantines were both expensive and time-consuming (Cai, 2021). The high costs in terms of money and time may have made travel between the UK and China nearly impossible for Chinese heritage families during the

pandemic. In interviews, several parents highlighted the significant reduction in their children's exposure to Chinese HL varieties during this period.

Books and other resources in heritage languages

Research indicates that books are the most commonly used resource among migrant-background families to support heritage language learning (Little, 2019b), alongside other printed and online materials (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; Little, 2020). However, HL development through reading materials cannot be achieved by learners in isolation; they need external support from home or school (Moll et al., 2001). Some parents choose to tell stories in HLs (Scheele et al., 2010), providing additional linguistic input to children from an early age. It is well established that parent-child joint reading activities are beneficial for children's long-term language development (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Snow & Ninio, 1986), as well as contributing to children's positive emotions and attitudes to heritage languages (Little, 2024).

Beyond books and other written texts, HL learners can also access language resources through heritage-language television programmes, which have been found to significantly enhance children's oral vocabulary skills (L. Dixon, 2011).

Social activities related to heritage culture

As will be discussed in section 2.2.1, language and culture have a close connection, especially for Chinese heritage families. Many parents take their children to social activities with a heritage cultural focus as a way to support the children's heritage language learning. A study in the United States on Chinese families from migrant backgrounds with children aged 6 to 14 years finds that parents often take children to participate in heritage cultural events and activities in their Chinese communities (D. Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009). The same study finds that parents involve their children in extracurricular pursuits where they are immersed in Chinese-speaking environments and exposed to Chinese-speaking contacts.

On the other hand, people have had to stay at home more in the past few years, during the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath (Khalifa et al., 2021) and wider social interactions have been significantly reduced for most people. The implication for this study is that there were likely less opportunities for families to engage in heritage cultural and social activities during the period when the data collection was conducted. Nevertheless, these strategies were still addressed in the interviews, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, *Findings and discussion*.

In brief, Chinese heritage families may adopt various methods to support children's Chinese HL maintenance. However, due to practical constraints, some parents are able to offer only limited supports, notwithstanding their positive attitudes to children's HL development, as found in studies of Turkish heritage families in Sweden (Bohnacker, 2022) and Chinese, Italian and Urdu heritage families in the UK (Curd-Christiansen et al., 2018). In Chapter 4, there is discussion of parents' efforts towards Chinese HL maintenance and how these influence the HL attitudes and identities of adolescents.

2.1.2 Language education in school and classroom settings

This section discusses language-learning provision in England's mainstream schools, as well as in complementary classrooms and schools.

2.1.2.1 Language lessons in mainstream schools

Young heritage language learners in England are exposed to British English as the dominant language in mainstream schools and wider society (Kupisch & Rothman, 2018; Montrul, 2016). Additionally, foreign languages are included as part of the national curriculum in England. This section describes the provisions for foreign languages in national policy and curricula, and reviews evidence on the provision in practice.

With the advent of the new millennium, the UK government commissioned a series of language-related studies in response to globalisation and multilingualism, including *Languages: The Next Generation* (Nuffield, 2000) and *Developing a Global Dimension in the School Curriculum* (Department for Education and Skills, 2000). Both reports emphasise the importance of foreign language education across all age groups. Subsequently, *Languages for All: Languages for Life* (DfES, 2002) outlines a national language strategy with three key objectives: enhancing language teaching, establishing a nationwide framework for language qualifications, and increasing participation in language learning from primary school to lifelong education. Following this strategy, modern foreign languages became a compulsory subject in primary schools in England (Dearing & L. King, 2007).

Currently, all pupils in England are required by the Department for Education (2013) to study a modern foreign language at Key Stage 2 (Years 3 to 6, ages 7 to 11). At Key Stage 3 (Years 7 to 9, ages 11 to 14), students can either continue with the same language from the previous stage (if available) or choose a new one, depending on their schools' offerings. Although

secondary academies⁶ in England are not legally bound to follow the national curriculum (HM Government, n.d.), many still adhere to it for most subjects since students of academies still take the same national examinations with other state-funded schools students (Cirin, 2014; DfE, n.d.). Consequently, most pupils should have learned about speaking and writing a language other than English between the ages 7 and 14, with some opting to take a foreign language as a subject for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications (Nidirect, n.d.). Typically, adolescents in England select their GCSE subjects between the ages 13 and 15, with exams taken at 15 or 16 (DfE, 2013). In 2010, the Department for Education (DfE) introduced the concept of *English Baccalaureate* (EBacc), encouraging students to take a set of core subjects, including a foreign language, as part of their GCSEs (DfE, 2019). By 2025, the government aims for 90% of pupils to study an EBacc subject combination, with a particular emphasis on languages (Collen, 2023; DfE, 2019). Given the significance of GCSE results for an individual's further education and career opportunities (Denscombe, 2000; Putwain, 2009), the rise of the EBacc suggests the stronger promotion of foreign language skills in England.

Despite these policies, support for minority languages in British mainstream schools remains limited and lacks diversity. The latest *Language Trends England* reports (Collen, 2023; Collen & Duff, 2024) indicate that French remains the most widely taught foreign language in English primary schools, offered by over 72% of schools in 2023 and continuing to dominate provision at Key Stage 2 (Years 3 to 6) in 2024. According to the 2024 report, Spanish was the second popular taught language, with 31% of primary schools offering it at Key Stage 2, while Latin (3%) and German (approximately 3%) are far less commonly taught in primary schools at Key Stage 2. Mandarin Chinese, however, is taught in only 1% of primary schools in 2024, marking a decline from 3% in 2023 and 4% in 2022. Some other minority languages are taught in a few settings, but the number of these schools is too low to show a statistical significance in the report. However, as participation in this survey is voluntary, these figures may not fully reflect the national landscape of foreign language teaching in England's schools.

In Years 7 to 9 of secondary education, French remains the most widely taught foreign language, offered in 89% of state schools and 97.6% of independent schools (Collen et al., 2024). Spanish follows at 79.1% and 92.8%, respectively, while German is available in 37.6% of state schools

⁶ Academies in England are funded by the government (state-funded) and managed by an academy trust, which allows them greater autonomy than regular state-funded schools in how they operate (DfE, n.d.)

and 64.8% of independent schools. In Years 10 and 11 and Post-16 education, French, Spanish, and German continue to dominate, with minor statistical variations.

Mandarin Chinese is the most popular non-European language in state-funded secondary schools in England, likely due to the *Mandarin Excellence Programme* (MEP), which has received £16.4 million in funding since 2016 (British Council, n.d.-b; Collen, 2023). Still, in the 2024 report (Collen et al., 2024), only 5.66% of responding state schools offer Mandarin as a curriculum subject, with 5.49% providing extra-curricular activities. Like German, Mandarin Chinese is offered in more independent schools, where 25.8% list it as a full curriculum subject and 13.3% offer extra-curricular activities. Moreover, 79% of state secondary schools and 17% of independent secondary schools report offering support for pupils to take exams in their home or heritage languages, although further research is needed to assess the effectiveness of such support (Collen et al., 2024).

Teaching time for foreign language lessons in English schools is often insufficient. The *Teaching Schools Council* (2016) recommends that schools provide three 40 to 60-minute language lessons per week at Key Stages 3 and 4 (Years 7 to 11), yet most students receive significantly less (Collen, 2023). Collen further points out that most Year 10 pupils receive only 2 to 3 hours of foreign language lessons per week, with students in Years 7 to 9 often receiving just 1 to 2 hours, or even less in some schools. These time allocations raise concerns about whether language teaching in England meets national curriculum standards, in addition to the issue of limited diversity of foreign language lessons.

The dominant status of French and Spanish is further reflected in GCSE enrolment statistics. Between 2017 and 2021, the number of students taking foreign language GCSEs rose slightly (Beynon et al., 2021). Over this period, French entries remained stable at approximately 125,000, while Spanish entries increased from 80,000 to nearly 110,000. Conversely, the number of students taking German and other minority languages declined, although there were about 40,000 entries for German and only 25,000 for all other languages combined (Beynon et al., 2021). From September 2024, GCSE requirements for these three languages have been shifted to a narrower focus on high-frequency vocabulary and grammar, potentially encouraging more schools to offer these languages as options, and more students to choose them for GCSEs (Collen, 2023; Collen et al., 2024).

Overall, French, Spanish and German are the *Big 3* languages taught, learned and examined in mainstream schools in England, with French being the most dominant choice in both primary and secondary education (Collen, 2023). There are various factors contributing to this dominance.

French has historically been the UK's most popular foreign language since the Norman Conquest, when it became associated with the upper class (Offord et al., 2014). It also served as the lingua franca in European courts during the 18th century (Offord et al., 2014; Ortmanns, 1993, as cited in McLelland, 2014). French was widely taught in independent schools in England from the 18th century and became a core subject in these schools from the 1830s, alongside Latin and Greek (McLelland, 2014). In some independent schools, such as Rugby, pupils not studying the sciences were required to take either French or German (J. B. H. Simpson, 1967). However, students were often expected to learn French before studying German, suggesting a hierarchy of language value (McLelland, 2014). Since the late 20th century, the prevalence of French-speaking teachers in England, many of whom learned the language at school, has further reinforced its dominance (Collen, 2021). Recently, Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic, have exacerbated teacher shortages, particularly among international language teachers, limiting opportunities for foreign language learning in schools (Collen, 2021). Additionally, the transition from primary to secondary education may compound the challenges for foreign language learning: since French is the most commonly taught language in primary schools, secondary schools with limited resources may restrict language options to align with students' prior learning (Collen, 2023). Moreover, travel preferences, influenced by England's geographic position in close proximity to France, could be another factor in adolescents choosing French (Parrish, 2020).

In summary, most migrant-background families, including Chinese heritage families, receive limited support for HL learning from the mainstream education system in England (W. Li, 2006; Little, 2020). Additionally, Mandarin Chinese is the only Chinese language variety included as an option in the curriculum reported by schools in the *Language Trends England Report 2024* (Collen et al., 2024), which means that support for other Chinese language varieties is likely precluded in mainstream schooling. Even when a heritage language is part of the curriculum, the syllabus is designed specifically for heritage language learners (DfE, 2013). Although the marginalisation of Chinese language varieties in school curricula in England is not directly linked to bias against HL maintenance, it does contribute to a greater burden on parents from

heritage families in maintaining their HL (Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2023). This burden, in turn, may lead to negative emotions within the family, particularly parents. For example, Y. Wang (2023) and Curdt-Christiansen et al. (2023) report the frustration and powerlessness expressed by Chinese parents in England over the limited access to Chinese language lessons within mainstream schooling, regardless of the varieties. Such feelings are likely to stem from the parents' strong sense of the importance of Chinese language proficiency (Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2023; Y. Wang, 2023), as will be discussed in Section 2.2.2.

Nevertheless, if HL learning conflicts with the academic demands on youngsters in mainstream education, parents may prioritise efforts for those academic subjects. Studies show that Chinese heritage parents typically take a pragmatic stance and treat mainstream educational achievement as the higher priority (Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2023; Y. Wang, 2023). Moreover, high-stakes GCSE examinations can increase students' stress levels (Roome & Soan, 2019), potentially reducing the time and energy they can dedicate to heritage language learning. Thus, mainstream schooling factors can contribute to shifts in Chinese heritage families' approaches to their children's language learning. The *Findings and Discussion* chapter will discuss how participants in this study navigate the language priorities and education pressures in adolescent Chinese HL learners' lives.

2.1.2.2 Heritage language schools and classrooms

As highlighted in the previous section, most minority languages are taught in only a limited number of mainstream schools in England, leaving immigrant families with little institutional support for maintaining their children's heritage languages.

While some immigrant parents rely entirely on home-based methods to support heritage language learning (see Section 3.5 for methods used by participants in this study), others find this onerous, particularly when they are still negotiating their own identities across multiple cultures (T. F. Su et al., 2009). Parents' self-assessment of their language proficiency, time constraints, and other commitments may prevent them from teaching their children themselves (Luyao Li et al., 2023).

As a result, some parents choose complementary schools and classrooms for their children's heritage language learning. This section focuses on these and other methods of HL support.

Complementary schools emerged in the UK in the late 1960s as a response to the neglect of minority culture in the mainstream school curriculum (W. Li, 2006). As the name implies, complementary schools mainly offer supplementary lessons related to minority languages and cultures, and these lessons take place on weekends or on weekdays after school (W. Li, 2006).

At the beginning of the 21st century, the Chinese and British governments agreed on a collaboration to promote Chinese teaching and learning in Britain, and English teaching and learning in China (G. X. Zhang & L. M. Li, 2010). From 2005, Chinese language teaching in Britain started to bloom, with support from the HSBC Global Education Trust, the British Council, the Confucius Institute and local enthusiasts of Chinese language and culture (G. X. Zhang et al., 2010). As indicated in the previous section, most Chinese language teaching in England takes place in complementary schools rather than mainstream schools.

Complementary schools receive little funding from the UK government to sustain their operations (W. Li, 2006). Consequently, the marginalised status of these schools in British society poses a challenge to the maintenance of minority languages. However, some Chinese complementary schools receive support from Hanban, the headquarters of the Confucius Institute, which is responsible for initiating policies, sponsoring activities, and providing both professional and volunteer teachers for overseas Chinese education (Xiang, 2017; H. Zhao & J. Huang, 2010). Teachers selected by Hanban typically serve in Confucius Institutes for a limited period, ranging from one to four years (Xiang, 2017).

Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic introduced new challenges for Chinese complementary schools in the UK. Travel restrictions hindered Hanban's ability to deploy teachers overseas in a timely manner (S. Liu et al., 2021). Also, many Chinese complementary schools were forced to transition to virtual classrooms. As these schools were typically renting facilities from mainstream institutions, pandemic-related school closures significantly disrupted their operations (Young & White, 2022). During the first national UK lockdown in the UK, schools remained open only for vulnerable children and those of key workers, while most students had to take online lessons (Kim & Asbury, 2020; Viner et al., 2020; Young et al., 2022). The transition of complementary schools to online learning brought specific challenges, including student dropouts due to limited internet access, struggles in adapting to new learning formats, and reduced motivation stemming from a lack of in-person interaction (S. Liu et al., 2021). The changes in learners' motivations and emotions due to the online transition are discussed in Section 2.3.1.

2.1.3 Use of online technologies for Chinese HL learning

The internet has long been recognised as a powerful tool for supporting heritage language maintenance among migrant families (J. S. Lee, 2006), as it facilitates connections between immigrants and their home countries (Wallraff, 2000). Social media applications are widely used for informal language learning (Artyushina & Sheypak, 2018; Ayers, 2020; Yurdagül & Öz, 2018). These technologies can enrich the linguistic environments of HL learners (Said, 2021), as they encompass various formats for user-generated content that facilitate interaction and knowledge exchange (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Muftah, 2022), including blogs and online chats (Muftah, 2022). The use of social media for educational purposes has increased significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic (Khalifa et al., 2021; Muftah, 2022). For overseas Chinese families, platforms such as WeChat are essential resources for accessing language-learning materials, as users can connect with online Chinese-speaking communities through “texting, reading online posts, sharing videos with self speaking” (Smith et al., 2020, p. 1075). Besides WeChat, TikTok and Zoom have gained popularity for language learning, although not exclusively among Chinese HL learners (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2022; Y. Lee, 2023). Some families also use Weibo to enhance literacy skills (see Section 3.5).

Online applications designed specifically for language learning have gained prominence in recent years. Research in Canada reports that children from migrant backgrounds may use computer games to enhance their heritage language vocabulary (Paradis, 2011). Overseas Chinese families often rely on dedicated language-learning platforms for HL learning, such as *Wukong Zhongwen* (S. Liu et al., 2021). Unlike complementary schools, which require in-person attendance, these sophisticated digital platforms offer customised lessons tailored to learners’ levels of proficiency and which can be adapted to their schedules (S. Liu et al., 2021). This flexibility particularly benefits children who live far from Chinese complementary schools or prefer personalised learning experiences. However, online platforms also present challenges, such as a shortage of trained teachers and a lack of professionally designed curricula (S. Liu et al., 2021). Moreover, language-learning applications in the current market are primarily designed for foreign language learners rather than heritage language learners (Little, 2019b), which may limit their effectiveness for Chinese heritage families.

Overall, one of the chief advantages of online learning experiences, whether through social media or dedicated language-learning apps, is high multimodality – the integration of text, images, and videos – which is beneficial for language acquisition (Purnama, 2017). Studies

suggest that multimodal content supports literacy development, including writing accuracy and complexity (V. Li, 2017; Valero-Porras & Cassany, 2015; Winke et al., 2010).

2.1.4 Summary

This section has examined the literature relevant to language learning experiences of adolescent Chinese HL learners, focusing on the various family language policies and practices that parents within Chinese heritage families may adopt. It has also considered other strategies and methods that families use to support their heritage language maintenance and development. These include complementary Chinese language schools and classrooms, visits to heritage countries, social and cultural activities, books and text-based materials, and online applications including social media. Curricula and provision for foreign languages in mainstream English schools have also been explored, including their influence on the language policies and practices of Chinese heritage families. This aligns with discussions on how language ideologies may shape linguistic repertoires (Busch, 2017).

The next section of this literature review addresses language ideologies that may be embraced and internalised by children and parents in Chinese heritage families in England.

2.2 Language ideologies within Chinese heritage families

This section addresses the role of language ideologies held by adolescent Chinese HL learners and their parents. Language ideology is an important consideration, as it may influence an individual's linguistic repertoire as well as their identities. As Kramsch (1998) argues, *ideology* is “symbolic language” that can create meanings of the world (p. 22). In social constructionism, the key paradigm adopted in this study, ideologies can contribute significantly to the construction of realities (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017). Particularly, ideologies related to language are crucial for analysis, as they extend beyond language itself to shape perceived connections between language and identity, influencing how individuals position themselves and others within social and cultural contexts (Woolard, 2020). Drawing on insights from existing research, this section probes the potential ideologies of overseas Chinese concerning language and culture, and how these are linked to identity.

2.2.1 Ideologies related to language and culture among overseas Chinese

Kramsch (1998) discusses the relationship between language and culture. She defines culture as:

membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings. Even when they have left that community, its members may retain, wherever they are, a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting. These standards are what is generally called their ‘culture’. (p. 10).

She asserts that language is intricately tied to culture in various ways, stating that both spoken and written words can “express”, “embody” and “symbolize” cultural realities (1998, p. 3).

Socially, language is a medium through which worldviews, including “attitudes, beliefs, and values”, are reflected, shared, and reinforced in interactions among members of a social group, and further emphasized through institutions (Kramsch, 1998, p. 6). Culture, which is historically rooted in traditions and practices, is passed down through generations as part of the shared language system. It is reproduced and preserved through both spoken and written language by institutions (p. 7). Moreover, as discussed by Anderson (1991), a group’s shared imaginations are mediated through language, which over time reflects, shapes, and serves as a metaphor for its cultural reality.

Thus, language not only conveys knowledge but also binds people to the conventions and norms of the communities they belong to. It is therefore important in this study to consider and discuss how overseas Chinese people may understand culture and language.

2.2.1.1 Understanding of Chinese culture by parents and Chinese schools

A. He (2008) argues that heritage language proficiency extends beyond mere lexico-grammatical knowledge for speaking and writing; it also involves adhering to a set of norms, preferences, and expectations that align linguistic structures to context. Many Chinese parents in the UK closely associate their children’s Chinese language abilities with Chinese culture, often perceiving Chinese-heritage individuals as “uncultured” if they cannot understand Chinese (Ganassin, 2020; W. Li et al., 2011, p. 16). Both studies also find that Chinese complementary schoolteachers tend to incorporate cultural transmission in their language teaching. Therefore, adolescent Chinese HL learners inevitably encounter Chinese cultural knowledge in their HL learning.

Traditional Chinese culture, heavily influenced by Confucianism, places a strong emphasis on *filial piety* and the respect children should show towards their parents’ opinions (Fuligni & W.

Zhang, 2004; Mengwei & Nehring, 2020). The influence of Confucian values often persists among overseas Chinese, including both adults and adolescents (Fuligni et al., 1999; V. Tseng, 2004). Parents typically transmit these values to their children as part of their cultural heritage (T. F. Su et al., 2009). Additionally, parents have expectations for their children's familial responsibilities, which may include participation in family activities (including extended family), consideration of the family's needs, involvement in ethnic cultural events, and the acquisition of heritage language and cultural knowledge (T. F. Su et al., 2009).

Cultural practices such as celebrating traditional festivals are also important for overseas Chinese, including in the UK (see Benton et al., 2011). Festivals offer a platform to showcase the history, culture, and values of a heritage (De Bres & Davis, 2001; Karlsen, 2007; Quinn, 2005). Jaeger and Mykletun (2013) argue that festivals can create not only a physical sense of home but also an abstract feeling of belonging, allowing individuals to feel at home in a new environment. Chinese festivals are also often marked by the consumption of specific foods, a custom which also has the power to connect individuals within a group (Reddy & van Dam, 2020). Festivals are also a means of passing on Chinese culture to the next generation, something which is highly valued by overseas Chinese. Chinese heritage families and Chinese complementary schools tend to celebrate traditional festivals to enhance children's knowledge of Chinese culture (Ganassin, 2020; H. Y. B. Yim et al., 2011).

Furthermore, traditional stories containing Confucian ideologies are often adopted for cultural transmission in Chinese complementary schools and classrooms (Ganassin, 2020). Various other activities related to Chinese culture (such as Chinese Kungfu, Tai Chi, Chinese chess, Chinese painting, traditional dance) are often regarded as important parts of learners' heritage culture and language learning, both by Chinese heritage families (see H. Y. B. Yim et al., 2011) and Chinese complementary schools (see Curdt-Christiansen, 2008; Ganassin, 2020; Mau et al., 2009).

However, overseas Chinese parents' and teachers' understandings of "Chinese culture" may run the risk of essentialisation (Ganassin, 2020), owing to the high value placed on certain ideologies and cultural practices, which may suggest that Chinese culture is homogeneous and universal. Instead, China "should be thought of as a cultural continent, not dissimilar to Europe, because the current geopolitical space that is the PRC is so vast and culturally varied" (Jin, 2016, p. 2). This advice resonates with the emphasis on diversity encompassed by the term "Chinese people", as discussed in section 1.4.1.1 above.

Moreover, the so-called Chinese culture passed on to HL learners within Chinese heritage families and complementary schools may neglect the evolving and processual nature of the production and negotiation of culture (Archer et al., 2010; Ganassin, 2020). As Anderson (1998) argues, immigrants may obtain a long-distance nationalism, which means that the sense of belonging they feel through certain cultural practices may evoke an imagined community rather than the real society. In studies among Chinese complementary schools in the United States, Chinese HL learners find that the culture they learn is separated from what they experience in their daily lives, or even different from what they encounter on social media about modern China (Smith et al., 2020).

In this study, Chinese culture is used as a term that captures diversity, but I am also aware that some participants (particularly parents) may still hold on to more traditional views and homogeneous concepts when they talk about “Chinese culture”.

2.2.1.2 High value placed on Chinese writing skills

Written language may play a more significant role in Chinese people’s language ideology than spoken language. Kramsch (1998) argues that a standard language is always a written form, and the use of written language is influenced and guided by cultural norms and practices. In turn, written language can contribute substantially to the continuation of culture, as well as “the way people think and behave” (Kramsch, 1998, p.8). Consistent with Kramsch’s arguments, Chinese people commonly believe that Chinese characters uniquely convey complex cultural values that other forms of expression cannot fully capture (W. Li et al., 2010). The deep respect for the authority of the Chinese written script is linked to China’s long-standing scribal culture, which has transmitted wisdom across generations through practices of copying and rewriting texts (Kramsch, 1998). Kramsch further argues that written scripts have also played a crucial role in preserving historical traditions, regulating collective memory, and maintaining interpretative authority over events. Nowadays, Chinese people’s reverence for Chinese characters still permeates their ideologies as well as their daily lives. For example, decorations in Chinese calligraphy are commonly used in Chinese households (W. Li et al., 2010). The high value accorded to written Chinese scripts can also be found in Chinese HL teaching, as Chinese calligraphy is taught in Chinese complementary schools worldwide as part of Chinese culture (Ganassin, 2020).

As outlined in Section 1.4, Chinese language varieties have two writing scripts: simplified and traditional (also referred to as complex). While respect for written scripts may be common among Chinese people across different regions, those in areas where traditional script is more prevalent (e.g., Taiwan) may associate the authenticity of Chinese culture particularly with traditional Chinese characters (H. Y. Su et al., 2021). Consequently, Chinese people from these regions, including Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, may place even greater value on the ability to write in Chinese. On the other hand, with the increasing prevalence of Mandarin Chinese in overseas Chinese education (to be discussed in Section 2.2.2), simplified Chinese characters – Mandarin’s corresponding writing script – may attract higher esteem by parents from Chinese heritage families. For example, in Ganassin’s (2020) study on Chinese complementary schools in the UK, some parents expressed doubts about teachers’ qualifications if they were from Taiwan, as these teachers were perceived to lack familiarity with the “standard” (simplified) characters that parents preferred their children to learn.

Although Chinese scripts are highly valued among Chinese people, it is open to question whether handwriting skills will continue to be highly regarded in the face of rapid digital technological advancement. Globally, written communication has shifted from paper and pencil to keyboards and touchscreens. Accordingly, e-writing, particularly e-writing via Pinyin-based typing, has been explored as an alternative to handwriting in teaching and learning practice and in Chinese language acquisition research. For example, among adult second-language learners of Chinese in the United States, speech-to-text technology is well-received and has positively influenced learners’ emotions during the learning process (see Da et al., 2024). However, whether this approach will be embraced by Chinese heritage language classrooms and Chinese parents from heritage families is debatable and currently lacks research.

2.2.2 Ideologies related to language and identity among overseas Chinese

This subsection examines three essentialist ideologies that are prominent among overseas Chinese people: the privileged status of Mandarin Chinese among Chinese language varieties; the “model minority” ideology; and the “authenticity” of Chinese identity. Drawing on the relevant literature, the subsection also examines the potential influence of these ideologies on adolescent Chinese HL learners’ language learning practices and their identity construction and development. Three related trends in Chinese HL learning will be discussed: the increasing prevalence of Mandarin Chinese as the heritage language variety learned by overseas Chinese;

the shift from heritage language varieties to the societal dominant language (English); and adolescents' adoption of translanguaging as a way of expressing their identities.

2.2.2.1 Language hierarchies: Mandarin and other Chinese language varieties

As mentioned in section 1.4.1.2, Chinese is regarded as a macrolanguage with various sublanguages (The International Organisation of Standardisation 639-3). Apart from Mandarin Chinese, there are several categories of dialects among Chinese language varieties. Most speakers of a dialect in one category cannot understand speakers in a different dialect category (W. Li et al., 2011). Additionally, diglossia and polyglossia are common among the overseas Chinese population, which means they can speak both Mandarin Chinese and one or more other dialects (W. Li et al., 2011).

Overseas Chinese people tend to regard Mandarin Chinese as the authoritative standard for the spoken Chinese language variety. When referring to their own dialects, overseas Chinese in Britain, Australia, and Singapore tend to use terms such as “*Jia Xiang Hua* (家乡话 hometown speech)”, “*Fang Yan* (方言 regional speech)”, and “*Tu Hua* (土话 rough speech)” (W. Li et al., 2011, p.18), and convey a somewhat negative attitude toward Chinese language varieties other than Mandarin. They perceive regional Chinese varieties as more difficult to understand and therefore less useful than Mandarin (W. Li et al., 2011). These perceptions, however, may have been heavily shaped by the promotion of Mandarin in education and standard language policy in mainland China (X. Su et al., 2017; L. Zhu et al., 2025), as discussed in section 1.4.1.2. Meanwhile, the term Chinese is often used interchangeably with Mandarin Chinese by both children and parents from Chinese heritage families, according to various studies (see Little, 2020; Mu et al., 2015).

However, it is worth noting that a significant factor in this phenomenon could be confusion about the distinction between Mandarin Chinese and other Chinese language varieties, especially among younger children. In Ganassin's (2020) research on Chinese complementary schools in the UK, young Chinese HL learners tend to subsume all the Chinese varieties in their lives, including Mandarin, into the label “Chinese”, even though they come from homes where they speak dialects (e.g., Cantonese, Hokkien or Hakka) fluently with other family members. Although the young age of the children (5 to 11 years old) may have contributed to their confusion about the languages in Ganassin's research, the growing prevalence of Mandarin Chinese as the primary HL variety may also shape children's language ideologies and linguistic

repertoires, leading to some confusion about other varieties. The *Findings and Discussion* chapter will explore how participants in this study perceive their linguistic repertoires, including the dynamics between their different Chinese language varieties.

A shift in the taught heritage language variety among overseas Chinese

Although a study by W. Li et al. (2011) finds that overseas Chinese place higher value on Mandarin Chinese than other dialects, it also does not imply that the other dialects are not regarded as useful. For example, a northern Chinese language variety may still be valued due to its closer resemblance to Mandarin Chinese, the standard form of Chinese. In the study of W. Li et al., dialects such as Shanghainese and Cantonese are also valued as they are spoken in economically developed regions, including Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Hong Kong. In fact, Cantonese used to be a commonly spoken and taught Chinese language variety among overseas Chinese people, due to the high proportion of Chinese immigrants from Cantonese-speaking regions among overseas Chinese (W. Li et al., 2011).

Nonetheless, since the first decade of the 21st century, there has been a rising trend for teaching Mandarin Chinese instead of Cantonese in Chinese complementary schools worldwide (A. He & Xiao, 2008; W. Li. et al., 2011; Mau et al., 2009). Recent studies show that Mandarin Chinese is now learned by a greater number of Chinese HL learners at home and in Chinese complementary schools (see P. A. Duff & Doherty, 2019; Ganassin, 2020). There is evidence that parents in Chinese heritage families residing in England, Australia and New Zealand also show preferences for developing their children's Mandarin Chinese abilities, regardless of their places of birth or the language varieties they speak at home (see Chen, 2023; Little, 2020; Mu & Dooley, 2015). However, Chen's (2023) study (in New Zealand) finds that adult children, as they get older, may challenge the prestige of Mandarin Chinese in their family language policies, especially in cases where their parents speak dialects such as Shanghainese (Wu Chinese), Cantonese, Hokkien and Hakka. Whether this pattern also occurs in the context of England or the UK more widely is still under-explored.

The shift in preference to Mandarin Chinese may be due in part to change over time in the regional origins of Chinese immigrants, especially those coming to England. As discussed in Section 1.4.1.1, increasing numbers of immigrants to England are from mainland China, where Mandarin Chinese is promoted by state language policy (also see W. Li & C. J. Wu, 2009; W. Li et al., 2011). Additionally, overseas Chinese people may be influenced by the PRC's increasing social and economic prominence since the handover of Hong Kong in 1997 (W. Li

et al., 2009, 2011; Zeng & Agha, 2021) and thus more inclined to adopt the standard language variety of the PRC, reflecting Kramsch's (1998) observation that national cultures echo with powerful voices. In 2011, a study by W. Li et al. forecasted that the growing dominance of Mandarin Chinese in complementary schools would shape the HL education and internal cohesion of overseas Chinese communities. That prediction may have become reality, in light of findings by Ganassin (2020) that even parents from Cantonese-speaking families are encouraging their children to learn Mandarin rather than Cantonese, thus demonstrating a shift in language ideology of overseas Chinese parents as well.

In the present study, all adolescent participants are taught Mandarin Chinese in their Chinese complementary schools/classrooms, even though two of the adolescents are from Cantonese-speaking families. This phenomenon is discussed further in the *Findings and Discussion* chapter.

Mandarin Chinese and Chinese identities

W. Li et al. (2011) argue that although families may differ in the Chinese language varieties they speak, Mandarin Chinese, as the standard variety, may contribute to the construction of a unified Chinese identity. Unlike regional dialects that represent specific local heritages, Mandarin Chinese can symbolise a broader Chinese heritage in many overseas Chinese people's ideologies (W. Li et al., 2011). This argument implies that although (Mandarin) Chinese learners may come from diverse family backgrounds where other Chinese languages are spoken, they may still embrace the idea of being a "heritage language learner" when they learn Mandarin Chinese.

However, as Section 2.4.5 will discuss, Chinese people cannot be regarded as a homogeneous community. Therefore, the emphasis on Mandarin, or an individual's identification as a (Mandarin) Chinese heritage language learner, does not necessarily lead to a convergence of adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities. Rather, this study adopts the perspective that individual identities are fluid and continuously evolving, shaped by personal experiences, linguistic backgrounds, and social contexts.

2.2.2.2 The "model minority"

The concept of the "model minority", which was first put forward in the late 1960s in the United States to recognise the educational/career success of Asian Americans, characterises Chinese immigrants as a hardworking, self-reliant, and problem-free minority group (Ng et al.,

2007). This stereotypical description, which positions Asian Americans as “others” who are not fully integrated into mainstream society while also distancing them from other minority groups (Ng et al., 2007), can also be observed in the UK context (Archer & Francis, 2005). Mau’s (2013) study finds that the concept of the model minority is accepted or even actively embraced by many parents and adolescents in Chinese heritage families in the UK. The idea of the model minority also suggests that some Chinese immigrants and their offspring may sacrifice their heritage language and culture in order to integrate into the dominant culture and society (Kang, 2015), despite the high value they may hold for their own language and culture, as discussed previously.

Even if some Chinese HL learners are motivated by the internalised notion of model majority to extend their pursuit of academic excellence to Chinese heritage language studies as well (see Y. Zhou et al., 2023), the model minority remains a stereotype which puts a homogenising frame on the experiences and identities of Chinese immigrants.

2.2.2.3 Language as an identity marker – and the authenticity stereotype

Kramsch (1998) notes that speaking certain languages can shape individuals’ identities by influencing their sense of belonging, as distinct discourse styles can differentiate insiders from outsiders within a cultural group. Various studies have found that parents in Chinese heritage families in the UK, Australia, and Singapore often regard Chinese language proficiency as a key marker of their children’s Chinese identity (Curdt-Christiansen, 2016; W. Li et al., 2011; A. Tseng, 2020). Similarly, children with Chinese heritage in Australia and the UK also recognise the significant role of language proficiency in shaping their Chinese identity (Ganassin, 2020; Shen et al., 2021). As explained above, although families may differ in their Chinese language varieties, Mandarin Chinese, as the standard variety, may contribute to the construction of a unified Chinese identity (W. Li et al., 2011). Unlike regional dialects, Mandarin Chinese can symbolise a broader Chinese heritage in many overseas Chinese people’s ideologies (W. Li et al., 2011; Ganassin, 2020).

Beyond children’s Chinese speaking skills, previous studies have shown that many overseas Chinese parents place high value on their children’s ability to write Chinese characters, viewing this skill as an essential component of their children’s Chinese identity (Kramsch, 1998; W. Li et al., 2010; W. Li et al., 2011). The focus on HL writing competence can be found in other ethnic communities too (see the study by Hashtpari et al. (2021) on Mexican Americans).

However, the emphasis on the strong or even absolute connection between ethnicity and language proficiency may fall into the stereotype of authenticity. This stereotype connects language proficiency to ethnicity, putting a moral imperative on individuals in an ethnic group to be fluent in their heritage tongue in order to be authentic members of that group (Abdi, 2011; Mau, 2013; Woolard, 1998). This emphasis on authenticity represents “fixed racial, linguistic and cultural content” that is usually rooted in the monolingual native speaker ideology held by older generations of overseas Chinese parents (W. Li et al., 2010, p.166). It is regarded as “an essentialist and absolute notion of Chinese” (Ang, 2005, p. 30). H. Zhu et al. (2014) make the point that in the context of Chinese complementary schools in the UK, teachers or parents of Chinese HL learners could be speakers of any Chinese language variety, which makes the notion of authenticity of Chinese language speakers even more problematic.

The authenticity stereotype appears to have been internalised by members of the UK Chinese community and reinforced by mainstream UK society (Archer et al., 2005; Ganassin, 2020; Y. Zhou et al., 2023). For example, the growing emphasis on learning Mandarin Chinese is accompanied by expectations for standardised pronunciation. In Ganassin’s (2020) study, some parents questioned the qualifications of teachers with Taiwanese accents, expressing concerns about their ability to teach “standard” Mandarin; meanwhile, teachers were observed to devalue the linguistic authority of parents whose Mandarin was accented. This tension between parents and teachers may indicate the ideological significance attached to linguistic norms in shaping authenticity. Nonetheless, as Blommaert and Varis (2013) argue, authenticity is not solely determined by language use, but also shaped by intersecting factors such as physical appearance, habits, occupations, and lifestyles. There are of course some connections between one’s heritage language proficiency and one’s identity: as W. Li’s earlier work (1994) shows a well-developed sense of ethnic identity and strong ethnic networks can contribute to greater HL proficiency. But, importantly, in this current study, a greater proficiency in the heritage language is not equated to a stronger sense of heritage belonging. Instead, this current study acknowledges that learners’ heritage language development can be complicated, varying with language input and individual experiences (A. He et al., 2008). For example, A. He finds that HL learners may have encountered a lot of vocabulary in their communications at home, but they may not understand the writing script, or speak various dialects. Furthermore, children from Chinese heritage families generally identify as Chinese regardless of their heritage language skills and do not see proficiency in reading and writing Chinese as essential to their

identity (W. Li et al., 2010). Their sense of being Chinese may be “more dynamic and fluid” (W. Li et al., 2010, p.166) in ways that value multilingualism and multiculturalism.

2.2.2.4 HL learners’ language development and identity

The language development of Chinese HL learners may receive much attention within their families, owing to parents’ emphasis on heritage language proficiency. This section examines the features of HL learners’ language development and the corresponding potential (re)construction of their identities.

Language shifts

Given the diversity of linguistic environments to which HL learners are exposed (see A. He, 2008), their language practices can vary significantly and they evolve over time. Some children continue to actively use both languages, while others may develop *passive bilingualism*, where they understand both but tend to produce only one (Mrva, 2018). Research in different linguistic contexts suggests that passively bilingual children often have lower proficiency in their HL varieties rather than the dominant language variety in their societal context (Colin Baker & W. Wright, 2021).

When HL learners are compared to foreign language learners acquiring the same language variety, HL learners tend to perform better in grammatical competence and listening skills compared to foreign language learners, but their reading and writing abilities are often limited to basic vocabulary (Kondo-Brown, 2005; Montrul, 2008).

Furthermore, HL learners’ language preferences and practices may shift over time. For example, in Little (2024), after living in England for 3.5 years, an 11-year-old Spanish girl – who had previously received most of her schooling in Spanish and was only exposed to Spanish at home in England – demonstrated a clear preference for reading and writing in English. Due to the prominent emphasis on children’s HL proficiency among overseas Chinese, language shift may be regarded as a risk for Chinese HL learners’ language development.

Fishman (1964, 2001) defines language shift as the process where people’s vernacular language changes from one to another. In this study, language shift primarily refers to the changes in the preferred language used by immigrants and their children in daily life. This shift may occur between Chinese language varieties and English, the dominant language in England’s societal context (the dominant status of English is further discussed in Section 1.2). However, language

shifts can also take place within Chinese language varieties, particularly from dialects to Mandarin Chinese (see X. Su et al., 2017 and Section 2.3.1).

Language maintenance is often viewed in contrast to language shift, as a decline in minority language proficiency is commonly associated with the latter (Little et al., 2024). Language maintenance refers to deliberate efforts to sustain the use of a minority language despite challenges posed by the dominant language of a given region or society or by a numerically stronger language (Mesthrie, 1999). In this study, adolescent HL learners' efforts to learn Chinese language varieties can be viewed as acts of language maintenance.

D. Zhang (2010) suggests that language maintenance and language shift should be understood as a dynamic process that reflects power imbalances between minority languages and the dominant language, shaped by various social relationships. However, previous studies indicate that language shift may be the more powerful force as it tends to occur more frequently and easily than language maintenance among migrant-background families, a phenomenon which is found in different ethnic groups and societal contexts (see Bougie et al., 2003; Dubiel & Guilfoyle, 2021; DuBord & Becker, 2021; Hunt & S. Davis, 2019).

Where language shift occurs, it can be attributed to two primary factors: limited exposure to the minority language and a lack of contexts where proficiency in the minority language is necessary (D. Zhang, 2010). Regarding the first factor, it follows that to reverse the shift and maintain the minority language, children must receive “comprehensible and sufficient” language input in accessible and engaging formats (Krashen, 1982). The second factor, on the other hand, concerning lack of contexts requiring language competence, has the corollary that language shift may occur when speakers consider one language variety to be less useful than the other(s) (D. Zhang et al., 2009). This aligns with findings of studies showing that children's reading preferences in the upper stages of primary education often shift to the dominant language in society or school (Worthy et al., 2016). Welply (2023) observes that schools often serve as a “battlefield” where young people from heritage families navigate their linguistic repertoires while simultaneously conforming to hegemonic linguistic standards. In the UK, school policies prioritise standard English over other languages or varieties (Cushing, 2023), which means that mainstream schooling has inevitably contributed to language shifts within heritage families (Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2023; Little et al., 2024).

Both of the identified factors in language shift are potentially relevant for this study. For example, HL learners may lack exposure to dialects (and the distinctions between Chinese varieties) due to the privilege of Mandarin Chinese over other dialects in Chinese complementary schools and in Chinese heritage families (Ganassin, 2020). Additionally, the Chinese HL learners in the study may shift their preference to English if they perceive it has greater utility than their heritage languages, given that English is not only the dominant language in the UK but is the lingua franca in many settings in the wider world; thus, English proficiency potentially brings considerable educational and professional advantages (D. Zhang et al., 2009). Furthermore, Curdt-Christiansen et al. (2023) highlight the impact of prejudice in mainstream society and schooling in England. Racial and cultural prejudice and inequalities may contribute to language shift as they can compel or influence members of marginalised communities to adjust their linguistic and cultural behaviours (Rosa & Flores, 2017).

Although language shift is more common for second-generation immigrants (Alyami, 2023), it can also emerge among first-generation immigrants, according to a study on the Turkish community in the Netherlands (Sevinç, 2016). This phenomenon is particularly evident where immigrant parents perceive their social status to be constrained by limited English proficiency and believe that mastering English will facilitate their own and their children's integration into mainstream society, permitting upward social mobility (Krashen, 1982; Shin, 2010). Language shift in the first generation may be more likely to occur when the parents embrace the “model minority” stereotype (Y. Zhou et al., 2023), especially where language policies in England's mainstream schools may inhibit pupils' positive attitudes towards languages other than English (Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2023; Cushing, 2023). However, the frequency of language shift is significantly lower among first-generation immigrants compared to the second and third generations (Sevinç, 2016). Nevertheless, whether the first-generation immigrant parents' proficiency in the societal dominant language has an influence on their children's language shifts is underexplored. This matter is addressed in this study (see Chapter 4).

Translanguaging

Translanguaging, defined as the process of “making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages” (Colin Baker et al., 2021, p. 555), highlights the flexibility of bilinguals in taking control of their own language learning and practices (O. García & W. Li, 2014). This concept aligns with the social constructionism

approach to identity adopted in this study, which recognises the dynamic nature of identities (see section 2.4).

The term translanguaging was first coined by Welsh educator Cen Williams in his unpublished paper in the 1980s (1994). Based on his work in local language classrooms, Williams observed that using both Welsh and English in teaching practice could significantly enhance students' motivation and facilitate learning. Williams originally named this teaching method *trawsieithu* in Welsh, which was later translated as *translanguaging* by Colin Baker (2001).

Although many studies on language and identity have adopted the term *code-switching* to refer to bilinguals' language practices (see Auer, 2005; K. Hall & Nlep, 2015; Sebba & Wooton, 1998), this study argues that translanguaging is a more appropriate term to understand HL learners' linguistic repertoires and identities. As Lewis et al. (2012) argue, the differentiation between *code-switching* and *translanguaging* is ideological. Unlike *code-switching*, translanguaging entails that bilinguals do not view their language varieties separately. Rather, they integrate their linguistic resources into a unified and flexible linguistic repertoire to communicate, learn, and construct meaning (O. García, 2011; O. García et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2012), a strategy that aligns with the social constructionist understanding of identities in this study. This perspective views bilingualism as a dynamic and fluid practice. It acknowledges the agency of bilingual individuals when they make purposeful choices about when and how to use different language varieties based on their communicative needs and social contexts rather than adherence to grammatical boundaries or prescriptive linguistic rules (O. García, 2011; O. García et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2012).

Translanguaging has been explored both as a pedagogical approach in bilingual classrooms and as a language practice among bilinguals in daily life. As a teaching method, translanguaging enhances the effectiveness of second language teaching and learning by fostering a dynamic and interactive learning environment (see Jones, 2017; Lin & P. He, 2017; Mazak & Herbas-Donoso, 2015). This approach challenges traditional hierarchical power dynamics between teachers and students, promoting a more inclusive and participatory classroom experience (see Colin Baker, 2001; Hornberger & Link, 2012; Jones, 2017).

Furthermore, translanguaging can serve as a resource for language learners' identity performances (Blackledge & Creese, 2017; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Ganassin, 2020; Little, 2023; Yanmei Han, 2020; H. Zhu et al., 2017), as language can be a means of embracing and

expressing fluidity in affiliations and social roles (Badwan, 2021). Two key concepts in translanguaging are *creativity* and *criticality*. Creativity refers to bilingual speakers' ability to choose whether to conform to or challenge linguistic norms, reflecting the dynamic nature of bilingual language practice (W. Li, 2018). Criticality, on the other hand, involves the ability to reform and negotiate cultural, social, and linguistic awareness in an insightful and contextually appropriate manner (W. Li, 2018). Through creativity and criticality, bilingual speakers actively construct and perform their identities (ibid). Additionally, HL learners may perceive that individuals who do not speak the same languages as them may fail to capture the complexity of the HL learners' identities (Little, 2023).

For these reasons, this study adopts the concept of translanguaging rather than code-switching as it is better aligned with the social constructionism approach adopted in the research. However, it should be recognised that some overseas Chinese parents and teachers of HL learners, who may ascribe high value to language authenticity and proficiency, may not accept translanguaging practices, even though translanguaging does not equate to low proficiency in either language variety (Yow et al., 2018). For example, W. Li (2014b) finds that in some Chinese complementary schools in the UK, students are prohibited from speaking English at all (thus precluding translanguaging practice), which significantly challenges some students' identities as they embrace their multilingualism (W. Li et al., 2010).

2.2.3 Summary

In brief, Section 2.2 has discussed several common ideologies related to language, culture and identity among overseas Chinese, including both adults and children. Arguments in this section mainly challenge the homogeneous view of Chinese language varieties, culture and identities. Instead, this study acknowledges the complexity and diversity in Chinese language varieties and cultures, further emphasising that individuals' identities are fluid and dynamic due to their different language learning experiences and different familial and school environments.

In *Findings and Discussion* (Chapter 4), the study uses a social constructionist framework to explore the participating adolescent Chinese HL learners' language ideologies, including the adolescents' understandings regarding Chinese language varieties, Chinese language and culture, language proficiency and identity, as well as how their ideologies may be contested by others.

2.3 Motivations and emotions in HL learning

In language learning, learners' motivations are closely linked to their identity constructions (Saito et al., 2018). Motivation, in turn, influences learners' emotions, which then shape their behaviours in relation to language learning. This ongoing process contributes to the (re)construction of learners' identities (Saito et al., 2018). Given the dynamic interaction between identity, motivation, and emotions in language learning, it is essential in this study to examine these concepts and their interrelationships. This section introduces the key concepts of motivation, and emotions in language learning, focusing on their development in the context of adolescent Chinese HL learners' HLs learning.

2.3.1 Motivations and language learning

Given the close connections between motivations, emotions and identities in language learning, this section considers two key theories in motivation studies: the L2 Motivational Self System and Investment Theory. Armed with these theories, the section reviews the potential motivations for adolescent Chinese learners' HL learning, to better understand their HL learning experiences and identity constructions in relation to their linguistic repertoires. The L2 Motivational Self System focuses on the learners' subjective understanding of their motivations, while Investment Theory may be applied to parents who may contest their children's motivations for pragmatic reasons. Next, these two theories of learners' motivations are explained in more detail.

2.3.1.1 Motivational Self System

Gardner and Lambert (1959, 1972) classify students' motivations for language learning into two categories: integrative and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation refers to a learner's identification with and desire to become a member of the target language community, whereas instrumental motivation is concerned with the "utilitarian value of linguistic achievements" (Gardner et al., 1959, p. 271). While both types of motivation influence language learners, research of Gardner et al. suggests that those with stronger integrative motivation tend to perform better academically.

Despite being one of the most widely cited theories in language education research, Gardner and Lambert's framework has been critiqued for its limitations. Ushioda (2011) argues that the theory treats language learners as categorised groups rather than as individuals with unique motivations. Furthermore, due to globalisation and the dominance of English, the boundaries

between language communities are blurred, resulting in a more complex multilingual society (Ushioda, 2011). Given that HL learners navigate multiple linguistic environments, and recognising that identity varies from individual to individual, Dörnyei proposes (2005, 2009) the *L2 Motivational Self System* as a more suitable framework for analysing adolescent HL learners' motivations toward their diverse linguistic repertoires.

Certain theories from second language acquisition (SLA) research have been used to inform HL research due to some of the similarities observed between L2 acquisition and HL acquisition. For example, for Spanish HL learners entering U.S. secondary schools, the societal dominant language often becomes the dominant language in their daily interactions and their grammatical and verbal choices in Spanish tend to resemble those of L2 learners rather than monolingual speakers (Lynch, 2003).

Dörnyei's (2005; 2009) L2 Motivational Self System is rooted in the psychological theories of possible selves and self-discrepancy (Higgins, 1987; Markus & Wurf, 1987; Ushioda, 2011), which explore individuals' perceptions of what they may become, what they want to become, and what they seek to avoid becoming. According to these underpinning theories, motivation arises from the disparity between a learner's ideal self-image and their current self-concept, driving them to bridge this gap (Higgins, 1987; Markus et al., 1987; Ushioda, 2011). Based on these theories, Dörnyei introduces two key constructs in this theory: the *Ideal L2 Self* and the *Ought-to L2 Self*. The Ideal L2 Self is an internal imagination that learners aspire to achieve, whereas the Ought-to L2 Self stands for what learners believe they ought to do to meet external social expectations and evade negative results due to their awareness of duties, obligations, and responsibilities (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). In other words, a language learner's Ought-to Self may be shaped by the external pressures or expectations imposed by others. Therefore, although the Motivational Self System emphasises the internalisation of individuals' motivations, it is also aligned with the paradigm of this research, which is social constructionism.

The notion of a potential future self is influenced by multiple internal and external factors, leading to dynamic changes in learners' motivations and performance over time (Saito et al., 2018). Research of Saito et al. indicates that students with a stronger Ideal L2 Self tend to invest more effort in language learning, whereas the relationship between the Ought-to L2 Self and learners' behaviours is less conclusive.

Unlike earlier theories (e.g., Gardner et al., 1959, 1972), the *L2 Motivational Self System* conceptualises language as “a means of self-expression and self-development” rather than merely a tool (Ushioda, 2011, p. 204), thus aligning closely with identity formation. The distinction between the Ideal Self and the Ought-to Self also parallels the tensions between young HL learners’ personal attitudes on the one hand, and parental expectations and social pressures on the other (see Little, 2020). Additionally, the L2 Motivational Self System has been applied to HL learning context by studies conducted in various countries, including Australia and the UK (see Kurata 2015; Little et al., 2024; Xie, 2014). These precedents suggest that the theory provides a useful framework for examining HL learners’ motivations in an identity study.

Moreover, the L2 Motivational Self System emphasises that learners’ present learning experiences – including teacher influence, peer interactions, curriculum structure, and potential achievements – also shape their motivations (C. You et al., 2016). Hence, this framework can well accommodate the diversity of adolescent Chinese HL learners’ language learning experiences, as discussed in Section 2.1. Later subsections will explore various factors that influence language learners’ motivations, which, in turn, shape their identities.

Notwithstanding the value of Dornyei’s L2 Motivational Self System, the study acknowledges that the theory’s emphasis on learners’ self-expressions may not fully align with the social constructionist approach to identity adopted in this study (see Section 2.4). Therefore, this study also considers how adolescents’ motivations may be contested by others, which can, in turn, shape their ought-to selves, given that this concept of the ought-to self is linked with external expectations. A detailed analysis is provided in Section 4.3 of Chapter 4.

Additionally, this study incorporates Investment Theory (Norton, 2013), which is applied to the role of parents and how they may influence adolescents’ subjective formation of identities. Investment Theory is explained further in the next subsection.

2.3.1.2 Investment Theory

Norton’s (2013) Investment Theory argues that adult language learners anticipate receiving rewards from their learning, and the perceived scale and likelihood of these rewards determine the effort they invest. The theory has been widely adopted in language-learning motivation research (see Barako & Selleck, 2019; Henry, 2019; Sung, 2020).

Although this study focuses on adolescents rather than adult learners, adolescents' HL learning is often shaped by parental influence, as parents may perceive language proficiency as a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and may expect tangible benefits from their investment in their children's education. Therefore, Norton's theory can be applied to analyse parents' motivations regarding their children's heritage language education, which may influence children's constructions of their *Ought-to Self* and contest children's *Ideal Self*. In this way, Norton's Investment Theory can be integrated with Dornyei's (2005; 2009) principles in this current study.

2.3.1.3 Motivations of adolescent Chinese HL learners

Given that HL learners by definition have heritage connections with the language varieties they are learning, their language learning motivations are often influenced by parents and other family members. An individual's sense of belonging to the heritage culture, especially through certain practices, food, festivals, could potentially serve as a motivating factor and a component of one's identity (Little et al., 2024), further reinforcing the connections between identities and motivations (discussed at the beginning of Section 2.3). As previously discussed, the language a learner studies often represents an "imagined" community they aspire to join (Anderson, 1991). However, for HL learners and their families, this community may not be merely imagined but real and present. Little (2020) argues that HL learners and their parents may be motivated not by the desire to "become" members of a new community but rather by a wish to "maintain" or "return to" their heritage culture, which indicates the cultural pride that parents often associate with HLs (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; A. He, 2025). This motivation may be particularly salient in Chinese heritage families due to their typically deep reverence for Chinese language and culture (see Section 2.2). However, children may not feel the desire to "return to" the heritage community to the same extent as their parents (Little, 2020), which may cause intergenerational frictions.

In contrast to the enthusiastic embrace of bilingualism observed among second-generation adult Korean HL learners in the United States (Jeon, 2020) and mixed-heritage adults in Britain (Hosany, 2016), some children may view learning Chinese HL as an obligation or responsibility.

For example, in a study by Gruszczyńska-Thompson (2024), young adult HL learners from diverse heritages say that they bore a responsibility to learn their HLs, although their attitudes to this responsibility are varied. Some are positive about the value of fulfilling their duty, while

others' awareness of responsibility rises from the guilt and shame they associate with their inadequate HL proficiency. This latter experience resonates with findings from previous studies indicating that children in heritage families are often regarded as the culprits for language shift or loss (Manosthikit, 2018; Verhaeghe et al., 2022).

Within Chinese heritage families, children's sense of responsibility can derive from their internalisations of Chinese cultural norms of *filial piety* and the expectations associated with it (Bond, 1996; Fuligni et al., 2004; Mengwei et al., 2020; Mu, 2014). As discussed in Section 2.2, traditional Chinese culture places great importance on filial piety and encourages children to respect parental guidance (Fuligni et al., 2004; Mengwei et al., 2020). Research on Chinese adolescents and young adults in America show that a sense of belonging to the Chinese community and family obligation are positively correlated (Louie, 2006; N. H. Wu & S. Y. Kim, 2009). Particularly, one female participant said explicitly that her motivation to learn Chinese was the potential to build a closer relationship with her parents. This suggests that obligation to close family may be a particularly strong motivation for adolescent Chinese HL learners for females, although more research is needed.

Maintaining connections with extended family members is a related motivation for HL learning. Studies on Eastern European immigrant families indicate that passing on the heritage language enables communication between children and their grandparents and other relatives, reflecting the strong cultural emphasis on extended family (Nesteruk, 2010; Nesteruk & Marks, 2009). Similarly, the value of extended family has been deeply embedded in Chinese culture for generations (see Hsu, 1943). Notably, the one-child policy has led to a pattern where many extended Chinese families are focused on a single child in each generation for multiple generations (A. Xu & Xia, 2014). If parents in heritage families are only children, grandparents may feel a stronger need for connection with their grandchildren. However, the benefits of extended family connections through a shared language can be felt by the young learners too. For example, adolescent Vietnamese Americans report a sense of fulfilment when communicating in their HL with family members who cannot speak English (Tran et al., 2021), highlighting the positive emotions that may flow from a young person's HL learning obligations.

For some heritage families, the obligation on children to learn their HLs can be a matter of "survival" for parents (Hashtpari et al., 2021; Little, 2020). When parents face language barriers in the host country (Beiser & Hou, 2006), children often have to assume the role of

“little translators” (Little et al., 2024). While the increasing number of skilled Chinese immigrants in the UK (see Section 1.4.1.1) may have mitigated this issue for some, language barriers remain a challenge for certain families. Some parents still expect their children to learn both the heritage language and societal dominant language to act as their families’ interpreters in daily life (Little, 2020). The influence of parental language barriers on the HL learning motivations and emotions of the adolescents in this study is further explored in the *Findings and Discussion* chapter.

Norton (2013) asserts that first-generation immigrants tend to perceive language learning as an investment in future careers and social status. First-generation immigrant Chinese parents may strongly encourage their children to learn Chinese, taking a strategic view of bilingualism as a passport to future job opportunities (Mu et al., 2015; Tran et al., 2021; Weger-Guntharp, 2006). This motive may be particularly pronounced in parents who have personally benefited from bilingual skills in their own careers (Jo et al., 2023). Family perceptions of multilingualism as a valuable asset reinforce motives based on notions of investment and anticipated returns (Polinsky & Kagan, 2007). Moreover, Chinese heritage parents’ commitment to investing in their children’s bi/multilingualism may be strengthened by their appreciation of China’s growing economic and political influence in the world (H. Zhu et al., 2014), as found in research on Chinese heritage families in Australia (Y. Wang, 2023).

Parents’ perceptions of the value of investing in children’s HL learning extend beyond expected career opportunities and financial rewards. Parents may also foresee important but less tangible benefits for young people, such as enhanced critical thinking skills and broadened social perspectives, given that bilingual individuals typically develop a deeper understanding of both their heritage and dominant cultures (Jo et al., 2023).

Similarly, the desire for academic success may motivate both parents and children to invest in HL learning (Matthews & López, 2019). Here, the influence of the stereotypical “model minority” ideology may also be in play (see Section 2.2.2.2). As mentioned previously, pupils in England are encouraged to study a foreign language for their GCSE qualifications. GCSEs are crucial for 15- to 16-year-olds as the results can strongly influence their future education options and career prospects (DfE, 2013; Denscombe, 2000; Putwain, 2009). The participants in this study, being aged 12 to 16, may be motivated to achieve high grades in languages. Nevertheless, the language curriculum and linguistic environment in England may complicate the young learners’ motivations, as discussed in Section 2.4.

Beyond the influences from their families, HL learners' motivations may be influenced by other factors. For example, the HL learners themselves may be intrinsically motivated by the belief that language learning is an investment in their future. Studies on Chinese HL learners aged 18 to 25, who were either born in an English-dominant country or migrated at a young age, indicate that many eventually recognise the career value of learning Chinese, even if they initially felt it was imposed upon them by their parents (Weger-Guntharp, 2006; K. F. Wong & Xiao, 2010). However, these studies do not specify the exact age range at which this shift in attitude occurs (K. F. Wong et al., 2010). Adolescents may begin considering future career prospects when choosing their GCSE subjects, as their further education and careers are partly steered by their GCSE outcomes. Also, pupils in England receive career guidance in mainstream schools, starting in early adolescence (Year 7) and running through to age 18 (Ofsted, 2023). Therefore, most youngsters aged 12 to 16 will be actively thinking about their possible future careers. In sum, adolescent pupils in England may develop their own career-related motivations for HL learning independently of parental influence.

Finally, recent research on the relationship between multilingualism and motivation (see Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017; Lasagabaster, 2017; Ushioda, 2017) highlights that some individuals are motivated to pursue bilingualism or multilingualism as an intrinsic goal, viewing it as a form of self-development independently of careers or other tangible benefits. As learners engage with multiple linguistic varieties, they may develop a *Multilingual Ideal Self*, which can further enhance their motivation (Henry, 2017). In a study by Little et al. (2024), several adolescent Chinese HL learners referred to their goal of multilingualism as integral to developing a "better version of myself" (p. 9). Given that adolescents in England's mainstream schools are required to study foreign languages (DfE, 2013) (which may not always include their heritage language), the notion of a Multilingual Ideal Self might play a role in motivating participants in this study to pursue their HL learning.

Research on Guatemalan heritage children further suggests that HL learners from middle-class families tend to be particularly cognisant of the advantages of bilingualism and cultural knowledge in a globalised world (Menjívar, 2002). Similar findings have emerged in studies of adolescent Chinese HL learners from middle-class families in the United States (Callahan & Gándara, 2014), and adolescent Chinese HL learners in England (Little et al., 2024). Research has established that bilingualism is a privilege more readily obtained by members of certain social classes (Gruszczyńska-Thompson, 2024). However, whether HL learners in

England perceive language skills and job opportunities differently based on social class is a question that remains underexplored.

In brief, this section has drawn on relevant literature to consider potential motives for learning Chinese HL varieties within Chinese heritage families. In the *Findings and Discussion* Chapter, the motivations of adolescents in this study will be explored, framed by the *Motivational Self System* theory, with additional insights from *Investment Theory*.

2.3.2 Emotions and language learning

Research on emotions and language learning has gained prominence since the late 20th century (Pavlenko, 2005), leading to various definitions of *emotions*. Berkowitz (2000) defines *emotions* as personal responses to specific provocations, whereas So and Dominguez (2005) propose that emotions result from complex intercommunications between psychological, cognitive, behavioural, and societal factors. So et al. (2005) emphasise that emotions are complex and multifaceted and that the analysis of emotions should vary from individual to individual, drawing on their subjective experiences.

Parkinson (2006), however, defines emotions as “a concept, a social practice, and a way of being-in-the-world” (p. 4), which suggests that emotions emerge from individuals’ interpretations of their interactions with others and the social environment. Consequently, people from different cultural backgrounds – or different generations within the same cultural background – may have different emotional responses to the same situations (Parkinson, 2006). Pavlenko (2005) highlights that Western cultures and languages typically frame emotions as individual phenomena, centring on personal interpretations. This tendency is reflected in the definitions proposed by Western scholars. In contrast, non-Western languages emphasise the social context of emotions (Pavlenko, 2005). The present study is conducted in a Western society but focuses on adolescents from Chinese heritage families, so the influences on participants’ emotions about HL learning are likely to be complex and variable. For the purposes of this research, emotions are conceptualised and defined as personal interpretations of social practices, encompassing both individual and social influences on emotional experiences.

As stated previously, emotions can shape individuals’ identities and motivations in language learning. Different emotional states, such as anxiety and enjoyment, may impact learners’ engagement and motivation in diverse ways (Dewaele & C. Li, 2020; Pavlenko, 2005; Saito et

al., 2018; Shelton & Stern, 2004). These emotions are key determinants of whether a learner remains engaged or becomes disengaged in language learning (MacIntyre, 2002). Research shows that positive emotions enhance learners' engagement and facilitate language acquisition (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). They contribute to improved language proficiency and resilience (MacIntyre, 2002; Sevinç & Anthonissen, 2023), which in turn may generate more positive emotions in language learners (see Li Li et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2020; Wen, 2011). Conversely, negative emotions not only hinder language acquisition but also reduce motivation connected to the *Ought-to Self*, as learners struggle to meet external expectations (Saito et al., 2018).

Language learners may also experience emotions that are not purely positive or negative but are contradictory and conflicting – which can impair their ability to concentrate on studying (Shelton et al., 2004). Moreover, repressed emotions may lead to anger or confusion (Shelton et al., 2004). As emotional expression is a vital aspect of social interaction that supports both physical and mental well-being (Fussell, 2022), it is essential to recognise learners' emotions in language education.

In research on languages and emotions within multilingual families, emotional experiences can be categorised as “linguistic well-being” and “socioemotional well-being” (Hollebeke et al., 2020, p.4). The former pertains to emotions related to language acquisition, learning, competence, and practice, while the latter encompasses family relationships, identity, and overall emotional well-being (Hollebeke et al., 2020). This section explores in detail both linguistic well-being and socioemotional well-being in the context of HL learners.

The next two subsections draw on the literature to explore the emotions that adolescent Chinese HL learners may potentially feel in classrooms/schools and at home.

2.3.2.1 Emotions of HL learners in classrooms and schools

Anxiety, one of the most common negative emotions in language learning, is stress and fear associated with language input and/or output, including processing, memorising, and producing the target language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

Pupils often associate anxiety with language learning after repeated negative experiences in the classroom (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). Researchers have identified several precipitating factors in such experiences, including harsh error correction (Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak,

2022), incompatible teacher-student relationships (Gregersen et al., 2014), and other classroom activities that threaten learners' sense of security and self-esteem (Pavlenko, 2005). Such experiences can suppress language learners' enthusiasm and willingness to acquire and use the target language, as well as decrease learners' desire to identify with the language community.

Boredom is another negative emotion commonly reported in language learning (C. Li et al., 2023). It can reduce cognitive engagement and motivation and impede the adoption of deep learning strategies that require self-discipline (Goetz & N. C. Hall, 2014). Goetz et al. also find that language learners may experience boredom during various activities, particularly task-based exercises, such as classroom assignments and homework. Studies indicate that children and adolescents tend to experience boredom more often in educational settings than in non-educational contexts (Goetz et al., 2014). Furthermore, boredom is not limited to the learning of foreign languages but extends to language and literacy tasks in pupils' first language too. Research by L. Allen et al. (2014) found that 16-year-old American high school students reported experiencing boredom when engaging in educational games for English writing. Similarly, studies of German students in Year 8 (aged 12 - 13) and Year 11 (aged 15 - 16) revealed experiences of boredom in native language classrooms (Haag & Goetz, 2012, as cited in Goetz et al., 2014). Whether adolescent HL learners position their HL as a native language or foreign language, feelings of boredom are possible.

Language learners may also experience other negative emotions, such as shame, guilt, confusion, lack of confidence, panic, and frustration (see Teimouri, 2018; J. Zhang & Pelttari, 2014). Furthermore, adolescent bilingual students in an English-dominant society may experience negative emotions associated with challenges they may have in mainstream schools, where they sometimes feel excluded (K. Allen et al., 2018; De Houwer, 2015; Valenzuela, 2005). Chinese HL learners in the UK have reported feeling "in between" the heritage community and the dominant British society, as well as being "other" in the mainstream schooling (Curd-Christiansen et al., 2023; Little et al., 2024; Little et al., 2025). These feelings may prevent their engagement in HL learning and influence their identities. The ways that mainstream schooling experiences in England affect adolescent Chinese HL learners' motivations, emotions and identities are discussed further in Chapter 4.

Positive emotions are often linked to positive learning experiences (Dewaele et al., 2014). Enjoyment, for example, can be fostered through engaging, innovative, and moderately challenging learning activities, reinforced by continuous positive feedback and encouragement

(Saito et al., 2018). Enjoyment also strengthens students' *Ideal Self*, which in turn enhances their motivation to learn, in a virtuous circle (Saito et al., 2018). Other positive emotions associated with language learning include excitement (Dewaele et al., 2014), as well as pride and confidence, which may arise from increased proficiency and successful communication with native speakers (W. G. Kim & S. B. García, 2014). Additionally, language learners across different age groups have reported creativity, interest and fun derived from their engagement in language learning (C. Li, 2020; Godwin-Jones, 2014).

A supportive and accepting classroom environment fosters active and effective language learning (Greenhalgh, 2002). Studies on Chinese complementary schools in the UK suggest that these schools foster a supportive community where pupils with Chinese heritage can socialise and receive emotional support in a safe space free from the discrimination experienced in wider society (Francis et al., 2009; Ganassin, 2020). These positive experiences at Chinese complementary schools can not only boost the Chinese language proficiency of Chinese HL learners (Chow, 2001) but also their ethnic pride and sense of belonging to Chinese culture (Ganassin, 2020). Such findings reiterate the connections between motivations, emotions and identities.

However, adolescent Chinese HL learners may develop understandings of language, culture, and identity that are different from those promoted in Chinese complementary schools (Smith et al., 2020, also see Section 2.2.1). Not all learners may have wholly positive experiences in these educational settings. Chapter 4 discusses negative emotions associated with the different, conflicting understandings of parents, teachers and Chinese HL learners, as well as how these emotions influence adolescents' motivations and identities.

Compared to Chinese complementary schools, online language classrooms may help reduce learners' communication anxiety by providing a more informal, spontaneous and creative environment, which has been shown to elicit positive emotions in learners (Al Jahrami, 2019). However, subsequent research during and since the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to debates on the pros and cons of online/remote learning for children and young people. During the pandemic, mainstream schools in England moved lessons online for periods of national lockdowns. Studies have reported increased levels of anxiety and depression among pupils during these lockdowns, possibly due to the loss of a sense of school community and fear of infections (Kassim et al., 2021; L. E. Kim et al., 2024; Usher et al., 2024), as well as restrictions on social interaction outside school hours and other factors. Increased anxiety levels may, in

turn, negatively impact pupils' motivation to engage in learning. A systematic review suggests that these effects may persist among children and adolescents even after the lockdowns ended (Loades et al., 2020), which is echoed by a more recent study, although with undergraduate students (Riaz et al., 2023).

As discussed in Section 2.1.2, school closures also limited pupils' access to complementary schools. While studies specifically looking into the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on HL learners' emotions remain limited (see Driver & Prada, 2024), it seems likely that the well-being of complementary school pupils would have been affected, given the evidence from mainstream settings (and of course most pupils would be attending both types of setting). In the current study, data collection took place during national lockdowns in England, so it is anticipated that the participants' emotions and learning experiences are influenced by the pandemic.

Aside from the pandemic context, factors in mainstream schools can influence HL learners' emotions towards HL varieties. English is the dominant language in England's schools and wider society, and school policies and curricula effectively exclude certain other languages and language varieties (Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2023; Cushing, 2023; also see Section 1.2). This English-dominant environment may influence HL learners to feel negatively about HL varieties, or even to reject them altogether. For example, in Little's (2023) study, her son, Toby, requested a "break" from learning German, his heritage language, when he began mainstream schooling in England at age 4. In a U.S. study, Chinese heritage children and adolescents question the necessity of learning Chinese when English is the dominant societal language (D. Zhang et al., 2009); one of the interviewees in that study explicitly said that Chinese was unnecessary for her daily life, as she spent most of her time at school. Similar perspectives have been expressed by Chinese HL learners in the UK (Little et al., 2024).

On the other hand, children's acceptance of their heritage language, culture and identity evolves over time. In Little's study just mentioned (2023), Little's son did resume German HL learning, two years after he paused it, when he felt more confident in his English proficiency. Longitudinal research on three bilingual (French-English) children found that while the young adolescents tended to favour English in their language practices, their acceptance of a bilingual identity increased with age (Caldas, 2008; Caldas & Caron-Caldas, 2002). This shift was attributed to reduced peer pressure and the growing recognition of bilingualism's value in academic performance and career planning (Caldas, 2008; Caldas et al., 2002). Similarly, Little

et al. (2024) also found that adolescent Chinese HL learners in England develop more positive feelings and attitudes towards their HL proficiency as they grow older, accompanied by a growing sense of agency and ownership. Therefore, HL learners may have negative emotions concerning HL varieties or their multilingualism as young children, but their emotions may shift as they mature. This study explores this development alongside the analysis of HL learners' motivations.

2.3.2.2 Emotions of HL learners at home

Research on family language policies (FLPs) and children's emotions has found that positive emotions, such as pride in HLs, are often associated with identity, loyalty and a sense of belonging to the heritage community (see Curdt-Christiansen & J. Huang, 2021; Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2023). Conversely, although troubled or conflicting feelings may arise, studies indicate that children may not express their negative emotions about heritage language directly (Little, 2019a; 2023). This section discusses the diverse emotions that may be experienced by adolescent Chinese HL learners in relation to FLPs and their interactions with family members.

A key distinction between HL learners and non-HL learners of a second language is that the former may have access to regular exposure to HL varieties from birth (Kwon, 2017; Jo et al., 2023). A related advantage is that HL learners may also receive emotional support from their families in the medium of the HL, as parents and extended family members in migrant communities often use the HL to express intimacy and affection (Dewaele, 2010; Ladegaard, 2018; Sevinç & Backus, 2017).

Within Chinese heritage families, the family language policy is not only a critical factor in children's linguistic development but also in children's emotional well-being and parent-child relationships (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Hollebeke et al., 2020; K. A. King & Fogle, 2013). When language ideologies and practices within a family are aligned with each other, children tend to develop a more positive emotional connection to the language varieties in their lives. For example, in families that adopt the *move-on strategy* (see Section 2.1.1.1 above), parent-child relationships are often more harmonious, as parents care more about the communication with children than children's language proficiency (Wilson, 2021).

However, not all HL learners are exposed to the HL at home, especially as Mandarin Chinese is gradually becoming the dominant language taught in Chinese complementary schools and

also in Chinese heritage families where members may speak other Chinese dialects (see Section 1.4). Still, children's positive emotions and bonds with family members from a particular heritage can encourage the children's HL learning. Research on Spanish HL learners suggests that those who establish close relationships with extended family members tend to develop more positive attitudes towards HL learning (Guardado et al., 2014). Similarly, studies on Chinese HL learners worldwide indicate that a supportive family environment is a key motivational factor in fostering children's engagement in HL learning (A. He & Xiao, 2008; Luyao Li et al., 2023).

Conversely, where parents and children have conflicting language ideologies, this can lead to frustration and negative emotional experiences on both sides (Curd-Christiansen, 2009; Hollebeke et al., 2020; K. A. King et al., 2013). In some cases, parents actively discourage their children from engaging with heritage language and culture, even when the children express interest (Tannenbaum & Yitzhaki, 2016; Shin, 2010). This is particularly evident in mixed-heritage families where the minority-background parent is a first-generation immigrant; first-generation immigrants tend to prioritise integration into mainstream society over cultural preservation, leading them to withhold heritage language exposure from their children (Shin, 2010). The ideology of these parents who are first-generation immigrants might also be influenced by the model minority stereotype (see Section 2.2.2.2).

Children with mixed heritage may face particular emotional challenges depending on ideologies in their wider family and community. Some minority communities may perceive a mixed identity as a betrayal to the minority ethnic community, while the "White" society also may not accept mixed-heritage individuals as members (see Shaff et al., 2024). As a result, children from mixed-heritage backgrounds may question their identities and struggle with their sense of belonging (Pao et al., 1997; Shaff et al., 2024; Shin, 2010). Even when they identify with a specific ethnicity, they may face marginalisation within that community due to their limited HL proficiency, as seen in the experiences of Māori-Italians in New Zealand (Giorgio & Houkamau, 2021) and mixed-heritage children in the UK from diverse heritage backgrounds (Ali, 2020; Maxwell, 2021). Consequently, mixed-heritage HL-learning children may experience more anxieties and other negative emotions than other youngsters (Ali, 2020), potentially during the process of developing their heritage languages too. This might be especially relevant to young Chinese HL learners where parents in Chinese heritage families

and others in the community tend to link identity with individuals' language abilities (see Section 2.2.2.3).

On the other hand, in many bilingual/multilingual families, bilingual parenting is regarded as “good” parenting (K. A. King & Fogle, 2006). Accordingly, some parents, especially Asian immigrant parents, choose to be highly engaged in their children's HL learning (Curd-Christiansen, 2009), even when the language variety they speak is different to the one their children are learning (Ganassin, 2020; Little, 2020). Some parents' strategies of engagement in their children's HL learning are assertive or even aggressive approaches (Y. Wang, 2023). While such parents think what they do is “good parenting”, they may be neglecting to consider if their parenting practices suit the children's rearing (Curd-Christiansen, 2009).

Language barriers and unsuccessful communications between parents and children can intensify negative emotions in children, such as stress and anxiety, potentially leading to family conflict (J. S. Oh & Fuligni, 2010; Sevinç, 2018, 2020). For example, the *one parent, one language* strategy can create communication barriers and anxieties within families (Noguchi, 1996). The situation can get worse when children reach school age and become more immersed in the dominant societal language and adapt to that language (Costigan et al., 2006). Imbalances between parents' expectations and school-aged children's enthusiasm for HL learning are widely observed across various heritage backgrounds (Little, 2020), including in Chinese migrant families (Mu, 2014). A recent Australian study found that parents who had migrated with children who previously attended mainstream schools in China felt disappointment over their children's language shift to English in Australia (Y. Wang, 2023).

Norton (2000) argues that language learners' negative emotions and attitudes can stem from power imbalances between speakers, such as being impolitely corrected by native speakers during conversations, or being reminded of their immigrant identity. While Norton's (2000) study focuses on adult second-language learners and their experiences with migration, similar power imbalances exist between parents and children (Little, 2020). Adolescent HL learners may also experience negative emotions in response to corrective feedback and strained interactions at home, especially when their parents tend to be native speakers of the HL varieties.

Children's resistance to HL learning may develop when they associate it with parental pressure and family tensions (Preece, 2009). However, parental expectations typically override

children's resistance, particularly in cultures where *filial piety* is deeply embedded, such as Chinese communities (Bond, 1996; Fuligni et al., 2004; Mengwei et al., 2020; Mu, 2014). In such cases, parents may criticise children for resisting the HL and culture (Y. Wang, 2022), while children may feel forced into learning it (Sevinç, 2020). On the other hand, Curdt-Christiansen et al. (2023) argue that it is important to recognise that negative emotions and intergenerational conflicts within Chinese heritage families may sometimes stem from the linguistic environment and school policies in the UK, rather than from heritage families' attitudes to their children's HL inclinations or proficiency. Chapter 4 discusses these particular school environment challenges and how they influence overseas Chinese parents' (and adolescents') language ideologies, practices, and emotions.

Previous studies suggest that tensions between HL learners and their parents often emerge in early childhood (Little, 2020; Mu, 2014). However, even as adults, HL speakers may experience negative emotions concerning HL and their extended families which lead them to distance themselves from their heritage (Preece, 2009). In studies of Chinese HL learners in Canada and Australia, adolescence is the phase where more intergenerational conflicts occur, as adolescents typically seek greater autonomy from their parents (T. Su et al., 2009; Y. Wang, 2023). However, England does not have the same societal and cultural context as those studies, so their findings may not be directly applicable to the present research on adolescent Chinese HL learners, but it is acknowledged that their life stage may make them vulnerable to family conflict. Additionally, there are socio-economic differences between the families in the Canadian and Australian research and the families examined here which may be influential (see Section 3.5).

When parents notice deficiencies in their children's HL skills, they may experience guilt (Luyao Li et al., 2023) and transmit anxiety and pressure to their children (Little, 2020; Shin, 2010). This tension can be exacerbated when only one parent speaks the HL (Shin, 2010) or parents have different levels of proficiency (Paradis, 2023), as parents who are less fluent may struggle to provide effective language support (Unsworth et al., 2019). However, Xie (2014) finds that young adult Chinese HL learners derive greater enjoyment from HL learning than they did as children, once parental pressure diminishes. This points to harmonious intergenerational relationships being key to HL learners' positive emotions towards their heritage languages. Researchers find that intergenerational relationships benefit from open conversations between parents and children about their emotions and concerns (Jo et al., 2023;

Little, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2018), especially when parents in heritage families feel frustration and other negative emotions about their children's HL learning (Curd-Christiansen et al., 2023).

Parents' own emotional dispositions towards their heritage languages influences the parent-child dynamics for HL learning. Studies indicate that immigrant parents typically have a deeper emotional attachment to the heritage language and culture (Curd-Christiansen & J. Huang, 2020; Little, 2020; Mu, 2014; Phinney, 2003), so parents may feel a strong obligation to pass on the HL to maintain the "cultural loyalty and linguistic continuity" (Curd-Christiansen, 2013, p. 1). HL maintenance is often viewed as the responsibility of mothers, who are traditionally regarded as the "guardians" of language (Piller & Pavlenko, 2007). The term "mother tongue" reflects this notion (Preece, 2009). Mothers tend to emphasise cultural traditions more than fathers do, even when both parents have the same heritage, fathers tend to show less interest than mothers in passing on traditional culture to their offspring (Costigan et al., 2006; T. F. Su et al., 2009). Thus, it is common in many cultures for mothers to take on primary responsibility for their children's HL education and cultural engagement (Tannen, 2014). This trend is also observed in Chinese heritage families in Canada, where fathers are more inclined than mothers to adopt the dominant Canadian culture (Costigan et al., 2006). This division of roles may make mothers more vulnerable to negative emotions during their children's HL learning. Additionally, studies suggest that when children begin to prioritise the dominant societal language, mothers' concerns about diminishing emotional bonds with their children can lead to anxiety and frustration (Pavlenko, 2004; Y. Wang, 2022, 2023).

As this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the potential for the adolescent HL learners to experience negative emotions within parent-child relationships was heightened, as national lockdowns had increased levels of parental involvement in children's HL learning (Luyao Li et al., 2023). Luyao Li et al. also find that, in families with Chinese HL learners aged between 5 and 14, the parents' presence during children's online lessons was found to enhance class engagement, as children benefited from the greater emotional support. However, given the broad age range examined in that study, it was not clear whether the pattern would apply to the adolescents in the present research. Furthermore, some parents in the study by Luyao Li et al. (2023) took on roles as co-educators or teaching assistants in their children's online HL learning. Considering that adolescents typically seek independence from their parents (T. F. Su et al., 2009), the extent to which increased parental involvement influenced the learners' emotions during the pandemic requires further investigation.

In summary, HL learners are more likely to be motivated for their HL learning when they find enjoyment and feel supported by their families. Conversely, those who perceive it as an obligation imposed by their parents may resist both the language and culture. In the Findings and Discussion Chapter, the emotional and motivational shifts among adolescent Chinese HL learners are further analysed.

2.3.3 Summary

Section 2.3 examined how motivations and emotions shape adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities. Drawing on Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System and Norton's Investment Theory, it explored how learners' personal aspirations (the Ideal Self) and external expectations, particularly from parents (the Ought-to Self), can influence engagement with HL learning.

HL learners are potentially motivated by cultural belonging, family ties, career prospects, and multilingual abilities, though these motivations are often shaped, as well as contested, by intergenerational dynamics. Parental expectations rooted in Chinese cultural values such as filial piety can create tensions, leading learners to view HL learning as a duty rather than a personal goal.

Emotions, whether positive (e.g., pride, enjoyment) or negative (e.g., anxiety, guilt), or mixed/conflicting, play a key role in HL learners' motivation and sense of identity. While the mainstream school environment may cause disengagement through pressure or exclusion, supportive home or complementary school settings can foster emotional well-being. However, conflicts at home, especially during adolescence, can lead to resistance to HL learning.

Overall, motivation and emotion are deeply interwoven, with implications for HL learners' identity development and learning trajectories.

2.4 Identity of Chinese HL learners

Arguments on identity formation appear across various disciplines, theories and methodologies. In psychology, Erikson (1968) conceptualises identity as a key developmental task during adolescence, whereas in social psychology, Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory highlights group membership as central to self-conception. Sociological approaches, such as Giddens' (2023) notion of the reflexive self, emphasise identity as an ongoing project shaped by late modernity. Furthermore, historian Anderson (1991) has linked national identity to imagined communities, while cultural theorists such as S. Hall (2011) and Butler (2006) argue

that identity is constructed through discourse and performance, destabilising essentialist views. In applied linguistics, Norton (2000) and Bucholtz et al. (2005) examine how language learners negotiate identities through multiple and overlapping power relations. These diverse perspectives illustrate that identity is neither static nor universally defined. This study draws on Social Identity Theory to discuss concepts of ethnic identity, cultural identity, as well as transcultural and transnational identity, in addition to adopting a social constructionist approach to identity, aiming to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of identity.

Norton (2013) defines identity as “the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p.4). By this definition, language learners’ identities reflect how they connect themselves with the social world in the present and for the future (van Lier, 2007), suggesting that identity research should focus on both “being” and “becoming” of language learners. However, Little (2020) argues that to “maintain” or “return to” the heritage culture community might better describe HL learners’ identities, especially their parents’ desire for them to be members of the community. Although children at younger ages may not feel the strong emotional attachment that parents have to the heritage community, children may develop a deeper appreciation for their HL abilities over age (Little et al., 2024). On the other hand, young Chinese HL learners often associate their Chinese HL learning with more pragmatic concerns, such as their parents’ survival and their own future opportunities (Little et al., 2024). However, HL learners’ identities are constantly evolving, and some adolescent Chinese HL learners in Little et al. (2024) also report the development of emotional attachment with their families and heritage as they grow older.

Little’s studies (2020, 2024) also resonate with Norton’s arguments that individual language learners may have complex, multiple, dynamic or even sometimes contradictory identities (Peirce, 1995). With globalisation leading to increased mobility and diversity worldwide, the concept of identity may be expanding to become a more complex phenomenon in the modern social context (Preece, 2016).

In the literature related to HL learners’ identities, several categories of identities are delineated and studied, including ethnic identity and cultural identity, as well as transnational and transcultural identity. This section reviews these concepts and relevant theories, using them as a starting point for theorising identity in this research but also acknowledging the potential limitations of these concepts. Finally, this section will arrive at the key approach adopted in

this study for understanding identity – social constructionism – highlighting the fluidity and complexity of identity.

2.4.1 Ethnic identity

Ethnic identity is defined as an individual's subjective sense of belonging to an ethnic group (Phinney, 1990). Rather than being a fixed entity, ethnic identity is dynamic, interactive, and situational (Sellers, 1993; Yip & Fuligni, 2002). The construction and development of ethnic identities can be influenced by shifts in sociopolitical environments such as changes to immigration policies in the UK or the rising political influence of Mainland China (Hashtpari et al., 2021; Rogers et al., 2012), by assimilation experiences among various cultures (González et al., 2017), a sense of belonging to groups (Stokers-Brown, 2012) and a family's socioeconomic status (Chaparro, 2019; Menjivar, 2002).

As mentioned in Section 1.4.1.1, many people may identify themselves as Chinese people without having or obtaining Chinese nationality, and there are ethnic minorities in China. This study uses the concept of ethnic identity to understand Chinese ethnicity as a minorised ethnic group in the context of England, but it also acknowledges that there are diverse understandings of Chinese ethnic identity, which are valued in the data collection and discussed further in *Findings and Discussion*.

Usually, ethnic identity can be enhanced by in-group interactions, as well as shared norms such as cultural practices and values (Hogg, 2016). Studies have identified multiple aspects of ethnic identity, such as self-categorisation and labelling; commitment and attachment; exploration; ethnic behaviours and ingroup attitudes.

Self-categorisation and ***labelling*** refer to the identification of membership within a specific social group (Ashmore et al., 2004). Verifying whether participants perceive themselves as belonging to a particular group is a significant demonstration of their ethnic identities (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Tran et al., 2021). Particularly, adolescents' self-categorisation may also encourage them to share their culture with peers from other ethnic backgrounds, as found among adolescent Vietnamese HL learners (Tran et al., 2021).

Self-categorisation for HL learners can be complex and multi-layered. For example, Costigan et al. (2009) found that Chinese HL learners in England identify themselves in various ways, including exclusive identification with their heritage country (e.g., Chinese), compound

identifications (e.g., British/English Chinese), exclusive identification with the host country (e.g., British/English), or pan-ethnic identifications (e.g., British Asian). Additionally, mixed-heritage individuals may not identify with only one ethnicity due to the exclusions they feel in various ethnic groups (Shaff et al., 2024). Therefore, it is incorrect or outdated to only use single-ethnicity options in research with multi-heritage participants (Shaff et al., 2024), which reinforces Phinney's (1992) suggestion that researchers should use open-ended questions to explore participants' ethnic identification. In *Methodology*, the research methods of this study are further discussed.

Commitment is also understood as a sense of belonging to one's ethnic group, while **attachment** refers to the affective commitment to one's ethnicity (Phinney et al., 2007). A study on Chinese young people in British Columbia, Canada, found that girls tend to experience a stronger sense of belonging to their ethnicity than boys (T. F. Su et al., 2009). However, demonstrating commitment does not always indicate a strong ethnic identity, as commitment may stem from identification with parents or role models in the same ethnic group rather than arising from personal exploration (Phinney et al., 2007). In such cases, individuals may not have fully internalised their ethnic identity, which often develops through a process of exploration (Phinney et al., 2007).

Exploration for information and experiences related to one's ethnicity plays a crucial role in the construction and development of ethnic identity (Phinney et al., 2007). While exploration is an ongoing process throughout the lifespan, it is particularly prominent during adolescence (Phinney, 2003).

Ethnic behaviours are defined as actions that are uniquely associated with, or hold significant symbolic meaning for, a particular ethnic group (Yip et al., 2002). These behaviours may include use and recognition of ethnic language varieties, social interactions and friendships within the ethnic community, consumption of ethnic food, observance of customs, and participation in cultural events, media, and traditions, as found among American adolescents across various heritage communities (Chinese, Vietnamese and Mexican) (Hashtpari et al., 2021; Shen et al., 2021; Tran et al., 2021; Yip et al., 2002). Similar patterns have been observed among Southeast Asian adolescents in the United States, particularly those from Vietnamese and Cambodian backgrounds (L. N. Huang, 1998), as well as among Chinese youth in Canada (Costigan et al., 2009) and Australia (Shen et al., 2021). Language also plays a crucial role in place-making and identity formation, distinguishing both insiders and outsiders within a

community (Badwan, 2021; Gruszczyńska-Thompson, 2024; Hashtpari et al., 2021). Adolescents who maintain close ties with a heritage network and actively use their HLs tend to experience a stronger sense of belonging to their ethnic community (Costigan et al., 2009; Shen et al., 2021). Young Mexican Americans indicate that not speaking Spanish can change their identities (Hashtpari et al., 2021). On the other hand, F. Gao et al. (2019) argue that language proficiency does not necessarily directly contribute to one's sense of belonging to a certain group. Language speakers may have mixed feelings about themselves associated with the languages they speak (Panicacci & Dewaele, 2017). Therefore, this study acknowledges that the link between one's language proficiency and identity is not straightforward and may have its limitations, which are further discussed in Section 2.2.2 and 2.4.5.

Finally, *ingroup attitudes* can also reflect individuals' ethnic identities. Phinney (1990) argues that individuals, regardless of their ethnic identity, may develop either positive or negative attitudes towards their membership of a particular ethnic group. This has been observed in studies on adolescents with a Chinese heritage in Canada (see Costigan et al., 2009). Positive attitudes towards ethnic identity are typically expressed through pride, satisfaction, and a sense of belonging, whereas negative attitudes may manifest as denial of one's own ethnicity and a preference for the dominant White culture (Phinney, 1990).

On the other hand, racial injustice, including discrimination and stereotyping, may contribute to Chinese HL learners' negative attitudes towards heritage cultures, as their identities are challenged and contested (Phinney, 1989; Y. Zhou & Liu, 2023). Studies have documented racial bias or even violence against Chinese individuals in England (Benton et al., 2011; Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2021; Kwan-Chan et al., 2004), with such bias intensifying globally due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Cheah et al., 2023; Devakumar et al., 2020; Y. Yang et al., 2023). Adolescent Chinese HL learners in England have even reported questioning their "identity and worth" following experiences of racism (Little et al., 2025, p. 9), and bias and discrimination may diminish children's pride in their HLs (Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2021). However, research also indicates that many Asian children and adolescents are reluctant to speak out about their experiences of racism, often due to socio-cultural factors. Studies conducted in the United States suggest that parents and teachers may be failing to address anti-Asian racism in homes or schools, possibly because of adults' discomfort with such conversations or their misunderstandings of children's developmental stages in relation to race (Hsieh & J. Kim, 2020; Wilton et al., 2024).

Furthermore, institutional contexts in both the United States (Hsieh et al., 2020; Wilton et al., 2024) and the UK (Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2023) may marginalise discussions of anti-Asian racism, especially when discourse on racism tends to prioritise the binary Black-White dynamic and overseas Chinese may embrace the model-minority stereotype (Ng et al., 2007; Sue et al., 2007). Consequently, although young people with Chinese heritages may actively participate in social justice movements like Black Lives Matters (H. Lee et al., 2022), they may be less aware of anti-Asian racism, particularly as it tends to be more subtle and less recognised (Fang et al., 2024). Additionally, adolescent co-researchers in Little et al. (2025) highlight that younger adolescents, such as those around 11 or 12 years old, may not fully grasp concepts like microaggressions, which might instead be interpreted as “teasing,” “joking,” or “bullying” (Little et al., p. 12), echoing observations by Hashtpari et al. (2021). In that same study, some Mexican American children’s experiences of racial exclusions in their host country led them to develop a sense of hatred towards the dominant White culture.

Nevertheless, a strong sense of ethnic identity may be associated with having greater support in the face of racism. A study in the Netherlands by Y. Yang et al. (2022) found that Chinese-immigrant mothers perceived an increase in discrimination after the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic but also reported a stronger sense of Chinese ethnic identity. The researchers conjecture that stronger ethnic identification may bring support and resilience against racism via stronger connections with others in the group. Similarly, in the United States, Litam and Oh (2022) found that strong Chinese ethnic identity can moderate the association between Covid-19 discrimination and depression for Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans. However, whether the same emotional support can be perceived by adolescents remains a question.

Chapter 4 discusses the adolescent participants’ accounts of their experiences of racial bias, its effects on their attitudes to languages and language varieties, and its influence on their identities.

2.4.2 Cultural identity

Ferdman (1990) defines cultural identity of ethnic groups as “a shared sense of the cultural features that help to define and to characterise the group” (p. 190). This identity is shaped through customary practices, as well as the “beliefs, values, sanctions, rules, motives, and satisfactions associated with it” (Whiting & Child, 1953, as quoted in Jensen, 2011, p.63). S. Hall (2015) argues that an immigrant’s cultural identity is not fixed but continuously evolving,

shaped by interactions among history, culture, and power. This echoes the psychology term acculturation which refers to the adaptation to psychological and socio-cultural context after migration (J. W. Berry, 1997). According to S. Hall, cultural identity belongs both to the past – being rooted in historical experiences – and the future, as it is subject to transformation over time. Like ethnic identity, cultural identity is also shaped by the socio-political climate (Nunes, 2021).

HL learners' feelings about their heritage culture may encompass pride, comfort and familiarity, as found by Hashtpari et al. (2021) in the Mexican American context. Those authors further argue that language abilities have a significant influence on one's cultural identity formation, drawing on findings that young Mexican Americans who were not able to speak their HLs fluently were more inclined to identify more with the host country, or to identify as bicultural.

Similarly, for adolescent Chinese HL learners, a sense of belonging to Chinese culture is often associated with and shaped by specific cultural practices, such as linguistic behaviours, social behaviours, social contacts, social class, food, and festivals (J. W. Berry, 1997; S. Hall, 2011; Little et al., 2024). However, language itself may not always play a central role in shaping their understanding of cultural identity (F. Gao et al., 2019). The ways in which Chinese heritage families in England may conceptualise the relationship between language and culture are explored in Section 2.2.1.

Chinese HL learners may find themselves struggling with being “in-between” two cultures, feeling the pressure to assimilate while also preserving their ancestral culture, similarly to the challenges observed among second-generation South Asian immigrant communities in various countries (Ullah, 2024). Based on research in Germany, Baumert et al. (2024) also find that immigrant youth from various cultural backgrounds are constantly navigating and negotiating their dual cultural contexts, and that the youths' identification with heritage culture tends to increase if they are distanced from the majority culture.

In this study, cultural identity is conceptualised as a fluid and evolving sense of cultural features, encompassing beliefs, values, and rules. Understanding identity from this perspective is crucial for recognising the challenges and struggles faced by immigrants and their descendants in multicultural societies. Additionally, this study acknowledges that categorising individuals solely based on their cultural heritage can be problematic, particularly given the cultural diversity that adolescent Chinese HL learners may encounter and experience (as discussed in

Section 2.2.1). A social constructionist approach to identity, discussed further in Section 2.4.5, is therefore adopted to enable a more dynamic and nuanced understanding of identity formation.

2.4.3 Transnational and transcultural identity

Transnationalism refers to the process by which individuals establish and maintain multi-dimensional relationships with both their country of residence and their country of ethnic heritage (Basch et al., 1994). This perspective challenges the traditional view of migration as a one-way journey and questions the assumption that immigrant families necessarily struggle to integrate into their host society (De Fina, 2016). Such assumptions may arise from stereotypical ideas held by majority groups, such as the notion that ethnic minorities inherently lack a sense of belonging in the host country (Benton et al., 2011).

However, contemporary immigrants may cultivate a dual sense of belonging, maintaining connections with both their new and home countries, leading to the formation of a transnational identity (Rouse, 2004 [1991]). In the context of globalisation, the fluidity of migration – whether short-term, permanent, serial, or reverse migration – has increased, making transnational practices more accessible (P. A. Duff, 2015). As a result, immigrant families may increasingly engage in economic and cultural exchanges across borders, including linguistic and cultural pluralism (P. A. Duff, 2015), and cross-border communication, visits, and financial arrangements (Klok et al., 2020). An increasing number of families can adopt transnational lifestyles, provided they have the financial resources and flexibility to do so (Hirsch & J. S. Lee, 2018).

Research on second-generation Chinese and Dominican young adults (college and university students) in the United States suggests that transnational identity is closely linked to transnational behaviours, particularly intergenerational relationships, language maintenance, and regular communication with the heritage country (Louie, 2006). Given that these factors are also central to heritage language learners' identity development, it is possible that some Chinese adolescent HL learners identify more with a transnational identity rather than a sole ethnic identity.

The construction of transnational identities is strongly influenced by socioeconomic status and government policies, as these factors shape individuals' capacities to maintain cross-border communication (Menjivar, 2002). Research suggests that middle-class children are more likely to adopt a transnational perspective on identity (Levitt, 2009; Menjivar, 2002). Given that the

participants in this study come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, some of them may experience their Chinese identity in a transnational way, as found in Little et al. (2024). However, due to the size of China and the many subgroups it encompasses (see Section 1.4), the understandings of transnationalism and transculturality held by Chinese HL learners from various backgrounds may be different from how these notions are conceptualised in existing research. In Section 4.4, the identities of the adolescent Chinese HL learners in this study are discussed further.

Transculturality, by contrast, is a concept proposed by Welsch (1999) in response to the increasing differentiation and complexity of modern cultures. This framework views cultures as interdependent and fluid rather than static or isolated (Kreuzer et al., 2018). In the context of globalisation, technological advancements – particularly social media – have facilitated cross-cultural interactions, reinforcing the transcultural nature of identity (Waegner et al., 2011). Given that immigrant families navigate different cultural environments at home and in broader society, transculturality may provide a more nuanced framework for understanding the cultural identities of multilingual children.

Studies on first-generation immigrants in Australia show that individuals experience a sense of “home” in both the heritage and host cultures after spending between 5 and 50 years in the country (Kreuzer et al., 2018). Similarly, third-generation Sikhs in the UK navigate their British and Sikh cultural identities through processes of accommodation, re-acculturation, and resistance (Takhar et al., 2021). Regarding languages, HL learners who develop a sense of belonging to both the heritage and host countries and cultures tend to express positive attitudes to their bilingualism or even multilingualism (Gruszczyńska-Thompson, 2024). These findings suggest that both immigrant parents and their children experience transculturality, albeit in different ways. However, the Australian and UK studies cited above focus on adults, so the experiences of adolescents remain underexplored in research. This study investigates the extent to which adolescents perceive fluidity in their identity among different cultures. The next section discusses fluidity of identity in more detail.

2.4.4 Social identity theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT) is a commonly used approach in research for understanding identity. SIT argues that an individual’s self-concept is shaped by their membership of a social group (or groups), such as gender, race, ethnicity and religion (Hogg, 2016; Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel

et al., 1979). An individual's value is attached to their membership(s) (Tajfel, 1978), leading to in-group favouritism and out-group comparisons (Hogg, 2016), suggesting that ethnicity may play a significant role in identity construction of HL learners, particularly due to their minority status in the host countries (T. F. Su et al., 2009). SIT affords mechanisms that help maintain or enhance self-esteem (Tajfel et al., 1979): a strong sense of social identity can be linked with higher self-esteem, and less anxiety or depression (see Yip et al., 2002; T. F. Su et al., 2009).

SIT has been applied to many studies on HL learners, such as He (2008) on Chinese HL learners in multiple countries; Ganassin (2020) on HL learners in Chinese complementary schools in the UK, and Dos Santos (2021) on Spanish HL learners in the United States. However, in a modern multicultural society, the categorisations of social groups by culture, ethnicity, and nationality are becoming increasingly complex and difficult to distinguish, especially in studies related to Chinese language and culture (Ganassin, 2020). For example, Ganassin (2020) finds that identities of Chinese heritage children and adolescents are dynamic due to “societal changes, migration, a growing intergenerational gap, and the intercultural encounters they engage in” (p. 148). Accordingly, while this study adopts concepts such as ethnic identity and cultural identity to support understanding of adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities, it also acknowledges that categorising people by their social group memberships may overlook the complexity and fluidity of features of their identities. The next section discusses the social constructionism approach to identity that is adopted in this study.

2.4.5 A social constructionism approach to identity

A problematic understanding of identity arises from essentialism, which is defined as the assumption that all members of a given identity category share certain fixed attributes that define who they are (Bucholtz & K. Hall, 2004). Although identities can be inhabited through some shared attributes (as discussed in previous sections), essentialism frames Chinese identity as a homogeneous group (Francis et al., 2009). This understanding, however, is not just adopted by external groups and forces, but is also being embraced by some Chinese people (Hoon, 2021), as discussed in Section 2.2.

Meanwhile, adolescent Chinese HL learners may prefer to think of their identities as dynamic and complex, similar to S. Hall's proposition: “Within us, we have contradictory identities pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about” (2002, p. 277). As can be seen in previous Sections, it is almost impossible to talk about ethnic

identity without also discussing other social identity groups, such as gender, socioeconomic status, culture, etc. However, there are contradictions and inconsistencies among these groups as well. For example, individuals from immigrant families can identify as members of their heritage ethnicity but also as members of the culture of the host country (J. W. Berry, 1997; Maehler et al., 2021). Therefore, this section connects the concept of identity with – social constructionism, the key theoretical approach adopted in the study, in order to better understand the complexity and multiplicity of identity.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that *reality*, and people's knowledge of it, are not objective but are constructed through people's social interactions with each other, emphasising that identity can be assigned/ascribed by other people, or asserted/claimed by individuals themselves (Cornell & Hartmann, 2006). Whether assigned or claimed, identities are situated and contextualised, constructed and negotiated in social interactions among people (Machat-From, 2017). Social constructionists view identity as fluid and dynamic rather than fixed or predetermined by unchangeable circumstances of birth (see Ganassin, 2020; S. Hall, 2015; Machat-From, 2017), although they still acknowledge that some people may perceive identity as stable or conferred by birth (see Cornell et al., 2006).

Various studies have argued that identities are multiple, fluid, overlapping and constantly developing (S. Hall, 2015; Holliday, 2010, 2021; Holmes, 2015). In different situations, the importance of any one identity category (e.g., ethnicity) in one's social life may change (Cornell et al. 2006). Social constructionism also emphasises the complex interactions among various dimensions of individuals' identities, such as race, gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, social status, and education, as well as how these interactions vary from individual to individual (Holmes, 2015). By adopting a social constructionism perspective, this study does not see an individual's understanding of ethnicity, culture or language prescribed by their links to a place or a group, nor as something that is fixed, but as something they continuously negotiate in the interactions with others and society. For example, this study looks into, under what circumstances or while interacting with whom, adolescent Chinese heritage language learners may/may not identify with Chinese ethnicity, culture or language, and how their identifications may in turn affect their language learning experiences and further identity development.

Moreover, participants' individual subjective understandings are valued in the study's exploration of the construction and negotiation of identity (Ganassin, 2020; Pavlenko &

Blackledge, 2004). Accordingly, the main method selected for data collection is the qualitative semi-structured interview (see Chapter 3).

Childhood, which from a social constructionist perspective includes the adolescent years (Jenks, 2020), is a period full of changes. Children growing up in a linguistically diverse environment may experience more changes than others (Little, 2024). Adolescence, particularly, represents a critical developmental stage for individuals' identities, being the phase in which young people begin to differentiate themselves from their parents and actively seek to establish their own identities (Ferrer-Wreder & Kroger, 2020; T. F. Su et al., 2009). This period is characterised by considerable upheaval in the process of identity construction and development.

Kraus (2006) argues that identity “must be negotiated, tested, confirmed, rejected or qualified again and again and not simply shown” through various interactions with others (p. 109). As Hashtpari et al. (2021) finds, the ways that young people express their identity development can vary, ranging from agentic individuals who view themselves as responsible for their own life outcomes, to dependent individuals who see themselves as shaped by their environment, and interdependent individuals who recognise the mutual embeddedness of people within their social contexts. Therefore, when people are positioning their identities, they are also positioned by others through these interactions. This is to say, one's identity may be influenced by other people's understanding of them as well. This feature of identity may be particularly relevant for the adolescent participants in this study. Since self-esteem is often a sensitive issue for adolescents (Y. Pan et al., 2020), adolescents may pay more attention to the way others position them. In light of the unique features of adolescents' identities, the age range for the participating adolescents in this study was set as 12 to 16 years, with the aim of exploring if going through adolescence will impact their identities.

2.5 Theoretical framework: a bricolage approach

This section introduces bricolage, the approach to building a theoretical framework for the study. Rooted in the work of Denzin and Lincoln (1999), Denzin et al. (2023), Kincheloe (2001, 2005), and K. S. Berry (2011, 2015), bricolage acknowledges the complexity of social phenomena and encourages a flexible, multi-theoretical stance. Rather than relying on a single lens, this study weaves together various theories and concepts, in order to better capture the complex and nuanced nature of adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities. A bricolage approach allows the researcher to respond reflexively to the data, engaging with theory in a dialogic and context-situated manner (Finlay, 2002; Kincheloe, 2008). It is often used to

navigate the layered ontological and epistemological approaches of meaning-making, while simultaneously challenging essentialist notions of truth and the reductionism of monological research (Kincheloe, 2004b). Bricolage has the capacity to disrupt dominant narratives.

Kincheloe (2004a) sees bricolage research as committed to recognising and shedding light on marginalised communities, particularly those excluded from dominant narratives. Thus, a bricolage approach was deemed appropriate and feasible for this study focusing on language learning experiences and identities of adolescent Chinese HL learners, most of whom are minoritised in the social context of England. Helpful precedents showing bricolage's critical potential include Watt's (2008, 2016) studies on representations of Muslim women, which adopted feminist and anti-racist lenses alongside discursive and semiological methods. Studies by Leard and Lashua (2006) and McLean (2008) similarly embraced bricolage to explore young people's voices in educational settings, illustrating how context-sensitive approaches can surface the ideological dimensions of pedagogy. Ganassin's (2020) study on Chinese complementary schools in the UK highlights the utility of a bricolage approach specifically to investigate adolescent Chinese HL learners and matters of identity.

In this study, a bricolage approach enables integration of the following concepts and theories:

First, the study adopts the concept of *linguistic repertoire* to explore the complexity and diversity of adolescents' potential language learning experiences (Section 2.1), in the context of the linguistic environment in England (Section 1.2). Particular attention has been paid to the concept of *family language policy* (Section 2.1.1.1), as this study values parents' perspectives regarding the construction and development of adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities.

Additionally, the concept of *language ideologies* is employed (Section 2.2), particularly ideologies relating to language, culture, and identity (e.g., notions of *authenticity* in language and identity discussed in Section 2.2.2.3), to understand how adolescents' identities may be ideologically constructed. Ideologies are important to understanding identity formation (Woolard, 2020) and are especially relevant within a bricolage approach. In the words of Kincheloe (2004a), "there is no final, transhistorical, non-ideological meaning that bricoleurs strive to achieve" (p. 5).

Given the dynamic interplay among identity, motivation, and emotion (Saito et al., 2018), this study focuses on adolescent Chinese HL learners' motivations and emotions in their HL learning, drawing on Dörnyei's *L2 Motivational Self System* (2005, 2009) and the concept of

language learners' emotions (Dewaele et al., 2014). Additionally, Norton's (2013) *Investment Theory* is employed to shed light on the motivations likely held by parents in Chinese heritage families, which may in turn influence the development of adolescent Chinese HL learners' motivations and emotions.

Social constructionism provides the paradigm for identity. The study draws on the concept of *translanguaging* (Section 2.2.2.4), alongside *Social Identity Theory* (Tajfel et al., 1979), to examine how adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities are constructed, contested, and negotiated through their engagement with various languages and language varieties.

The diagram below provides a graphical visualisation of the theoretical framework adopted in this study through a bricolage approach, which is applied to data analysis in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5 *Conclusion*, this framework is revisited in relation to the contribution of this study.

A Bricolage Approach to Researching Language Learning Experiences and Identities of (Chinese) Heritage Language Learners



Figure 1 A framework for researching language learning experiences and identities of (Chinese) HL learners

The study highlights the interconnections between these concepts and theories in relation to each research question. This illuminates not only the multifaceted nature of identity, but also the interdisciplinary character of identity research via a bricolage approach. These characteristics are also reflected in the approach to data analysis in Chapter 4.

Researchers who adopt a bricolage approach piece together their inquiries through a critical and reflexive lens, acknowledging the contradictions and fluidities of the social world (see Denzin et al., 1999, 2023). This orientation aligns with the social constructionist rejection of universal structures in favour of situated meaning. Reflexivity, therefore, becomes essential in this context. As Finlay (2002) notes, this involves not only self-awareness but also critical engagement with how knowledge is produced through relational and contextual entanglements. In Section 3.6, I discuss my reflexivity alongside my data collection journey.

By adopting a bricolage approach, this study aims to obtain a richer and more comprehensive understanding of adolescent Chinese HL learners' language learning experiences and identities in the context of England.

2.6 Chapter summary

In summary, existing literature in this Chapter has made significant contributions in understanding adolescent Chinese HL learners' language learning and identities, particularly in relation to HL maintenance; language ideologies; parent-child relationships; motivations and emotions. Nonetheless, there remains a notable gap concerning young people's voice in this process, especially within the context of Chinese heritage families in England. Responding to this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative approach to explore how adolescent Chinese HL learners in England negotiate their identities, with the additional perspective from their parents, thereby contributing a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding to the field.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Chapter overview

This chapter outlines the methodology adopted in this study, beginning with an introductory section on my philosophical stance as a researcher. It proceeds to set out the rationale for a qualitative research approach and describes and explains the specific methods chosen – interviews and visual research methods. Subsequent sections describe the sampling strategy, participant recruitment process, and provide a brief overview of the participants in this study. The chapter then discusses the data collection process, including reflections on its implementation, followed by the methods of data analysis and a description of the analytical process. Ethical considerations relevant to various stages of the study are then addressed. The chapter concludes with a summary of the research methodology.

3.1 Philosophical stance: social constructionism

As discussed in the *Literature Review*, I adopt social constructionism as a key theoretical framework, as well as my philosophical stance, in this study. Social constructionism is anthropocentric rather than theory-driven, emphasising that reality is socially constructed rather than rational, objective, or naturally given (Alvesson et al., 2017). Accordingly, social constructionist research focuses on exploring how social reality is constructed through factors such as ideology, interests, and power relations, rather than merely describing surface-level social phenomena (Alvesson et al., 2017).

The study of human behaviour is therefore central to social constructionist inquiry. The perspectives of social constructionists align with the process of identity construction discussed in Section 2.1. For example, Berger et al. (1966), in their seminal work *The Social Construction of Reality*, argue that individuals develop the concept of a “self” and distinguish themselves from others through interactions governed by socially constructed rules, referred to as social order. They further emphasise the critical role of language and conversation in these interactions. Moreover, social constructionists contend that there is no absolute truth, but rather “local truths” situated within specific human actions and contexts (Hacking, 1999; L. Yang &

Gergen, 2012). This perspective resonates with the “individual by individual analysis” approach in identity research, as discussed in the *Literature Review*.

Given these conceptual overlaps, social constructionism provides a suitable philosophical foundation for identity research. Accordingly, this study seeks to explore how HL learners construct their identities in relation to various social factors, particularly those emerging from their language learning experiences.

3.2 Qualitative approach

A qualitative research approach is widely adopted in social science research concerning identity and language (e.g., Francis et al., 2009; Ganassin, 2020; Little, 2020; Shin, 2010; Y. Zhou et al., 2023). Qualitative research involves the collection, analysis, and presentation of non-statistical data (Hammersley, 2013), typically through fieldwork methods such as interviews, observations, case studies, narrative approaches, phenomenological studies, and visual research (Cohen et al., 2018; Padgett, 2016).

In contrast, quantitative research prioritises numerical data, objective analysis, generalisability, and systematic interpretation (Hammersley, 2013). Methods such as surveys and experiments are commonly used in quantitative research (Cohen et al., 2018). In the context of language education, quantitative approaches are often employed to assess participants’ language proficiency and evaluate strategies for improving HL learners’ academic performance (e.g., Jee, 2018; Li Li et al., 2016; Saito et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2020; Wen, 2011). Qualitative research, however, is inherently participant-oriented, valuing the subjectivity of participants and prioritising their personal experiences and perspectives (Sandelowski, 2001; Punch, 2013).

A qualitative approach is adopted in this study for the following reasons. First, the primary focus of this study is on the identities of adolescent Chinese HL learners, exploring participants’ understanding of their relationships to the world and how the relationships were constructed (Norton, 2013). To analyse how their identities are constructed and developed, it is essential to consider their emotions, and personal experiences related to language learning, rather than merely evaluating their language proficiency.

Furthermore, this study seeks to explore participants’ experiences beyond formal language learning, including interactions with family members, peers, and even strangers in diverse social contexts. As discussed in the literature review, such experiences significantly influence

adolescents' emotions and sense of belonging. The analysis of these experiences enables a deeper understanding of the social factors influencing the identity construction processes of adolescent Chinese HL learners in England.

To achieve these research objectives, an approach is required that allows participants to express their thoughts and feelings in their own words, fostering deeper insight into their inner worlds. Therefore, qualitative research is well-suited to the aims of this study. Semi-structured interviews, combined with visual methods such as drawing activities, are selected as the primary data collection methods. The rationale for these methodological choices is discussed in detail in the next section.

3.3 Research methods

Research methods refer to the specific instruments used for data collection and analysis (Cohen et al., 2018). In this study, interviews and visual methods were employed for data collection. Thematic analysis was chosen for data analysis.

3.3.1 Interviews

As Kvale (1996) suggests, interviews can be understood as an *inter-view* – a space for the exchange of perspectives between individuals who share a common interest in a particular topic. Therefore, interviews represent a social encounter through which researchers and participants engage in dialogue, sharing views on subjects such as worldviews, values, and emotions.

The use of interviews as a research method offers several advantages. First, interviews are highly flexible, as communication can occur through multiple modes, including verbal, non-verbal, visual, and written expressions (Cohen et al., 2018). This multimodal interaction allows for spontaneity and can lead researchers to uncover issues beyond or underlying participants' initial responses. Given that my own experiences differ from those of the children and parents involved in this study (as discussed in Section 1.5), interviews afford a deeper understanding of the topics of interest, through participants' own narratives of their perspectives.

Second, interviews are particularly well-suited for exploring sensitive topics in depth. Hochschild (2009) notes that interviews are ideal for investigating how individuals construct their ideas and the reasoning behind these constructions, as well as how they connect their experiences to broader social realities (Punch, 2013). Since this study focuses on sensitive issues such as emotions and identities, interviews offer an appropriate method for eliciting participants' inner thoughts and interpretations of their social experiences.

Third, the conversational nature of the interaction in interviews tends to foster a sense of involvement in participants, promoting greater motivation and engagement (Oppenheim, 1992). Face-to-face or synchronous interviews, where the researcher's identity is visible, can therefore be particularly effective for building rapport and facilitating open discussions on sensitive subjects. Further discussion of rapport-building strategies employed in this study is presented in Section 3.7.

However, interviews also present certain limitations: they can be time-consuming, resource-intensive, and susceptible to researcher bias (Cohen et al., 2018). These challenges, along with my reflections on the data collection process, are discussed in subsequent Sections. Ethical considerations specific to interviews are addressed in Section 3.9.

3.3.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews can vary greatly in their degree of structure, ranging from highly formalised formats with standardised questions to informal, conversational approaches focused on broad themes (Cohen et al., 2018; Wellington, 2015).

Unstructured interviews offer the greatest flexibility and are useful when researchers seek to explore participants' perspectives without predefined expectations. In contrast, structured interviews employ fixed questions and often rely on close-ended responses (e.g., yes/no, agree/disagree), which may fail to capture the complexity of an individual's identity (Brinkmann, 2018; Cohen et al., 2018). Structured interviews risk eliciting superficial or incomplete responses, particularly when addressing nuanced topics such as identity.

Researchers have found that rich, insightful conversations frequently occur outside the formal interview structure, such as before recording begins or after it ends (Brinkmann, 2018; Parker, 2005). Given this study seeks to explore participants' inner thoughts and emotions, semi-structured interviews were selected to allow participants a degree of freedom to articulate their perspectives beyond rigid "yes" or "no" responses, but still allowing sufficient interview structure to scaffold the researcher to probe all target themes.

The semi-structured interviews in this study followed a consistent protocol, with questions designed around specific themes (Cohen et al., 2018; Morrison, 1993). However, the order of questions varied depending on the flow of each conversation. All questions were open-ended,

allowing for flexible wording and the use of prompts and probes as needed (Cohen et al., 2018; Morrison, 1993).

As well as offering flexibility, open-ended questions are particularly valuable as they encourage elaboration and foster a cooperative atmosphere between interviewer and participant (Cohen et al., 2018; Kerlinger, 1970). They allow for clarification of misunderstandings, enable participants to expand on their responses, and often yield unexpected insights. Given the complex and subjective nature of identity construction, this open-ended approach was essential for eliciting rich, authentic narratives (Bryman, 2016).

Furthermore, research suggests that children may respond to close-ended questions without sufficient reflection (M. B. Powell & Wright, 2008). Open-ended questions, by contrast, require participants to engage in deeper self-reflection, making them particularly suitable for this study's focus on personal experiences and emotions.

In addition to open-ended questions, prompts and probes were used to facilitate deeper responses (Al Balushi, 2016). Prompts, such as rephrasing questions or providing examples, were employed to clarify the meaning and purpose of the question when participants struggled to understand or respond (Denscombe, 2014). Probes were used to encourage elaboration, seek clarification, or invite further detail (Cohen et al., 2018; Priede et al., 2014). These included pauses, echoing participants' statements in a questioning tone, and asking follow-up questions like "why?", "how?", or "can you give me an example?" (Cohen et al., 2018; Priede et al., 2014).

While prompts and probes can enrich the quality of interview data, they also carry the risk of introducing researcher bias (Wellington, 2015). To mitigate this risk, potential prompts and probes were considered in advance during the development of interview questions. Nevertheless, as acknowledged in Section 1.5, complete elimination of bias is unlikely, and reflexivity is essential throughout the research process. In Section 3.6, I discuss my own reflexivity as a researcher.

3.3.1.2 Online interviews

Initially, I had planned to conduct interviews in person. However, due to ongoing concerns related to the Covid-19 pandemic, many potential participants expressed reluctance to travel or engage in face-to-face meetings. Additionally, the geographical dispersion of participants

across England, combined with family and work commitments, made in-person interviews impractical. Consequently, all interviews were conducted online via the university's Google Meet platform to ensure information security.

The widespread availability of internet access has made online interviews an increasingly common method in social science research (James & Busher, 2012). While online interviews present certain drawbacks, such as reduced control over the interview environment, potential distractions, and the difficulty of interpreting non-verbal cues (Cohen et al., 2018; O'Connor & Madge, 2001), they also offer notable benefits.

First, online interviews are time- and cost-efficient, offering flexibility in scheduling and eliminating travel requirements. This convenience is particularly valuable for participants with limited availability, such as working parents or families with young children. Recent research also suggests that online interviews can increase participation from underrepresented and marginalised groups by reducing logistical barriers (Lathen & Laestadius, 2021).

Second, participants often feel more at ease in familiar surroundings, such as their own homes, which can foster openness and candidness during interviews. For shy participants or those discussing sensitive topics like identity, online interviews may offer a more comfortable and less intimidating setting (James et al., 2012).

Third, the normalisation of online communication during the Covid-19 pandemic has further increased public familiarity with digital platforms, including among children and adolescents. By 2020, 96% of UK households had internet access (Prescott, 2021), and government initiatives provided digital devices to disadvantaged students to support online learning (Carl Baker et al., 2020). However, there is limited publicly available data on the effectiveness of these initiatives, raising the possibility that some Chinese HL learners in England may still face digital access challenges. As a result, this study's reliance on online interviews may unintentionally exclude participants from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who are less connected to digital resources or may have suspended Chinese language learning during pandemic-related disruptions (S. Liu et al., 2021). This limitation is further discussed in the *Conclusion* of this thesis.

In sum, despite these challenges, online interviews bring important advantages and were deemed appropriate for this study. They offer a practical solution to pandemic-related restrictions, broaden participant reach, and accommodate diverse schedules. Moreover,

previous studies indicate that participants often value the opportunity to maintain social connections through online interactions, which can evoke positive emotions during times of physical distancing (Keen, 2021; Lathen et al., 2021).

Online interviews can be synchronous (real-time) or asynchronous (non-real-time) (Janghorban et al., 2014b). Synchronous interviews involve live interactions through video conferencing, chat rooms, or instant messaging, while asynchronous interviews occur via email or discussion boards (Hooley et al., 2012). This study employed synchronous online interviews via Google Meet to facilitate real-time communication and ensure data authenticity.

All interviews were audio-recorded to enable accurate transcription and analysis. To protect participants' privacy and ensure their comfort, recordings were limited to audio only, using external devices. Participants were informed of the recording procedures in the information sheets provided (see Appendix B and D). Ethical considerations related to interview recordings are further discussed in Section 3.9.

3.3.2 Visual research methods

Information can be communicated through various forms other than spoken or written language (Eisner, 2008). Some ideas may be better expressed through visual narratives, while others are more effectively conveyed through words (Clark et al., 2010; Kalaja et al., 2013). Consequently, interviews and visual methods each have inherent limitations as a sole research tool but can complement each other when combined. Visual media forms that are frequently employed in educational research include films, photographs, advertisements, images, and drawings, among others (Cohen et al., 2018). In this study, a drawing method was used to collect data, as a means to capture the subjectivity of their creators (Cohen et al., 2018).

3.3.2.1 Drawings

This section defines the drawing method employed in this research, alongside a discussion of its potential benefits and challenges. Visual images have long been recognised as powerful, functional, and inclusive forms of communication, with drawings serving as a primary medium of expression well before the advent of written language (Ward & Shortt, 2018). In this study, drawings refer specifically to *language portraits*, a form of participant-produced visual representation. The concept of language portraits is explained in detail in the next subsection.

Participant-produced drawings are images created, typically by hand, by research participants themselves (Ward et al., 2018). This method has been applied in diverse fields, including medical research (Cross et al., 2006), management studies (Ward & Shortt, 2013), and educational research (Theron & van Rensburg, 2018). Participants are usually asked to create drawings related to a particular topic or question, using basic materials such as pens, pencils, crayons, and paper (Theron et al., 2018). Drawings are particularly valuable for exploring participants' personal experiences, emotions, and inner thoughts, especially in relation to sensitive topics (Morgan et al., 2009). Given that identity can be a sensitive and personal subject, drawings were chosen in this study as a method to elicit participants' reflections.

Some researchers advocate using drawing activities as icebreakers at the start of interviews, while others suggest they are more effective when introduced towards the end, after rapport has been established (J. Ellis, 2012). The latter argue that participants may feel less awkward or anxious about drawing once they are more comfortable with the researcher (Ward et al., 2018). However, in this study, the drawing activity was deliberately positioned at the beginning of the first interview with each family. This was intended to reduce the perceived formality of the interview setting, particularly given the non-anonymous nature of face-to-face (or online) interactions.

Beyond a subsidiary function as an icebreaker, the key advantages that drawings offer as a research method are as follows. The act of drawing itself often stimulates conversation, prompting participants to discuss and reflect on the images they create (Ward et al., 2018). In group contexts, drawing activities can foster the sharing of mutual experiences, emotions, and meanings (Ward et al., 2013). These interactions may occur not only between participants and the researcher but also among participants themselves. Accordingly, in this study, the drawing activity facilitated meaningful communication between parents and children, as evidenced by quotations presented in the *Findings and Discussion*.

In multilingualism research, drawings are frequently used to explore the connections between language, body, and mind, enabling participants to express inner feelings that may be difficult to articulate verbally (Soare et al., 2020). Furthermore, drawing is recognised as an effective means of data collection when working with young people, as it provides an accessible and engaging way for them to express complex thoughts and experiences (Moore & Castellotti, 2011, as cited in Soares et al., 2020).

Language Portraits

In this study, *language portraits* were employed as the primary drawing activity. A language portrait is a visual tool used to represent an individual's multilingualism (Soares et al., 2020). Building on the work of Krumm and Jenkins (2001), Busch (2010) introduced language portraits in bilingual workshops with adolescents, inviting them to colour “a body silhouette, using different colours to represent different elements of their linguistic dispositions” (2010, p. 286). Through this method, participants are able to express their attitudes towards language and culture in a non-verbal, non-intrusive way (Gkaintartzi & Tsokalidou, 2018).

Language portraits allow participants to express their linguistic experiences visually, shifting from spoken or written narratives to visual representation (Busch, 2006). This method not only captures participants' “current language learning and language use but also plans and aspirations for the future” (Busch, 2010, p. 286). Given the dynamic and evolving nature of adolescent HL learners' identities and motivations, language portraits are a particularly suitable research instrument for this study.

An example of the language portrait template used in interviews is presented in Figure 2.

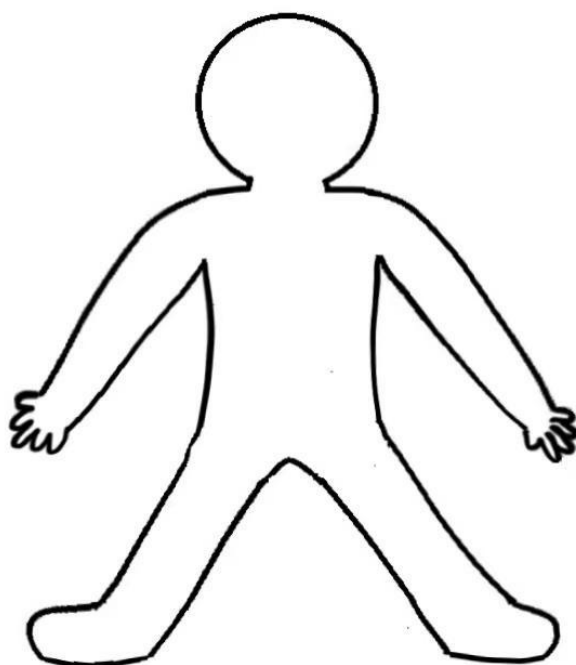


Figure 2 Language portrait

In the first interviews, both the adolescents and their parents were invited to use different colours to represent each language variety present in their lives. Participants were encouraged

to include any language variety they considered part of their lives or identities, regardless of their proficiency in that language. In the *Findings and Discussion* Chapter, I analyse participants' drawings alongside their interpretations, focusing on how these visual representations reflect their emotions, motivations, and identity constructions.

3.3.3 Research design

This section outlines the overall design of the research, focusing on how the previously discussed methods were applied in practice.

Given the sensitivity of identity-related research, I designed the study to include four interviews with each participating family in order to gradually establish trust and rapport. The first interview was conducted with both the parent and the HL learner, with the aim of gathering basic information and introducing the core themes of the study. The second interview was carried out with the parent(s) only, allowing for a deeper understanding of the child's heritage language learning journey from the parental perspective. The third and fourth interviews were conducted with the adolescent learner alone, focusing on their identities, motivations, and emotional responses related to language learning experiences. Parents were present during these interviews, but did not actively participate, to ensure the appropriateness of all questions asked.

In the first interviews, language portraits were used as an icebreaker. As noted by Cohen et al. (2018), drawings are particularly effective for initiating discussions with children on sensitive topics. The drawing activity served to reduce the formality of the research setting, help participants gain a preliminary understanding of the main topic of the study, and enable me to gain initial insights into their linguistic backgrounds. This also helped to ease participants into more personal and sensitive conversations in subsequent interviews.

Additionally, short follow-up interviews were conducted with parents at the end of the third and fourth interviews if clarification was required regarding something their child had mentioned. These follow-ups ensured that parents had the opportunity to respond to or expand upon specific points, enriching the dataset and supporting a more holistic understanding of the family's experiences.

3.4 Sampling and recruitment of participants

The Chinese ethnic population in England is both large and widely dispersed (UK Government, 2020). Consequently, it is neither feasible nor realistic to investigate every family with adolescent Chinese heritage language learners. Instead, this study employed a sample designed to balance both practical considerations and representativeness (Acharya et al., 2013).

Multiple sampling methods were used to reach potential participants. Initially, I employed **cluster sampling**, which involves dividing a population into clusters and targeting specific groups (Acharya et al., 2013). To identify the target cluster – families with Chinese HL learners aged 12 to 16 – I contacted both Chinese complementary schools and mainstream secondary schools. This was because Chinese complementary schools may not be the only route through which Chinese immigrant families in England support HL learning.

The initial approach involved emailing each school a brief introduction to the study, alongside a visually engaging recruitment poster designed to attract attention. The poster contained key information such as participant requirements, the study's purpose, and my contact details (see Appendix A). If schools agreed to share the information, I also provided full participant information sheets and consent forms for distribution to parents.

In total, I contacted 10 Chinese complementary schools and 88 mainstream schools across different regions of England. However, response rates were extremely low, likely due to disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Only two Chinese complementary schools agreed to share the recruitment information, while three mainstream schools responded but declined to circulate the materials. Ultimately, no participants in this study reported hearing about the project through these school channels.

One parent later mentioned having received an email from their child's Chinese complementary school but admitted to having overlooked it amidst the flood of emails resulting from the pandemic-induced shift to online learning. Furthermore, pandemic restrictions prevented me from establishing in-person connections with potential participants, which may have affected trust-building, which is an important factor when recruiting for research on sensitive topics (Leighton et al., 2021).

To diversify the pool of potential participants, I also contacted various Chinese community organisations. However, responses were similarly limited, often due to resource constraints

exacerbated by the pandemic. For example, one organisation prioritised supporting vaccination efforts over research collaborations during the data collection period.

Given the low response rate from cluster sampling, I adopted **convenience sampling** via social media. Typically employed for its ease (Acharya et al., 2013), this method allowed me to disseminate recruitment information widely across diverse communities. With mainstream schools and complementary schools either closed or operating remotely (L. E. Kim et al., 2020; Viner et al., 2020; Young et al., 2022), social media offered a practical alternative.

I posted the recruitment poster in various Facebook groups, including those for multilingual families, British Chinese communities, and regional information forums. Permissions were sought from group administrators prior to posting. Additionally, I used Twitter and WeChat for recruitment purposes. WeChat, in particular, was chosen due to its popularity among Chinese immigrant families in the UK (S. Zhao et al., 2020). I also encouraged contacts to share the recruitment information within their networks and group chats to maximise reach.

Following the recruitment of participants who took part in a pilot interview, it became clear that WeChat was the most effective platform for recruitment, as Chinese families showed a clear preference for communication via this platform. This preference is further explored in the *Findings and Discussion* Chapter. Section 3.7 discusses the pilot process and its contributions to refining the research interview approach.

Snowball sampling was also employed from the outset of the recruitment process. In essence, snowball sampling involves participants referring other potential participants from their own contacts (Acharya et al., 2013). It is an effective strategy when potential participants are difficult to access and not directly known to the researcher (Acharya et al., 2013; Leighton et al., 2021). After the first interview with each family, I invited participants to share information about the study within their own networks. This proved fruitful: for instance, the mother from Family 3 found the interview process personally valuable and recommended the study to her friends, leading to the participation of Families 7 and 10. Similarly, the mother from Family 8 introduced the study to Family 9, who are her relatives. Basic information about all participants is presented in Section 3.5.

Finally, **voluntary sampling** was integral to recruitment in this study, as all participants joined the research willingly. Further discussions regarding voluntary participation, particularly in relation to the adolescent participants, are presented in Sections 3.6 and 3.9.

To ensure relevance and consistency, all participants met the following criteria:

1. Adolescents from each family all had a Chinese heritage origin and were able to speak or at least understand Chinese language varieties when interviews were conducted.
2. Adolescents had received most of their formal education in England. This criterion was used in consideration of the influence of English mainstream school settings on HL learners in England.
3. Adolescents were Chinese HL learners when interviews were conducted, although the criteria for participants did not specify kinds of HL learning settings or methods.
4. Adolescents were aged between 12 and 16 years. This age range was selected because adolescent Chinese HL learners are underrepresented in existing research (see Section 2.4). Adolescence is a critical period when identity formation becomes more complex, often influenced by a desire for independence from parents (T. F. Su et al., 2009). Additionally, in this age group, the range of participants' language proficiency levels was expected to enrich the data.
5. Adolescents had been learning Chinese language varieties for a minimum of two years. Prior research suggests that learners' attitudes towards HL learning can evolve over time (Caldas, 2008; Caldas et al., 2002; Little et al., 2024). Selecting participants with sustained learning experience allowed for a more in-depth exploration of identity development. Moreover, this timing enabled the study to capture experiences both before and after the Covid-19 pandemic's onset.
6. For each adolescent participant, at least one parent agreed to be interviewed, ensuring that both parental and adolescent perspectives could be considered, thereby enhancing data credibility (Johnson et al., 2020).

The entire sampling and recruitment process spanned approximately three and a half months. Ultimately, 10 families participated in the study, including 11 adolescent Chinese heritage language learners.

The next section provides brief introductions to each participating family.

3.5 Participants

This section provides an overview of the participants involved in this study. Although real names were used during interviews for ease of communication, all names presented here are pseudonyms, in line with ethical guidelines for protecting participants' privacy (BERA, 2018).

Where participants preferred to be addressed by their Chinese names during interviews, pseudonyms in Pinyin have been used. For others, an English pseudonym was selected. Some participants chose their own pseudonyms for use in this thesis.

Table 1 below summarises details of the participating families.

Table 1 Basic information of adolescent heritage language learners interviewed in this research

No.	Name	Gender	Age	Time in the UK (years)	Dominant home language (variety)	Parent interviewed	Parents' educational level
1	Huhu	F	12	Native	Mandarin*	Mother	Undergraduate or higher
2	Ximeng※	M	16	Native	Mandarin	Father	Undergraduate or higher
	Haijin※	M	12	Native	Mandarin	Father	Undergraduate or higher
3	Opal※	F	13	Native	Cantonese/ English	Mother	Undergraduate or higher
4	Anna※	F	13	Native	Mandarin*	Mother	Below undergraduate
5	Bella	F	15	Eight	Mandarin*	Mother	Undergraduate or higher
6	Niya	F	14	Native (Nine) ⁷	Mandarin	Father	Undergraduate or higher
7	Flora	F	14	Native	Cantonese/ English	Mother	Below undergraduate

⁷ This will be explained in the full introduction of this family.

8	Simon※	M	13	Native	Mandarin/English*	Mother	Below undergraduate
9	Hanting※	M	15	Native	Mandarin*	Mother	Below undergraduate
10	Harry※	M	13	Native	Mandarin	Mother	Undergraduate or higher

Notes:

* Children in this family are exposed to parents' other dialects as well.

※ Participant has one or more siblings.

Family 1: Huhu and her mother

Huhu's Mandarin Chinese learning was primarily home-based. During the interviews, it was revealed that she had recently started online Mandarin Chinese lessons via Zoom, conducted by her mother and a family friend, with Huhu and the friend's son attending the lessons together. Prior to this, Huhu had been mainly taught by her mother, although they also occasionally participated in several online learning groups on WeChat. Huhu's mother used to work in a multinational corporation in China. After migrating due to marriage, she worked as a housewife. Huhu's mother mostly spoke Mandarin Chinese with Huhu when interviews were conducted. Very occasionally, she also spoke her hometown dialect to Huhu for fun. Huhu's father grew up in Taiwan as his family had migrated from mainland China after the Second World War. According to Huhu's mother, Huhu's father could not speak any other Chinese language varieties. Since he offered limited contributions to support Huhu's heritage language learning (see mother's quote in Section 4.4.2), only Huhu's mother was interviewed.

Family 2: Ximeng, Haijin and their father

Ximeng and Haijin are two brothers who were mainly learning Mandarin Chinese by adopting the *adult repetition* strategy at home, although they both took online Chinese lessons when they were young. Since they both fit the age range for this study, they were interviewed together in the first interview, then interviewed separately for the third and fourth interviews. Ximeng and Haijin's father migrated to England after finishing his higher education study. He was using Mandarin Chinese and English at his job. Besides, he can speak multiple languages and

Chinese varieties due to his educational background. However, Ximeng and Haijin were not exposed to any Chinese language varieties other than Mandarin Chinese when interviews were conducted.

The father was interviewed as the parental representative as this was a single-parent household, although it was reported that the mother used to take the children to activities related to Chinese culture before she moved back to China during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Family 3: Opal and her mother

Opal was mainly learning Mandarin Chinese by using Mandarin textbooks on her own at home, with extra support from her mother. Additionally, Opal took a trial lesson from an online Chinese learning platform called LingoAce during the process of data collection. By the end of our last interview, Opal's mother had signed her up for this platform.

Opal's mother migrated to England after finishing her higher education degree in an English university and she was working at a local company where she spoke English. Opal's mother mainly spoke Cantonese, and occasionally her hometown dialect, which she identified as a register of Cantonese, with Opal. Additionally, Opal's stepfather, with whom they have been living since Opal was 2 years old, is British. Therefore, the dominant languages in their household when the interviews conducted were Cantonese and English. Opal's mother was the only one who contributed to Opal's Chinese language maintenance; therefore, she was interviewed as the parental representative.

Family 4: Anna and her mother

Anna was mainly learning Mandarin Chinese by using Mandarin Chinese textbooks at home, with extra support from her mother, after she stopped learning at her Chinese complementary school during national lockdowns. Anna's mother had migrated to England for higher education study but had paused it halfway. Anna's parents were working at their family-owned Chinese take-away when interviews were conducted. At work, Anna's mother mainly spoke English. At home, she spoke Mandarin Chinese with Anna, but she spoke her Hokkien with her husband. Because Anna's mother was in charge of children's Chinese learning, she was interviewed.

Family 5: Bella and her mother

Bella was mainly learning Mandarin Chinese on her own by using social media and watching Chinese TV shows. She migrated to England with her mother for education when she was eight years old. Before that, she was educated in English-Chinese bilingual schools back in China. Bella's mother was using both Mandarin Chinese and English for her job, which involves part-time acting and networking for companies across China and Britain. She mainly spoke Mandarin Chinese when Bella came home from her boarding school. As Bella's father stayed in China when they migrated, Bella's mother was the parent who was interviewed.

Family 6: Niya and her father

Niya was mainly learning Mandarin Chinese through reading activities with her father. Niya was born in England but moved back to China when she was one year old. When she was six years old, her family moved back to England for her education.

Niya's father was in charge of her Chinese learning, since her mother was busy with working. Niya's father used to work as an engineer back in China. However, after moving to England, he changed his job to a more administrative position in the office, where he used English every day. Niya's father self-reported that he could not speak any dialect other than Mandarin. According to Niya's father, her mother can understand her hometown dialect but not speak it. Therefore, Niya was only exposed to Mandarin Chinese at home when interviews were conducted.

Family 7: Flora and her mother

Flora was learning Mandarin Chinese through online lessons offered by her Chinese complementary school and weekly sessions with her personal tutor when the interviews were conducted. She migrated to England after she married Flora's father, a second-generation Chinese immigrant whose family was from Hong Kong. Flora's mother mainly spoke English at work. Flora mainly spoke English with her father and Cantonese with her mother. Flora's parents spoke Cantonese to each other. Since Flora's mother was responsible for her Chinese learning, she was interviewed.

Family 8: Simon and his mother

Simon was learning Mandarin Chinese through online lessons via LingoAce, after stopping attending his previous Chinese complementary school during national lockdowns. Simon's mother migrated to England with her parents when she was 11 years old. She worked at their

family-owned Chinese restaurant, where she spoke English more often. Simon spoke both Mandarin and English with his mother and spoke Mandarin only with his father. His parents spoke Mandarin and Hokkien to each other. Since Simon's mother was responsible for his Chinese learning, she was interviewed.

Family 9: Hanting and his mother

Hanting was mainly learning Mandarin Chinese through online lessons offered by his Chinese complementary school during data collection. Hanting's parents migrated to England for job opportunities with higher payments. They both spoke Mandarin Chinese to Hanting and Hokkien to each other. Hanting's mother worked in a Chinese restaurant where she mainly spoke Chinese (the variety was not specified). Hanting's mother was interviewed because she was less busy than Hanting's father.

Family 10: Harry and his mother

Harry was mainly learning Mandarin Chinese through online lessons offered by his Chinese complementary school during data collection. Harry's parents migrated to England after they obtained their higher education degrees in British universities. Harry's mother usually spoke Mandarin Chinese for her job, which was as a supplier for food trading. Both Harry's parents spoke Mandarin Chinese at home with their children, although they accepted that Harry and his younger brother spoke English to each other and parents. Since Harry's mother was responsible for her Chinese learning, she was interviewed.

In addition to the criteria for participants stated in the last section, participants in this study share some other common features.

- (1) All adolescent Chinese heritage language learners were learning Mandarin Chinese, although their dominant language variety at home may differ. In *Findings and Discussion*, this situation is further discussed.
- (2) In six out of ten families, children were exposed to Chinese language varieties other than Mandarin Chinese from their parents.
- (3) In six out of ten families, the adolescent participant had one or more siblings
- (4) All adolescents have at least one parent who is a first-generation immigrant. Family situations are otherwise diverse, as discussed in the introduction to each family.
- (5) All families could afford Chinese complementary lessons/schools for children, even though some of them do not choose complementary lessons/schools (More information is

presented in the data analysis).

- (6) In most families, mothers are in charge of children's heritage language education, which resonates with the findings of previous studies (see Little, 2020; Wilson, 2021), as mothers are usually taking the role of caretaker in families (Tannen, 2014).

3.6 Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to “the processes of critical self-reflection on one's biases, theoretical predispositions, preferences, and so forth” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 224). These processes are essential in qualitative research as they raise awareness of the complexities inherent in conducting research and contribute to the validity and legitimacy of the study by critically examining the research process itself (Pillow, 2010).

While I have discussed my positionality in Section 1.5, it is also important to acknowledge that researchers are continually (re)positioned during data collection – both through their own perceptions and those of their participants (Gallego-Balsà, 2020). Researcher's reflexivity enables greater awareness and understanding of these shifting positions as the research proceeds. Furthermore, hooks (1984) suggests that positions should be considered through the dual lenses of insider and outsider status, emphasising that positions are not only about self-identification but also about the communities from which one is excluded.

Throughout this study, my position oscillated between being an insider and an outsider (Mason-Bish, 2019), depending on the context of interaction with participants. When interacting with parents, I was often perceived as an insider. As a Chinese citizen and native Mandarin speaker who has lived in England since 2019, I shared linguistic and cultural commonalities with my adult participants. My own experiences of navigating English society allowed me to empathise with the challenges of cultural adaptation, thus facilitating rapport with parents. Particularly, conversations about concerns for family members in China during the Covid-19 pandemic frequently served as effective icebreakers in the interactions I had with parents.

However, I was not a parent myself, which limited my ability to fully relate to certain parental concerns, such as balancing responsibilities as both the caregiver to children in England and the adult daughter or son of parents who were living in China. Simultaneously, my status as a doctoral researcher in education positioned me as an authority figure. For example, during an informal pre-interview conversation with Huhu and her mother, Huhu's mother explicitly

encouraged her daughter to view me as a role model, potentially intensifying the power imbalance between researcher and participant, particularly given the participant's young age (Wood et al., 2019). To mitigate this imbalance, I deliberately shifted the focus of the conversation back to Huhu's own experiences and interests, thereby affirming the value of her voice in our interactions. Additionally, when Huhu's mother later sought my advice on her daughter's school learning behaviours, I clarified that I could only share personal experiences, not professional guidance, in line with my supervisor's recommendations and ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018).

Similar dynamics arose with other parents. Several positioned me as an authority on educational matters, with one even addressing me as "teacher" during the interview. In such cases, I clarified that my role was exploratory not evaluative, and that I was there to listen to their experiences rather than assess them. Nonetheless, this perception sometimes inhibited open dialogue, as exemplified by a parent asking me what responses I was expecting, so that they could provide the "correct" answers.

Conversely, parents with prior experience in academic research occasionally positioned me as a student or researcher who was not as experienced as them. These participants were more inclined to critically engage with my questions, prompting me to explain in more detail the rationale and background of my study. Although such challenges were sometimes uncomfortable, they ultimately encouraged me to critically reflect on my research design and communication strategies.

The languages and language varieties used during the interviews also brought my insider-outsider positions into focus. I had given participants the choice of using Chinese and/or English in the interviews. However, I could speak fluent Mandarin Chinese and could understand basic Cantonese without being able to speak it fluently. During the interviews, parents who had migrated to England with little or no formal Mandarin education appeared to regard me as an authoritative Mandarin Chinese speaker, which led to expressions of lack of confidence in their own Mandarin proficiency (e.g., Simon's mother's concerns about whether she could be qualified to teach her children Chinese, as discussed in Section 4.2.1.2). In response to this concern, I emphasised my appreciation for the diversity of Chinese language varieties and adopted translanguaging practices (e.g., with Simon's mother) and translation assistance from children (e.g., with Flora's mother) to maintain the flow of the interviews with parents. On the other hand, some parents from regions where Northern Chinese varieties were

spoken remarked that they could tell I lived in a region that was “more Southern” than theirs, reflecting the value placed on Northern accents both in Mainland China (L. Zhu et al., 2025) and among overseas Chinese communities (Ganassin, 2020). These interactions with parents further deepened my understanding of the prestige of Mandarin Chinese over other varieties, as well as the complexity of Chinese language varieties and the potential impact on identities.

In contrast, my interactions with adolescent participants often positioned me as an outsider, as I did not belong to their peer groups (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Despite my own experiences of internal migration within mainland China, I did not share the specific experiences of growing up as a Chinese HL learner with a migratory background in England. The languages and language varieties used during the interviews with adolescents also highlighted my dual insider-outsider position. As Hashtpari et al. (2021) pointed out, young participants might try to demonstrate their HLs vocabulary and heritage cultural knowledge when interviewed by researchers fluent in those languages. Since I am fluent in Mandarin Chinese, some adolescents may have chosen to use Mandarin more frequently when responding to interview questions (even though both Mandarin Chinese and English were listed as potential languages for the interviews), regardless of their proficiency in or attitudes towards Mandarin Chinese. For example, at the start of her first interview, Anna chose to use Mandarin Chinese. However, as time went on, I noticed that she often needed me to rephrase certain words or sentences into English, despite continuing to insist on answering in Mandarin. In the third interview, at one point she directly answered my questions in English, and I observed that the depth and length of her responses increased significantly. I then asked her if she felt more comfortable using English for the interviews, and she said yes. After this short conversation, I conducted the rest of the interviews with Anna in English. I also reminded myself to pay closer attention to adolescents' reactions when we communicated in Mandarin Chinese and to ask them actively and explicitly if they wanted to switch to English. However, it seemed that Anna was the only adolescent in this study who encountered these struggles and wished to switch.

While my outsider status distanced me from participants' lived experiences, it also enabled me to approach their narratives with greater objectivity. The adolescents frequently assumed that I lacked knowledge of the educational system in England, often prefacing their responses with explanations of curriculum structures. Although I possessed some understanding of the curriculum, I refrained from stopping them, instead encouraging them to explain in their own

words. This strategy was intended to empower participants, fostering a more balanced interaction by positioning them as experts on their own experiences (Eder & Fingerson, 2003).

However, my personal experiences of migration also carried the risk of leading me into what Beedell (2009, p. 110) describes as a “murky state of complacency”, meaning that I might unconsciously assume that my participants shared similar negative experiences. To counter this, I continuously reflected on the wording of my interview questions and remained vigilant in avoiding assumptions that could misguide participants’ responses.

Occasionally, shared interests, such as books, animations, or snacks facilitated moments of insider connection with adolescent participants. Such commonalities often enhanced communication, supporting rapport-building and fostering more open conversations (O’Connor et al., 2001). Talking about these shared interests provided valuable opportunities for participants to engage more comfortably in the research process.

3.7 Conducting interviews

Interviews are inherently time-consuming compared to other research methods (Cohen et al., 2018). However, given that this study sought to explore sensitive topics in depth, investing time in building rapport with participants was essential. It was necessary to begin with surface-level questions to establish trust before moving towards more sensitive issues, often revisiting topics to encourage deeper reflection. The entire data collection process spanned seven months.

As discussed in the *Literature Review*, this study aimed to explore participants’ personal experiences and their inner thoughts regarding these experiences. Thus, I anticipated that some emotional conversations would inevitably arise during interviews. To prepare for this, both in terms of refining the interview protocol and managing the emotional dynamics, I conducted a pilot interview. This allowed me to assess participants’ reactions to the interview design, adjust my questioning strategies, and improve my own preparedness as a qualitative researcher (Janghorban et al., 2014a; Priest, 2006). The pilot interview participants were Huhu and her mother, who were the first family to respond to my recruitment advertisement. Before setting out my reflections on the pilot interview itself, I address some learning points from Huhu’s recruitment concerning consent, scheduling and gatekeepers.

Huhu and her mother found my study through a WeChat group chat, a popular social media platform among overseas Chinese communities (Hong et al., 2023), which proved to be a

valuable recruitment tool. Initially, however, Huhu expressed concerns about the time commitment, given her academic workload, and declined to participate. Respecting the principle of voluntary participation (UNICEF, 1989), we agreed to revisit her decision a month later. During this time, I redirected my recruitment efforts to WeChat, which subsequently became the primary channel for participant recruitment.

When Huhu later reconsidered and agreed to participate, I conducted an informal video chat to confirm her willingness, emphasising her right to withdraw at any time (Economic and Social Research Council, 2015). After ensuring her consent was informed and voluntary, I proceeded with obtaining signed consent forms. Throughout the subsequent interviews, I continued to check in with Huhu to ensure her ongoing comfort and consent. Her active engagement and insightful contributions during interviews indicated genuine interest and participation.

This experience highlighted two important considerations. First, obtaining adolescents' consent should be seen as an ongoing process, as their willingness to participate may fluctuate (Levine et al., 2022). Second, I recognised the need for flexibility in scheduling, accommodating participants' academic commitments. Moving forward, I explicitly acknowledged this to participants and prioritised scheduling at their convenience. Additionally, given that parents acted as "gatekeepers" (Cohen et al., 2018), and might be imposing their wishes on their children to participate, I arranged informal video chats with adolescents prior to the first interview to ensure that their participation was genuinely voluntary.

Learning from pilot interview

The pilot interview also provided valuable learning opportunities regarding interview dynamics. One notable challenge was establishing rapport, particularly with Huhu's mother. She appeared initially defensive, which was likely due to the power dynamics between researcher and participant (Eder et al., 2003). Her responses to some of the personal questions were limited, prompting me to adjust the sequencing of interview questions. I subsequently moved the more sensitive questions to the second (parent-only) interview, allowing time for rapport to develop (Roberts, 2020).

Through these interactions, I discovered that sharing my own relevant experiences, such as those related to family relationships or the pandemic, helped create a more comfortable atmosphere and encouraged participants to open up. However, mindful of the risk of leading questions (Wellington, 2015), I timed these personal disclosures after participants had provided

their initial responses. With adolescent participants, shared interests – such as a mutual appreciation for certain book genres – also proved effective in building rapport, as noted in section 3.6. Consequently, I made a conscious effort to share personal interests during relevant conversations with other participants.

For safeguarding reasons, parents were present during the third and fourth interviews, even when the questions were directed solely at their children. This approach was informed by literature suggesting that parental presence can provide emotional support for children when discussing sensitive topics (Gibson, 2012; M. A. Powell et al., 2020). The pilot interview provided an illustrative example when Huhu struggled to articulate an experience of marginalisation at school in mainland China. Her mother's intervention not only clarified the situation but also provided emotional reassurance, which would have been difficult to manage had we been alone.

Nevertheless, parental presence also brought challenges, such as parents occasionally answering on behalf of their children. To mitigate this, at the beginning of each interview I emphasised the importance of hearing the child's own perspective, and reiterated this when necessary. In cases where parents interjected, I would either seek confirmation from the child or gently redirect the question back to them.

The pilot interview was instrumental in refining my interview approach. Together with my own reflections, the feedback from Huhu and her mother, although somewhat limited due to politeness, led to several adjustments. These included reordering questions to introduce sensitive topics later in the interview sequence and clarifying ambiguous wording. Additionally, the pilot study helped me accurately estimate interview durations, allowing me to manage participants' expectations more effectively.

Data collected during the pilot study was incorporated into the main analysis, as the core interview questions remained consistent; therefore, the pilot interview can contribute to the major dataset as well (K. Mellor, 2022). However, some of Huhu's and her mother's responses were excluded from the findings where my inexperience as an interviewer may have influenced the data.

Protocol and procedures for data collection

Following the pilot interview, I implemented a structured protocol for data collection, as follows.

After initial contact, families received detailed information sheets outlining the study's purpose, potential risks and benefits, and examples of interview questions. Participants were given 5 to 7 days to consider participation, they were encouraged to ask questions during this time frame. Prior to each first interview, I reiterated the voluntary nature of participation and informed consent.

Given the limitations of Google Meet, which does not allow audio-only recording, I used an external device to record interviews, ensuring data security and confidentiality (Saarijärvi et al., 2021). Participants were reminded of the recording at the start of each session.

After completing interviews with each family, I expressed my gratitude and reminded them of their right to withdraw within seven days. I also informed them of the possibility of follow-up interviews, although none were ultimately required.

Subsequent interviews with other families continued to refine my skills. For instance, when Family 2 informed me that Ximeng and Haijin were preparing for exams, I scheduled interviews for the following week to avoid adding stress. Similarly, when time constraints arose, I offered flexible arrangements, including splitting interviews across multiple sessions, as I did with Harry (Family 10).

Some challenges persisted, particularly the issue of parents attempting to answer on behalf of their children. I addressed this by affirming the parents' contributions and then redirecting questions to the child. Additionally, home environments often introduced distractions, such as younger siblings interrupting or participants engaging in activities like drawing during interviews. Rather than perceiving these as disruptions, I used them as opportunities to build rapport, which in turn facilitated more open conversations.

While online interviews are generally considered to be effective substitutes for face-to-face interactions (Archibald et al., 2019; Irani, 2019; Krouwel et al., 2019), minor technical issues occasionally arose. These included interruptions from phone calls, muted microphones, and unstable internet connections, all of which were manageable and did not significantly disrupt data collection. Overall, the online interview format may have actually enhanced participant

comfort, as it allowed interviewees to remain in familiar surroundings, which is conducive to discussing sensitive topics.

3.8 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is defined as a method for “systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). Its flexibility makes it suitable for various research questions, data collection methods, and sample sizes (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Rather than focusing on frequency of words and phrases in participants’ responses, thematic analysis prioritises the depth and relevance of meaning patterns in relation to research questions (Joffe, 2011).

This section outlines the data analysis process adopted in this study, from transcription to theme generation, following Braun and Clarke’s (2006; 2012) six-phase thematic analysis framework.

Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with the data

I began by manually transcribing all audio recordings, which is recognised as a good way to become more familiar with the data (Kiger et al., 2020). All words and sounds in interviews, including pauses, self-corrections, tones and emphasis, were kept in transcriptions, in order to better understand participants’ meanings and emotions during data analysis (Bucholtz, 2003). Manual transcription allowed for deeper immersion in the data, as repeated listening to the recordings enhanced my understanding of participants’ meanings and emotions, while simultaneously enabling me to reflect on participants’ answers and link them together. During this phase, I took extensive notes, recording keywords, potential codes, emerging ideas, and possible links to existing literature. By the end of this phase, I had a general idea about which raw data could potentially be used to answer each research question (Braun et al., 2012), which can make the next phase more efficient.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes

Codes, as the foundational “building blocks” of themes (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p. 297), were developed by identifying features of the data relevant to the research questions (Braun et al., 2012). Codes can be captured from transcripts directly, or they can be extracted from transcripts through interpretation (W. Xu & Zammit, 2020).

Given the large volume of data (four interviews per family across ten families), I used NVivo, a Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software application produced by QSR International, in

addition to manual analysis work in this research. QDA software can make researchers' data analysis easier and more efficient and may generate higher quality results (Hilal & Alabri, 2013). To ensure familiarity with the software, I first practised manual coding and then cross-referenced results using NVivo's functionalities. The coding process led to the development of a comprehensive codebook, which was instrumental in the next phase of analysis.

Although this study collected both textual and visual data (i.e., drawings in the form of language portraits), the language portraits were not being thematically analysed based on visual elements (e.g., Soares et al., 2020) in this current study. Instead, the analysis focused on participants' verbal interpretations of their language portraits, provided during interviews. These interpretations thus became textual data for the thematic analysis. The visual images of language portraits were still presented in Chapter 4, together with relevant quotations, to support the discussion of the identified themes and subthemes.

Phase 3: Searching for themes

In this phase, I reviewed and categorised codes by identifying similarities, differences, and relationships among them. Potential themes were generated by clustering related codes and mapping how they addressed the research questions (Braun et al., 2006; Joffe, 2011). Importantly, themes were not determined by word frequency but by the significance of meaning patterns within the data (Nowell et al., 2017; Varpio et al., 2017). Relationships between categories were also examined to build a coherent thematic map (Braun et al., 2012). An example of this process is provided in Appendix F.

Phase 4: Reviewing potential themes

At this stage, I brought potential themes back to the data set to examine if they were supported by codes and fit in the entire dataset (Braun et al., 2012). This phase was conducted repeatedly as my interpretations of data were continuously developing throughout the data analysis process. During this theme review process, I noticed that the initial themes I developed were too general and not sufficiently clearly related to my research questions. Therefore, I had to change the expressions of themes, adding new themes or removing existing themes to make the connections between themes and research questions clearer. Moreover, I checked if all themes could be distinguished from each other but still have coherence (Braun et al., 2006; Kiger et al., 2020).

In the next phase, the final versions of themes and relevant codes are presented.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

In this phase, I clearly defined each theme and subtheme, specifying their scope and relevance to the research questions. Themes were named to reflect their central ideas while maintaining analytical clarity. Table 2 below sets out a summary of the finalised thematic structure:

Table 2 Themes that identified in data analysis

Section No.	Themes	Subthemes
4.2	The prestige of Mandarin Chinese over other Chinese language varieties	• Children's limited knowledge of Chinese language varieties • Parents' preference for children's Mandarin Chinese learning
	Reconsidering Chinese character writing skills	• Frictions among family members related to children's Chinese writing skills • Technology development brings a new turn for writing in Chinese
	(Not) learning Chinese culture through language learning	• Entwinement of adolescents' cultural and language learning • Challenges and opportunities in teaching culture for Chinese HL learners
	English as the dominant language in England	• Adolescents' preferences for English • Limited support in mainstream schools for other languages and language varieties • Uncertainties about learning Chinese in the future

4.3	Ideal selves of adolescent Chinese HL learners in England	• The multilingual ideal self • Potential future opportunities • Sense of belonging • Communication with other Chinese speakers • Travel to the heritage country
	Ought-to self of adolescent Chinese HL learners in England	• Future career opportunities • Learning Chinese is an obligation • Adolescents' motivations being contested
4.4	Language as an identity marker: speaking Chinese and feeling Chinese	N/A
	Translanguaging and fluidity of adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities	N/A
	Speaking Chinese and feeling special	N/A
	"I'm Chinese because my parents are Chinese"	N/A
	Language learning and the construction of adolescent HL learners' cultural identities	N/A

	Microaggression and racism against adolescent Chinese HL learners	N/A
	Adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities being confirmed and contested	• Parents link their children's identities with their own well-being • Adolescents' identities being contested by strangers • Translanguaging means low proficiency • Parents who understand the complexities of HL learners' identities

Phase 6: Producing the report

The final phase involved integrating the thematic analysis into the findings and discussion Chapter. Following N. King's (2004) guidance, this phase extended beyond mere description of codes and themes, incorporating interpretation and synthesis with existing literature. Relevant studies were cited to contextualise findings and deepen analysis, as presented in the next chapter.

3.9 Ethical concerns

Cavan defines ethics in research as “a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others” (1977, p. 810). Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1992) argue that the most common ethical dilemma in social science research is balancing the potential social benefits against the individual costs to every participant, which is also known as the “cost/benefits ratio”. On the other hand, some research may make participants feel proud about contributing to society. Therefore, participating in social science research is inevitably sensitive, or at least has the possibility to become sensitive (Fahie, 2014). These arguments point out researchers' responsibility to minimise harm and respect participants' dignity and privacy throughout the research process.

Given this study's focus on adolescents' emotions, motivations, and identity formation, ethical sensitivity was crucial at every stage of the research.

3.9.1 Ethical concerns in research design

In order to conduct the research ethically, the design of this study was informed by the following ethics guidelines and principles.

Considering that the participating adolescents in this study would be under 18 years old, the research adhered to the Articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child (UNICEF, 1989) and adopted the ethical guidelines set by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) as the principal ethical guidance. Particular attention was paid to inequalities experienced by children and young people (BERA, 2018), so the adolescents taking part in the study were asked to give oral and written consents before the interviews started, even if their parents had provided consents.

Interview questions were designed to minimise potential harms and to ensure that the benefits would override potential harms (British Psychological Society, 2014; Economic and Social Research Council, 2015; Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). The potential risks and benefits of participation in interviews were explained in the information sheets (see Appendix B, C and D), which were sent to participants before they signed the consent form. During the interviews, participants were also reminded that they had the right not to answer any particular questions if they felt uncomfortable about it. However, such a situation did not transpire during the actual process of data collection.

While the interview process sought to minimise risk of harm or discomfort to participants, interview questions are inevitably influenced by researcher bias (Cohen et al., 2018). Before the fieldwork, I reflected on my positionality and its potential influence on my bias. Furthermore, given that my previous experiences of doing fieldwork with young people was somewhat limited, I asked my supervisor to review my set of interview questions before the pilot interview was conducted.

3.9.2 Ethical concerns in data collection

Informed consent is indispensable in academic research, as it ensures that no participant is pressured to become involved in a study and has access to all the information they need to make a decision about whether to participate (Bhutta, 2004; Cohen et al., 2018). When I

approached potential interviewees, I supplied them with detailed information about the study, including the potential risks of their participation which primarily related to potentially feeling negative emotions when talking about unpleasant experiences. The participant information sheets also included other information of concern to potential interviewees, such as the purpose of the study and how interviews were going to be conducted. It is a fundamental duty of researchers to ensure that potential participants are aware of what their participation will involve (BERA, 2018). Interviewees were also informed that they have the right to withdraw from the research for a certain period of time (BERA, 2018; Economic and Social Research Council, 2015; Psychological Society, 2014). Appendix C and D present the full version of the information sheets for parents and adolescents. Furthermore, considering that some participants may prefer to read in Chinese to better understand the content (BERA, 2018; Nijhawan et al., 2013), information sheets were offered in both Chinese and English. The Chinese version of information sheets was translated by me and revised by my colleague, who is a researcher but also a native speaker of Mandarin Chinese. Additionally, potential participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions about the content of information sheets and consent forms before they signed the forms.

As my main participants were under 18 years old, I needed to approach them through “gatekeepers”, who are usually their teachers and legal guardians who can protect children from harm (Cohen et al., 2018). However, the children’s participation needed to be entirely voluntary as well (UNICEF, 1989). Therefore, as highlighted earlier, I made sure that both adolescents and their parents gave their consent before any interviews began. The obtaining of informal oral consent before adolescents signed and gave the written consent has been discussed previously in this section. In Appendix B and D, the consent forms in English and its translation version in simplified Chinese (which was also reviewed by my Chinese colleagues) are presented. All parents and most children signed the Chinese version of the consent form, while some adolescents preferred the English version. In Section 3.9.4, ethical concerns related to languages and language varieties used in data collection will be discussed.

Confidentiality is also a key issue in interviews with adolescents. Participants’ personally identifiable information should not be included as data in the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Participant information sheets made it clear that any information that could be connected to participants’ real identities would not be disclosed in my thesis. Furthermore, recordings of interviews could not be accessed by any people besides me, and were securely stored before

being destroyed after completion of the study (see Appendix C and D for the full version of information sheet).

Participants were informed of the potential harms and benefits of their participation (see Appendix C and D). As mentioned earlier, the potential harm was the stress or other negative emotions that might be triggered by talking about unpleasant experiences related to Chinese language learning or Chinese culture. Participants were informed that they could refuse to answer any questions if they were not comfortable with it. Parents were allowed to refuse on behalf of their children. As for the potential benefits, it was hoped that participation would help adolescent Chinese HL learners and their parents to open up and share their feelings and thoughts, which may lead to closer intergenerational relationships. In addition, the sharing and dissemination of the study's findings may help other people who experience similar feelings, emotions and problems.

Harms for researchers may also occur during a study. In the course of data collection, I sometimes felt frustrated after hearing participants' stories. However, I regarded this as a positive sign that participants felt safe to share various emotions and experiences with me. Meanwhile, I also discussed my experiences with my supervisor to better understand researchers' roles in fieldwork.

The power dynamics in interviews were also considered, as I wanted to ensure that participants felt confident and comfortable in sharing their experiences (C. Dixon, 2015). Researchers are usually in a more powerful position than their participants (Cohen et al., 2018), as they are in charge of the settings and processes of interviews (C. Dixon, 2015). Power imbalance should be given particular consideration when interviewees are under 18 years old, given that children and adolescents may be more easily intimidated by researchers, compared to adults participants (Eder et al., 2003). To avoid or minimise unequal power dynamics between me and the interviewees, I engaged in self-disclosure by sharing personal emotions and experiences with them (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992), as discussed earlier in this chapter. Additionally, Reinharz et al. (1992) suggest that researchers conduct multiple interviews with a participant(s) to build mutual trust. In this study, each family was interviewed four times. In the first interview, both parent and child were interviewed. In the second interview, only the parents took part. The third and fourth interviews were conducted with the children but with the parent(s) present. Considering that there might be a power imbalance between children and parents, I asked for parents' permission to stay with children alone in the online meeting to talk for a few minutes.

However, this strategy might not work well before trust is built with the adolescents, as they may position me as an outsider. For example, in the first interviews with family 3, I noticed that Opal was not willing to talk about her motivations directly. After her mother left us alone, she still avoided directly answering questions related to motivations. Still, I was able to find clues about her motivations after we built rapport through talking about her hobbies, which benefited from my self-disclosure in data collection. The use of other research methods in addition to the interview itself can also help to equalise the power dynamics between the researcher and interviewees (Eder et al., 2003). In this study, language portrait was a method added in the first interview to explore interviewees' attitudes and emotions towards various language varieties in their lives. It also served as an icebreaker activity to build rapport with the interviewees. In *Findings and Discussion*, the contributions of language portraits are further discussed.

3.9.3 Ethical concerns in data analysis

Data analysis must also follow ethical principles. Kemmis et al. (2013) emphasise that data analysis should be fair, relevant and accurate, so I tried to avoid bringing my own values and judgements into my data. However, inevitably, the data analysis may be influenced by my unconscious bias, which is a well-recognised disadvantage of qualitative research. My potential bias and my reflections on how it might influence this research are discussed in Section 1.5 and Section 3.6.

3.9.4 Ethical concerns related to multilingualism

Kvale (1996) recommends that qualitative research interviews are conducted with natural languages that participants can understand. Therefore, I used my bilingual capability during interviews. At the beginning of the first interview with each family, I asked which language, English or Mandarin, participants would prefer for us to use in the interview.

However, considering the power imbalance between researchers and participants (Eder et al., 2003; Wood et al., 2019), as well as between children and parents (Little, 2020), I was aware that adolescent participants might feel being obliged to choose Mandarin Chinese to satisfy the adults (parents or the researcher) whose first language is one of the Chinese language varieties relevant to this study. On the other hand, I was mindful that various researchers argue for caution to avoid over-interpreting children's responses in interviews (see Almqvist & Almqvist, 2015; Eskelä-Haapanen & Kiili, 2019). Therefore, even if children chose to be interviewed in

Mandarin Chinese, I reminded them that I could understand English as well, so they could switch to English during interviews if they thought that was necessary. As mentioned in Section 3.6, I sometimes switched to English if I sensed adolescents preferred to use English but might not dare to voice their preferences. In the data collection, switching between Mandarin Chinese and English happened in almost every family, including the first interviews where both parents and adolescents were present. In *Findings and Discussion*, where participants' quotes are used, the original language is indicated by the font used: *italics* if they were spoken in Chinese (and translated into English by me); regular upright text if spoken in English. Additionally, interpretations of adolescents' translanguaging practices and their identities, with viewpoints from both parents and adolescents, are discussed in Section 4.4.4.

In the transcription process, interviews conducted in Mandarin Chinese were transcribed to written Chinese. In the data analysis, these transcripts were kept in Chinese to improve the trustworthiness of the analysis (Al-Amer et al., 2016). By keeping them in Chinese, I could reduce my bias in the process of analysis. Quotes selected to support my arguments in *Findings and Discussion* were translated during the writing process.

Still, my bias may influence the translation of raw data in Chinese originally. To avoid my bias during translation, if one Chinese word could be translated into various English words, I used footnotes in the analysis to explain my choices. However, my interpretation of participants' meanings may not always be completely accurate. Al-Amer et al. (2016) suggest that translated texts should be discussed with participants. Since most participants in this study are bilingual, selected quotes with footnotes were sent back to participants to check. These translated quotes were used as a representative sample of my translation skills for participants to judge, as researchers should try to engage participants in potential outcomes of a study (BERA, 2018). If they still had questions after reading the translation samples, I would offer translations of all quotes from their interviews for them to check. Eventually, only Niya's family put forward suggestions on a selected quote, but did not request to see all quotes. Hanting's and Simon's families, on the other hand, requested to see all the selected quotes, but did not request changes to any translation in my study.

3.10 Chapter summary

The methodology chapter explains the research design of this study, outlining the framework of methods and strategies employed to explore the research questions.

To answer the research questions proposed in Section 2.4, a qualitative approach was adopted in this study. The study focuses on a diverse sample of Chinese families across England, selected through convenience sampling and snowball sampling to ensure a representative mix of experiences and perspectives.

Through semi-structured interviews and a visual research method (drawing), abundant data was collected. This chapter also includes my reflections on the data collection, which may offer suggestions for other researchers seeking to conduct research with Chinese adolescents or Chinese families from a migration background.

The following Chapter focuses on findings and discussion, offering insights into the research questions.

Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion

Chapter overview

In this Chapter, three research questions are addressed:

RQ1: What are adolescent Chinese HL learners' attitudes towards their languages and language varieties, and what may inform their attitudes?

RQ2: How are the motivations and emotions of adolescent Chinese heritage language learners constructed and developed in the context of their heritage language learning?

RQ3: How do adolescent Chinese HL learners negotiate their identities in the context of their languages and language varieties?

Aligned with the social constructionist paradigm, each research question in this study considers perspectives from both adolescents and their parents, while placing particular emphasis on adolescents' subjective understandings. As outlined in Table 2 (Chapter 3), the findings are organised into three thematic sections (4.2, 4.3 and 4.4). Due to inevitable overlaps across sections, each findings section broadly corresponds to one of the three research questions: Section 4.2 primarily addresses RQ1, Section 4.3 mainly relates to RQ2, and Section 4.4 generally focuses on RQ3, although some content may intersect with more than one research question. In Chapter 5 (Conclusion), each of the research questions will be addressed and answered in a more targeted way, drawing on key findings across all relevant sections of this Chapter 4.

4.1 How data are presented in this chapter

Here, I explain how data are presented in the following three sections 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4.

The headings and subheadings of each section are drawn from the themes and subthemes identified in the thematic analysis, as presented in Table 2 (Chapter 3).

The discussions make extensive use of quotations from participants. Quotes by adolescent participants are indicated by their pseudonyms, while quotes from their parents are indicated as "[pseudonym]'s mother/father" (as presented in Section 3.5). Where quoted passages include questions or comments spoken by me, these are indicated as "researcher".

Quotes in *italics* were originally spoken in Mandarin Chinese and translated into English by me, the researcher. Given that researchers' positionalities inevitably influence the translation process, when a Chinese word or phrase can be rendered in multiple appropriate English equivalents, the translation I have chosen is underlined, with footnotes providing the original Chinese and alternative possible translations. Additionally, as Mandarin Chinese does not differentiate between the pronunciation of "he" and "she," the gender-neutral pronoun "they" is used in English translations when an individual's gender is unspecified during interviews. When explanations of specific terms related to Chinese history or culture are necessary, they are provided in the footnotes.

If words were elided during the conversation, they are inserted in the quote in square brackets where this is necessary for clarity. This distinction aims to preserve the authenticity and avoid transcribers' subjective interpretations of the so-called correct written form (O'Connell & Kowal, 1994).

All sounds made by participants were noted and retained in the transcripts to help me better understand the context during translation. However, in the presented quotations, speech "fillers" (such as "um") and word repetitions are excluded for reasons of readability. Nonverbal sounds and cues, such as laughing, and pauses that can be measured (Chafe, 2014), as well as contextual information such as loss of internet connection, are indicated in curly brackets (Ganassin, 2020). Extralinguistic communicative behaviours, such as non-verbal body movements (e.g. hand gestures or facial expressions), are not included in the transcription, due to the potential bias in researchers' interpretations of such behaviours (Kowal & O'Connell, 2014).

Ellipses are used to indicate the omission of parts of participants' responses (Toner, 2015), as not all segments within a single answer may be relevant to a particular theme or argument.

When quotations from the same participant relating to one topic are drawn from different conversations, they are presented in separate paragraphs, each beginning with the participant's pseudonym. Given that multiple interviews were conducted with each family, the interview number pertaining to the quotation is indicated in round brackets. If multiple quotations are drawn from the same interview, the interview number is provided only at the end of the final quotation.

Any vocabulary or grammatical errors made by participants are retained in the transcriptions, but are corrected in the quotations presented in the thesis to ensure clarity for readers. For example, Flora’s mother kept using “he” instead of “she” when she referred to Flora, which is a common mistake for Chinese speakers when they use English, due to the same pronunciation for both pronouns in (Mandarin) Chinese (*tā*) (Dong et al., 2015). These corrections are not marked up, as the purpose of this research is to understand participants’ inner thoughts rather than to evaluate their language proficiency.

4.2 Adolescent Chinese HLs’ understanding of their languages and language varieties

As presented in table 2, This section explores the following themes: the prestige of Mandarin Chinese over other Chinese language varieties; reconsidering Chinese character writing skills; (not) learning Chinese culture through language learning; and English as the dominant language in England. The corresponding subthemes (identified in Table 2) are also explored.

4.2.1 The prestige of Mandarin Chinese over other Chinese language varieties

As discussed in Section 1.4.1.2, adolescents with a Chinese heritage may be exposed to and learn a range of Chinese language varieties. However, as addressed in Section 3.5, all adolescent participants in this study were engaged in learning Mandarin Chinese at the time of data collection. The perceived higher status of Mandarin compared to other Chinese language varieties is evident not only in participants’ language learning experiences but also in their awareness and understanding of other varieties. It is important to note that during interviews, the term “dialect(s)” (方言 *fāngyán*) was commonly used by participants to refer to non-Mandarin Chinese language varieties (J. Yuan, 1983). However, acknowledging the limitations of this term, I adopt the phrase “Chinese language varieties other than Mandarin” in the analysis to better reflect linguistic diversity and avoid reinforcing hierarchical assumptions about Chinese language varieties.

4.2.1.1 Children’s limited knowledge of Chinese language varieties

In this study, Chinese language varieties other than Mandarin were seldom referenced by adolescent participants when reflecting on their language learning experiences. Unlike earlier studies, where participants indicated that Mandarin had higher value and authoritative status over other Chinese language varieties (W. Li. et al., 2011), adolescents in this study appeared to be unaware of the distinctions among different Chinese language varieties and seemed to equate *Chinese* with *Mandarin Chinese*. This finding echoes Ganassin’s (2020) research on

Chinese complementary schools in the UK, which found similar perceptions among young Chinese HL learners. For example, when I asked Harry if he ever felt that the language variety spoken by his grandparents sounded different from Mandarin Chinese, he answered:

Harry: No. I don't think so. I don't know what Mandarin Chinese sounds like. I've only ever spoken the one my mum and dad say, which I'm guessing is modern Chinese. (3rd interview)

Harry's quote indicated a lack of awareness regarding the existence of other Chinese language varieties. He expressed confusion about the concept of Mandarin Chinese and referred to the variety he had encountered and spoken as "modern Chinese." As mentioned in Section 3.5, Harry was attending classes at a local Chinese complementary school. This study did not seek to interview staff in complementary schools, but it is conjectured that Harry's confusion may reflect the dominant status of Mandarin Chinese in the curricula and language ideologies promoted by such schools, as suggested in recent research on Chinese complementary schools in the UK (Ganassin, 2020). Furthermore, Harry's parents and grandparents are from Northeast China and speak a northern variety that closely aligns with Mandarin Chinese. Given that the northern variety forms a basis for the standard pronunciation of Mandarin (China, 1996; see also Section 1.4.1.2), the linguistic similarities between his home language variety and Mandarin Chinese may have further contributed to his inability to distinguish between the two.

On the other hand, the adolescents from families speaking Hokkien, which is a variety that differs more significantly from Mandarin Chinese, also showed confusion when "dialects" were discussed during interviews:

Researcher: So your mum and dad speak a dialect, right?

Simon: Which dialect? The American dialect or – Mum! *I don't understand!*

Simon's mother: *What?*

Researcher: *I thought his dad speaks Hokkien [at home]?*

Simon's mother: *[His dad] speaks Mandarin more often.*

Researcher: Okay. So did you notice sometimes what your dad is saying is different from Mandarin Chinese?

Simon: Yes... [But] I never thought it was a dialect... I know what a dialect is, I didn't think that was a dialect. I thought that was just a new language... I can only understand it [Hokkien]... some of it. (3rd interview)

In this exchange, Simon recognised American English as one dialect of English, which suggested that adolescents were developing awareness that languages have different varieties. Still, Simon did not demonstrate a similar understanding of Chinese language varieties, describing Hokkien as “a new language”.

When Simon's mother explained that his father spoke Mandarin Chinese rather than Hokkien, she was referring to the dynamic described in Section 3.5: Simon and his father communicated in Mandarin, while his parents used Hokkien with each other. Furthermore, Simon confirmed that he could only understand parts of Hokkien but was not able to speak it, reflecting a decision by his parents not to actively pass on Hokkien to their children. This pattern was common among families in this study, where parents often chose to use Mandarin Chinese with their children despite using other language varieties among themselves (as discussed in Section 3.5). Across interviews, parents consistently expressed a stronger preference for Mandarin language education for their children, regardless of the learning methods. This preference reflects a tendency among Chinese heritage families to prioritise proficiency in Mandarin over other Chinese language varieties, a trend also observed in previous research (P. A. Duff et al., 2019; Ganassin, 2020; W. Li, 2011; Little, 2020).

4.2.1.2 Parents' preference for children's Mandarin Chinese learning

Parents offered various explanations for preferring children to learn Mandarin Chinese. For example, Simon's mother questioned the relevance and necessity for children to learn other varieties instead of Mandarin Chinese:

Simon's mother: *Where can [they] use [dialects] – except for {pause} talking to my grandma. But my grandma is a little old. Now, generally speaking, people aged forty to fifty, the elderly people in China, can all speak Mandarin. So there is no need to speak the hometown dialect.* (2nd interview)

The quote from Simon's mother suggested that parents' emphasis on their children's proficiency in Mandarin Chinese may be shaped by the linguistic context of their heritage country. This was echoed by Huhu's mother:

Huhu's mother: *There are limited chances for her to use dialects in the future. Including now, when you go back [to China], you won't speak dialects with young children anymore. So I didn't teach her [my dialect].* (2nd interview)

As discussed in Section 1.4.1.2, Mandarin Chinese is officially promoted in Mainland China and is also widely spoken in Taiwan. Both Simon's and Huhu's immediate family maintained regular contact with relatives, particularly those based in Mainland China. Recent research indicates that Mandarin has grown more dominant both in public communication and within families, even in regions where northern varieties were not traditionally spoken (see X. Su et al., 2017; L. Zhu et al., 2025). This practical consideration may have shaped parents' decisions to prioritise Mandarin Chinese. As highlighted in previous research, parents typically value their children's ability to communicate with relatives in heritage countries (Ganassin, 2020; Little, 2020). In both quotes, parents appeared to perceive little opportunity or necessity for communication in Chinese language varieties other than Mandarin, even though Huhu's mother had quite a strong emotional attachment to her hometown language variety:

Huhu's mother: *Dialects are really vibrant... Sometimes I speak [my hometown] dialect to tease her... But I actually like dialects very much... [Dialects] are very vivid... [Some words in] dialects cannot be found corresponding expressions in Mandarin.* (2nd interview)

Even in the families of Opal and Flora, where Cantonese was more often spoken than Mandarin Chinese among family members (see Section 3.5), parents still chose to prioritise children's Mandarin Chinese learning:

Opal's mother: *It's not popular to teach Cantonese anymore.* (1st interview)

Flora's mother: My husband also encouraged her [to learn Mandarin] because my husband says Cantonese is {pause} Now, Cantonese is not very useful. Mandarin is [used] all over the world. Mandarin, it's more useful {chuckle}... Because {pause} that [Mandarin Chinese] is an international language... Because you go everywhere, like China, like Malaysia, [the language spoken locally] is Mandarin. All right, [if] you speak Cantonese, I think [the] only [place] in [Mainland] China [where Cantonese is spoken] is Guangdong, all [people] Cantonese [there]. Almost [everyone else in Mainland China], they use Mandarin. {pause} When she grows up, one day, maybe that she is in the UK,

maybe the company will send her to you, China, and she can know how to communicate. (2nd interview)

Both Opal and Flora attended local Chinese complementary schools, although Opal dropped out and started learning by herself. Notably, both schools offered Mandarin Chinese as the sole language variety in their curricula. As Opal's mother observed, this reflects a broader shift in the language variety commonly taught by Chinese complementary schools in the UK (Ganassin, 2020; W. Li et al., 2011; Mau et al., 2009). Whereas Cantonese was once widely taught, largely due to its prevalence among Chinese communities in the UK (W. Li et al., 2011), it now appears to have become “not popular”, as Opal's mother noticed. It is worth noting that Flora's parents considered proficiency in Mandarin Chinese to be “useful”, particularly in a work setting. Their viewpoint may reflect the increasing influence of the Mainland Chinese market following the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to the PRC and its impact on the perceived status of the standard language in Mainland China (W. Li et al., 2009; Zeng et al., 2021). More broadly, many parents in this study appeared to prioritise the practical benefits of Mandarin, suggesting an underlying view of their children's language learning as a form of investment. From this perspective, it is logical that they would prefer language varieties perceived to have greater utility in future social or economic contexts (e.g., Mandarin Chinese) and to carry potential for tangible rewards (Norton, 2013).

In addition to the dominance of Mandarin Chinese within complementary schools and classrooms, some parents also highlighted the challenges of passing on their hometown language varieties within the family, particularly when the two parents originated from different regions of China:

Ximeng and Haijin's father: *I'm from Shanghai, but their mother is not. So we don't have that kind of environment - a language [variety] cannot be taught by just one person. (2nd interview)*

As mentioned in Section 1.4.1.2, most speakers of distinct Chinese language varieties are not mutually intelligible (W. Li et al., 2011; L. Zhu et al., 2025), a factor which may also contribute to the prestige of Mandarin over other Chinese language varieties in the social and political context of Greater China. In the present study, parents also actively embraced Mandarin Chinese in their family language policies and HL maintenance. However, the dynamics

between Mandarin Chinese and other Chinese language varieties are still underexplored and need further research in the context of the UK (see Chen, 2023 for examples in New Zealand).

Finally, parents' expectations for children's "authentic" Mandarin Chinese proficiency are also found in this study. While all parents interviewed expressed a strong appreciation for their children's ability to speak Mandarin, few chose to teach children themselves. When asked about this, parents whose hometown language varieties do not belong to the Northern group expressed doubts about their own Mandarin proficiency, suggesting that their decision was shaped by concerns over not providing a sufficiently "authentic" model of Mandarin for their children:

Researcher: *Why didn't you choose to teach him yourself?*

Simon's mother: *Ah? Do you think my [Mandarin] Chinese ability is good enough to teach him?*

Researcher: *I think you are fine.*

Simon's mother: *I don't think so. (1st interview)*

Opal's mother: *Don't you think my Putonghua is not that good? {laugh} (2nd interview)*

Having migrated from southern regions in Mainland China, Simon's and Opal's mothers may have viewed me, the researcher, as an authority on speaking Mandarin Chinese, given that they received less formal Mandarin education than I did (see Section 3.5 for their education experiences). Their quotes further illustrate the prestige accorded to Mandarin Chinese over other language varieties (Ganassin, 2020; L. Zhu et al., 2025), a prestige that may have been internalised by parents within Chinese heritage families who had migrated from regions where northern Chinese varieties were not commonly spoken. On the other hand, parents from northern regions of Mainland China preferred to see their language variety as an "accent" rather than a "dialect", which might be due to the close alignment between Mandarin Chinese and northern varieties (China, 1996):

Harry's mother: *I don't think there is such a thing called Northeast dialect {laugh}... [my variety] just has a tiny bit of accent. (1st interview)*

For some parents in this present study, time constraints may have also been a factor in their decision to enrol their children in Mandarin Chinese classrooms at Chinese complementary schools rather than teach them other Chinese language varieties at home (being mentioned by Opal's, Harry's and Simon's parents). Still, their allocation of resources in this way reflects the high value they place on Mandarin Chinese and their expectations of "authenticity" in their children's acquisition of Mandarin (Ganassin, 2020). These reflections also point to an essentialist understanding of Chinese language and identity, whereby linguistic authenticity is narrowly defined by standard pronunciation and form, while other factors contributing to authenticity, such as cultural knowledge, personal experience, and social practices, are overlooked (see Blommaert et al., 2013). As discussed in Section 2.2.2, such essentialist perspectives may also shape the ways in which adolescent Chinese heritage language learners construct and negotiate their identities.

4.2.1.3 Summary

In summary, the hierarchical relationship between Mandarin Chinese and other Chinese language varieties identified in previous research is also evident in this study, reflected in parents' prioritisation of Mandarin in their children's formal and informal HL learning. However, parents were not categorically rejecting other Chinese language varieties in their own or their children's lives. Some parents may still hold on to an emotional attachment to their hometown dialects. Rather, their preferences for Mandarin appeared to be shaped by pragmatic considerations (Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2023), including the widespread use of Mandarin due to Mainland China's language policy, the growing global influence of Mainland China, the limited language variety options available in Chinese complementary schools and classrooms (Ganassin, 2020), and the insufficient exposure to other varieties in daily life. All these factors potentially contributed to adolescents' limited awareness of distinctions among various Chinese language varieties, as well as higher proficiency in Mandarin Chinese over other Chinese language varieties.

4.2.2 Reconsidering Chinese character writing skills

This section explores adolescents and parents' attitudes toward Chinese writing abilities, with a focus on handwriting skill. It addresses some family tensions about writing development, as well as shifting perspectives on this area of language learning in the wake of new technologies. First, there is a brief account of the findings on which Chinese script was being learned by the adolescent participants.

Previous research suggests that individuals from regions where traditional Chinese script is used – including Taiwan and Hong Kong – typically place greater value on traditional characters than simplified characters (H. Y. Su et al., 2021). In this study, all the adolescent participants were learning simplified Chinese characters, which are associated with Mandarin Chinese. This was true even in the case of Huhu, whose father was from Taiwan, and Flora, whose father’s family was from Hong Kong. However, it must be borne in mind that Flora’s father was a second-generation immigrant and may not have been brought up to learn a Chinese writing system (this was not specifically discussed, as Flora’s mother was the one interviewed). Thus, parents’ choice of script for their children’s Chinese learning appears to reflect the dominance of Mandarin Chinese (Ganassin, 2020; Tsang et al., 2024).

The preference for simplified Chinese characters was also apparent in Chinese complementary schools. Although this study’s methodology did not include interviews with practitioners in such schools, the parents’ observations about the schools echo the published findings on the shift in England from Cantonese/complex Chinese characters to Mandarin/simplified Chinese characters (Ganassin, 2020; Mau et al., 2009). For example, Opal’s mother commented on the shift:

Opal’s mother: *One [Chinese complementary school in our region] used to teach complex Chinese scripts, but all of them just teach Putonghua and simplified scripts now. (1st interview)*

Notwithstanding the clear preference for Mandarin and simplified script, some tensions emerged in the participating families on the question of their adolescent children’s Chinese handwriting skills, as discussed in the next subsection.

4.2.2.1 Frictions among family members related to children’s Chinese writing skills

As discussed in Section 2.2.1, writing skill is usually regarded as an essential aspect of language proficiency (Kramsch, 1998), a view that is particularly prevalent among overseas Chinese (W. Li et al., 2010) and Chinese complementary schools in the UK (Ganassin, 2020). While previous research suggests that mothers typically take greater responsibility for their children’s education, often placing higher value on children’s HL maintenance than fathers do (Piller et al., 2007; Tannen, 2014), this study found exceptions. Two of the fathers took particular interest in their children’s Chinese handwriting development and techniques. One of them was Harry’s father:

Harry's mother: *[His dad] requires him to write [Chinese characters] in the right order of strokes as well, just like what we did when we were young... His dad cannot be responsible for education; it can only be me. Because if his dad tries to parent, [they] would argue, and [they] would be mad. (2nd interview)*

According to Harry's mother, Harry's father emphasised the importance of Chinese handwriting skills, especially correct stroke order. Stroke order, which refers to the prescribed sequence in which the individual strokes of a Chinese character are written, has been an essential aspect of Chinese handwriting for thousands of years (H. Zhang, 2014). Harry's father's focus on stroke order suggested that he regarded handwriting as a fundamental component of his children's Chinese language education. However, tensions emerged between Harry and his father during Harry's writing process. This friction may result from the negative emotions children often associate with task-based activities such as homework (Goetz et al., 2014). It is also possible that Harry's emotional responses were not fully recognised or acknowledged by his father (Jo et al., 2023; Little, 2023). Section 4.3 further discusses how adolescents' emotions develop in relation to their Chinese HL learning.

Bella's father also expressed keen interest in and high expectations for his child's Chinese handwriting ability:

Bella's mother: *Her dad has very high expectations in her [Chinese] learning. [He] asks her to practice writing every day. Every time [he] calls, [he] just asks her to practice writing. [When we] went back to China, [he] asked me to find teachers to [support] her writing practice... Because we go back to China for a longer time during summer holidays... [We sent Bella to] calligraphy lessons, to [learn how to] do calligraphy [with Chinese brushes], and with fountain pens too. (2nd interview)*

Unlike Harry's father, who emphasised general handwriting skill, Bella's father appeared to place particular value on traditional Chinese calligraphy. Calligraphy is much more than writing by hand, as it is widely used as decoration in Chinese households and is regarded as an integral part of Chinese culture (Ganassin, 2020; W. Li et al., 2010). However, as Bella's father was not interviewed in this study, it was not possible to determine the extent to which his appreciation for calligraphy was linked to a broader understanding of the relationship between language and culture, a view mentioned by Huhu's mother:

Huhu's mother: *She can understand when she reads in Chinese... but she doesn't have the ability to appreciate the beauty behind texts... She never actively chooses to enjoy reading a book in Chinese... She would just naturally choose to read in English [when she is reading for fun]. (2nd interview)*

The comments by Huhu's mother, which highlight the aesthetic value of Chinese literature, suggest that parents from Chinese heritage families may continue to regard Chinese script as an important aspect of language learning and cultural appreciation (Ganassin, 2020; W. Li et al., 2010), since she highlighted the beauty of Chinese literature. However, not all parents translated their appreciation for Chinese writing into high expectations regarding their children's handwriting proficiency. In this study, mothers tended to express more flexible and pragmatic expectations, potentially reflecting their desire to maintain their children's emotional well-being:

Anna's mother: [My expectations] for their writing abilities are lower, because writing [in Chinese] is indeed very difficult for them. (2nd interview)

Huhu's mother: *I think [my current requirements for her Chinese proficiency] {pause} maybe just basic communications. So maybe less requirements for her [ability] to appreciate the beauty of Chinese from the literal perspective and understand more background knowledge of Chinese. (2nd interview)*

Like other mothers in the study, Harry's mother acknowledged and accepted her children's lower level of proficiency in writing Chinese characters, rather than engaging in parent-child conflict on the issue as has been reported in previous studies (Little, 2020; Mu, 2014):

Harry's mother: *Since you don't have time to focus on him, to ask him to practice [writing] everyday, to remember these things; you shouldn't require him to do so many things... Because his [dad's] requirements are too high. I always tell him, "He [Harry] doesn't use [Chinese in daily life], there is no solution for that. So it is useless for you to be mad at him. The kid is also pitiful in this situation."... I didn't give [Harry] such high requirements [like his dad]. I think you only need to write it down, even though you think it's drawings. I don't think it's necessary to get down to so many details [on children's writing skills]. (2nd interview)*

Here, Harry's mother was adopting an empathetic stance towards Harry's struggles with writing Chinese characters. Previous studies show the benefit of such an approach for fostering children's positive emotions related to HL learning and maintaining harmonious relationships between parents and children (Jo et al., 2023; Little, 2023). In Section 4.3, adolescents' emotions and motivations in HL learning are discussed in more detail.

Harry's mother also made efforts to mediate conflict between Harry and his father, particularly when tensions arose over Chinese learning. This aligns with previous research suggesting that mothers are often more adept at empathy, communication, and nurturing (Cabrera et al., 2000; Luyao Li et al., 2023; Mingo & Easterbrooks, 2015). The different attitudes of Harry's mother and father highlight the need to consider the dynamics between parental gender and role assignment in Chinese heritage families. For example, mothers were interviewed as the parental representative in most of the families in the study (see Section 3.5). In practice of children's HL maintenance, mothers' participation was more active than fathers too. In Huhu's case, her mother talked explicitly about the parental gender divide:

Huhu's mother: *In the Chinese lesson, {pause} only mums are present. Dads are both absent {laugh}. (1st interview)*

Huhu's mother: *There is no agreement [regarding the family language policy], because he doesn't participate in education. So there is no discussion [with him] about [Huhu's] Chinese [education], right? (2nd interview)*

This may represent a worthwhile direction for further research, which is addressed in Section 5.4.

Although Harry's mother did not personally hold high expectations for Harry's writing proficiency, she recognised the necessity of completing writing tasks to meet the formal requirements imposed by the Chinese complementary school:

Harry's mother: *He can speak [Chinese]. If the requirement for him is only speaking, he could be happy [at the Chinese complementary school]. But the Chinese school requires him to write essays [in Chinese], and so much homework. Actually, that's the biggest difficulty for him, because he doesn't want to write [Chinese], because he cannot write [Chinese] very well. (2nd interview)*

Harry's parent(s) were aware of his negative feelings about learning and practising Chinese handwriting and they expressed willingness to support his emotional well-being. Nevertheless, they seem to tacitly defer to the ideological emphasis on Chinese writing abilities that prevails in Chinese complementary schools, particularly among practitioners (Ganassin, 2020).

As Harry's mother pointed out, the emphasis on children's Chinese handwriting development can contribute to children's struggles during Chinese language learning. Indeed, many adolescents in this study voiced their resistance to handwriting in Chinese:

Anna: Like the test, you know. You have to write a paragraph with 90 words...
I don't really want to do it. (3rd interview)

Opal: I remember crying over [writing Chinese] homework. (4th interview)

Given the struggles with Chinese handwriting homework, as well as the general challenges of handwriting Chinese characters, some adolescents and parents may start to reconsider the necessity of handwriting proficiency in Chinese, especially given recent technological developments. The next section discusses the changes that technology may bring to Chinese language learning.

4.2.2.2 Technology development brings a new turn for writing in Chinese

Technological developments may prompt both adolescents and their parents to reconsider the necessity of learning to handwrite Chinese characters. For example, Bella's mother commented:

Bella's mother: *Writing skills are not necessary nowadays. We can use computers or mobile phones to type.* (2nd interview)

Similarly, Ximeng remarked:

Ximeng: *I won't need to [manually] write things [in Chinese]. If I need to text, I can use Pinyin, it's easy.* (4th interview)

Such perspectives indicate that technological innovation has influenced ideologies related to HL learning. In line with patterns identified among adult Chinese second-language learners in the United States (Da et al., 2024), the adolescent HL learners and their parents in this study viewed technology as a practical tool for Chinese writing, while simultaneously questioning the continued relevance of handwriting. There is widespread use of Pinyin, a phonetic input system employed on digital devices, which enables users to produce Chinese characters without

requiring advanced handwriting skills, provided they can recognise the intended characters (Da et al., 2024).

Although previous research has noted that reliance on Pinyin can bring challenges for HL learners due to tonal variation (Ding et al., 2018), and may offer only limited contributions to broader literacy development (McBride-Chang & Kail, 2002; Tong & McBride-Chang, 2010; H. Yuan et al., 2022), adolescents in this study regarded it as an accessible and empowering resource. For example, Niya reported using a computer to write in Chinese:

Niya: *I can write short stories and Chapters in Chinese... about time travelling.*
(1st interview)

Even though Niya did not share these writings during the interviews, her descriptions implied relatively sophisticated language used when writing on a computer. In contrast, her manual writing practices were limited to brief notes or to-do lists, during which she often engaged in code-switching between Chinese and English (4th interview). Niya herself differentiated between her digital and manual writing abilities:

Niya: *I think [my writing ability can be graded as] 8 or 9 [out of 10], [if I'm] writing on computers... but on paper, maybe just 7 or 8 [out of 10].* (1st interview)

Furthermore, some parents noted that even Pinyin input might be superseded by newer technologies, such as speech-to-text functions (Da et al., 2024). As Bella's mother observed:

Bella's mother: *If she doesn't know [the pinyin], she can also use speech input.*
(2nd interview)

Parents' and children's preferences for pinyin suggest that they may question the necessity of manually writing Chinese characters, while still valuing the ability to recognise characters. This is because individuals must be able to select the correct characters after typing in Pinyin or using voice-to-text functions on digital devices, as Pinyin only indicates the pronunciation of Chinese characters (E. Zhou, 1956). This finding is consistent with Chinese heritage parents' emphasis on character recognition in the context of their children's HL learning (W. Li et al., 2010).

While the use of digital technologies for HL learning is not the central focus of this study, the views expressed by adolescents and parents highlight the increasing integration of

technologically sophisticated tools into HL learning practices within Chinese heritage families. Although earlier research emphasised handwriting proficiency as fundamental to HL maintenance (Kondo-Brown, 2005; Montrul, 2008), and found that young pupils had internalised this principle (Ganassin, 2020), the findings presented here suggest an emerging shift in these ideologies, the findings presented here point to an emerging shift in these ideologies. This also raises critical questions about whether handwriting continues to serve as a key component of identity construction among contemporary Chinese HL learners, an issue that will be further examined in Section 4.4. Moreover, future research could usefully investigate the role of digital literacy in HL learning and the broader implications of technology-mediated practices.

4.2.2.3 Summary

This section has examined the attitudes of the participating adolescents and their parents towards the ability to write Chinese characters in HL learning and language practices. All the adolescent Chinese HL learners in this study were learning simplified Chinese script, which is commonly associated with Mandarin as the standard language variety (Ganassin, 2020; Tsang et al., 2024). Frictions between parents and children regarding Chinese handwriting abilities were reported in this study, consistent with previous literature (Little, 2020; Mu, 2014), but specifically in this current study between fathers and children in the Chinese heritage families. These tensions were likely linked to parents' language ideologies concerning handwriting skill, culture, and language (Ganassin, 2020; W. Li et al., 2010).

On the other hand, various mothers in this study showed empathy for their children's struggles with learning to write simplified Chinese characters. In their efforts to support their children's HL learning, they reduced their emphasis on handwriting development. Additionally, advances in technology, particularly voice-to-text functions (Da et al., 2024), have shifted both parents' and adolescents' attitudes towards handwriting abilities. Instead, Pinyin is valued as a pragmatic tool for writing Chinese characters through digital devices. Despite this development, the ability to recognise Chinese characters remains highly valued by the parents in this study.

4.2.3 (Not) learning Chinese culture through language learning

As discussed in Section 2.2.1, parents in Chinese heritage families and Chinese complementary schools commonly view cultural learning and language learning as inseparable (Ganassin, 2020;

W. Li et al., 2011). However, adolescent HL learners may have different understandings of language and culture, compared to adults, which is explored in this section.

4.2.3.1 Entwinement of adolescents' cultural and language learning

In this study, the mutual reinforcement of cultural exploration and language learning was highlighted by several adolescents when discussing their experiences with Chinese learning. One avenue frequently cited by adolescents as a method of learning Chinese was social media. However, unlike findings from other studies suggesting increased social media usage during the Covid-19 pandemic (see Khalifa et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2020), adolescents in this study did not report a significant rise in their social media engagement during this period. This might suggest that using social media and online platforms was already a common practice among adolescent Chinese HL learners in England. For example, Bella actively used Weibo and Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok), one of the most popular apps among teenage girls (Kennedy, 2020), to engage with trends in the online Chinese community:

Bella: *I [use] Weibo to read [Chinese] domestic news... I [use Douyin] to follow celebrities, Chinese celebrities... also some fun stuff {laugh} or makeup styles. Yeah, [I] mostly [view content related to] makeup styles... So Douyin also becomes a resource [for me] to learn about makeup techniques {laugh}. (4th interview)*

Since Chinese language varieties dominate on Douyin, even for multilingual, mixed-race users (X. Jiang, 2023), Bella, who had received formal education in Mainland China only until the age of eight, indicated that her engagement with these platforms helped expand her Chinese vocabulary:

Bella: *Because I only studied till Year 3 [back in China]... So I only learned a few thousands of characters, and there are many many many words I haven't seen. For example, when I'm reading {pause} reading some news, if there are characters I didn't know, I always check the pronunciation of it, and its meaning. (1st interview)*

Although social media is reportedly more popular among girls than boys (Kennedy, 2020), the boys in this study also actively engaged with Chinese pop culture through these platforms. Hanting, for example, followed trending TV shows and films:

Hanting: *Sometimes the trending TV shows and movies are shown on Douyin, and I will check them out. (1st interview)*

Similarly, Hanting believed that such activities enriched his Chinese vocabulary:

Hanting: *I also learned new words by watching these [Chinese] TV shows. (1st interview)*

Niya also showed enthusiasm for Chinese cultural media, particularly Chinese cartoons such as *Beijing Opera Cats*:

Niya: *I got obsessed with some Chinese cartoons recently... One of them is called Beijing Opera Cats... I cannot watch it on Chinese websites because I'm abroad, I need to pay for membership [to watch]... So I'm waiting for it to be released on YouTube, then I can binge-watch it {laugh} ... I don't need subtitles. (1st interview)*

Beijing Opera Cats is based on a children's picture book (Whittock, 2013) and introduces children to Beijing Opera history through characters depicted as cats with traditional facial make-up (G. Zhou et al., 2023). As Beijing Opera is regarded as an important aspect of Chinese traditional culture (X. Cai et al., 2022), Niya's choice to watch the show without subtitles may suggest that she viewed it not only as entertainment but also as a way to stretch her Chinese language proficiency.

Across these examples, adolescents' Chinese language skills enabled them to explore Chinese culture. They naturally engaged with Chinese culture alongside their Chinese HL learning, which reinforces the idea that cultural knowledge is an essential part of HL learning and daily life in Chinese heritage families (Ganassin, 2020; T. F. Su et al., 2009). This viewpoint was explicitly confirmed by Hanting, who reflected on his own learning:

Hanting: *I think it's quite good. I mean {pause} like, even though I don't have enough knowledge, I have a big vocabulary. Usually I know a lot of words. (1st interview)*

When asked to clarify what he meant by "knowledge", he responded:

Hanting: *Like for A-Level [mandarin Chinese] classrooms [at my Chinese school], they teach history and other stuff. (3rd interview)*

Hanting's comments suggest an awareness that knowledge of history, and by extension, culture, is an important part of language learning (S. Hall, 2015; Kramsch, 1998;), a view informed by his experiences at Chinese complementary schools.

On the other hand, some adolescents expressed an interest in reading about Chinese culture, but this eagerness did not necessarily motivate them to learn Chinese, showing that they might not perceive close links between their Chinese learning and cultural knowledge:

Harry: I didn't read it [Chinese books about Chinese history] because my Chinese reading is terrible. But I did, occasionally, ask my mum about it, or maybe my dad. But no, I don't think I will ever get through a book of Chinese ever... It could be interesting [to read more about Chinese history], I guess... A lot of books, if they're Chinese, [but] they get translated to English, I could read the English version. (3rd interview)

Harry's quote also points to the common pattern that HL learners often develop stronger skills in speaking and listening than in reading and writing (Kondo-Brown, 2005; Montrul, 2008). Harry's comments highlighted his preference for reading in English, which may have arisen from the dominant status of English in England, as will be discussed in more detail in Section 4.2.4.

Parents in Chinese heritage families, however, usually emphasised the importance of cultural knowledge for Chinese HL learning, viewing it as integral to being an "authentic" Chinese speaker (Y. Zhou et al., 2023) and potentially beneficial for future opportunities. For example, Niya's father stated:

Niya's father: *After all, China is a big country. Whether you like it or not, most countries all over the world need to deal with this fact. [So countries] all need this kind of [bilingual] people... But it's difficult to ask foreigners to understand the policies and other words in the context of Chinese... [Their understanding] is often not authentic... [Niya] can also understand Chinese history, Chinese culture, some idioms and literal references. [She can reach] the level of proficiency British people can never reach.* (1st interview)

Niya's father anticipated that bilinguals who can speak Chinese will have a competitive advantage in the job market due to the rising power of China (Nye, 2023). Furthermore, his

comments indicated that parents might see the acquisition of HLs as a valuable tool for developing children's deep understanding of both cultures (Jo et al., 2023).

Taking a slightly different view, Anna's mother linked her children's acquisition of Chinese language more to her own sense of contentment and well-being (Little, 2020) rather than potential opportunities for the children:

Anna's mother: *Maybe I cannot imbue them with many things from Chinese culture, since [we are] not literally living in China. But things like languages, as long as you [her children] can speak [the language], it's still a comfort [for me]. (2nd interview)*

Huhu's mother also emphasised a sense of responsibility in preserving Chinese language and culture:

Huhu's mother: *If you acknowledge another language, whether you are in China or abroad, even though you may not participate in intercultural communication between China and Britain, you can also influence people around you... For example, if one person stays here [in England], you can invite your friend to know more about Chinese language, Chinese food culture, tea culture, and many other things, including Chinese traditional festivals. [She] may become a window for people to know more about China. I think it's possible, and can be achieved. (2nd interview)*

This quote also illustrates the tendency for women to act as guardians of both language and culture within the family (Costigan et al., 2006; Piller et al., 2007; T. F. Su et al., 2009), with Huhu's mother framing language teaching not just as a personal duty but also as a contribution to broader cultural awareness. Furthermore, although she preferred home-based language education, she considered enrolling Huhu in a local Chinese complementary school before the first national lockdown, primarily because the school “*offered a variety of extracurricular activities related to Chinese culture, such as Chinese calligraphy, paper cutting and Chinese dancing, which I valued (3rd interview)*”. When lessons in Chinese complementary schools moved online and these activities were suspended, she withdrew from this plan, highlighting her strong emphasis on cultural content in educational choices.

Although both adolescents and parents recognised the importance of cultural learning alongside language learning, their preferences regarding cultural content sometimes diverged. As the examples above suggest, adolescents tended to be more interested in contemporary Chinese pop culture, whereas the cultural material encountered in HL classrooms often focused on more traditional aspects, which might feel less connected to the adolescents' everyday lives (Ganassin, 2020; H. Y. B. Yim et al., 2011). The following section examines the challenges and opportunities in relation to the selection of cultural content for teaching and learning.

4.2.3.2 Challenges and opportunities in teaching culture for Chinese HL learners

Although adolescents might agree that culture was an essential component of language learning, they did not always respond positively to the cultural content they are taught. When they could explore on their own, adolescents in this study expressed enjoyment in watching videos about Chinese clothing trends on social media platforms such as TikTok. Both Flora and Harry discussed their interest in videos featuring traditional Chinese clothing:

Flora: I saw on videos that they dress really nice... They just feel like long, silk clothes and often are all white. (3rd interview)

Harry: So there's this channel... I think it's probably a Chinese person running the channel on Tik Tok. And then they post like, short videos of, like, Chinese street fashion... I think maybe there's a trend going... They go round and they wear traditional Chinese clothing... [with] golden dragons... I have to admit, I think the traditional clothing look really cool... They have those cool man buns, with the needle thing. It looks pretty cool... I like them, yeah. (1st interview)

The traditional clothing style described by both participants is known as *Hanfu*, which is the traditional costume of the Han ethnic group and has become a popular fashion trend among some young people in China (Pan et al., 2020). As mentioned in the previous Section, Hanting also expressed a preference for exploring trending TV shows and movies, which indicates that adolescents often lean towards popular cultural content. In contrast, adults, such as parents and teachers, may place greater emphasis on “traditional” cultural materials. For example, some teachers at Hanting's Chinese complementary school particularly valued the inclusion of poetry education in their Chinese HL classes:

Hanting: *This teacher taught us ancient Chinese poetry for the whole year. Every lesson taught by them was poetry, we didn't learn the textbook anymore. So we [students] told them [the teacher], asked them to teach us the content [of the textbook], but they didn't. They thought they were right [to teach the poetry]... But at that time we were not paying as much attention to the lessons as we used to. (1st interview)*

Teaching Chinese poetry, especially ancient Chinese poetry, is often regarded as an important part of Chinese culture education (R. Li, 2023). However, as the practitioners in the study by Ganassin (2020) observed, such “traditional” content is often disconnected from HL learners’ everyday lives and can reduce their engagement, a phenomenon confirmed by Hanting’s experiences. Hanting’s account also suggested that some practitioners in Chinese complementary schools in the UK may maintain an essentialist view of Chinese culture and its teaching, potentially eliciting negative emotions among students during their Chinese HL learning. Section 4.3 further discusses adolescents’ motivations and emotions in relation to Chinese HL learning.

Within the Chinese heritage families in this study, several parents also viewed the teaching of “traditional” culture as an integral part of their children’s HL education. For example, some parents, such as Huhu’s mother, selected Chinese books for their children to learn about culture:

Huhu’s mother: *[I] bought The Analects of Confucius, The Works of Mencius, basically The Four Books⁸ [for her]. But [she] only read a few lines in The Analects of Confucius, never touched others. (1st interview)*

When Zoom became a tool for language education during the Covid-19 pandemic (Kohnke et al., 2022; Y. J. Lee, 2023), Huhu’s mother even signed her up for a morning reading session of Chinese classics:

Huhu’s mother: *Sometimes, [if] she can wake up [early] in the morning, [we] will attend a morning reading session. It’s an online [activity] on Zoom, voluntarily organised by other parents... What they learn is basically related to*

⁸ 《论语》 The Analects of Confucius, 《孟子》 The Works of Mencius, 《大学》 The Great Learning and 《中庸》 The Doctrine of the Mean are called “The Four Books (四书)” of Confucian classics.

classic books. For example, [they are learning] “Analects of Confucius” recently. (2nd interview)

Although this Zoom session might have provided a flexible additional learning opportunity (S. Liu et al., 2021), an online reading group organised by volunteers may have had limited effectiveness as a format in maintaining children’s engagement. Huhu’s mother also admitted that they did not “*persist with it very well*” (1st interview). Nevertheless, Huhu’s mother’s book choices illustrated that some parents from Chinese heritage families continue to value traditional Confucian teachings in children’s Chinese culture learning (Fuligni et al., 2004; Mengwei et al., 2020), even though these efforts did not result in positive outcomes for Huhu’s learning.

In contrast, Huhu proactively chose books in Chinese to read on her own. Her favourite Chinese books were a series of comic books about Chinese culture, which she found “interesting and educational (1st interview)”. These books provide knowledge of “*geography and history... There are dozens of provinces in [Mainland] China, and there is a book for each province [in this series]*” (Huhu’s mother, 1st interview). Moreover, when they travelled to China, Huhu and her mother visited libraries to access more Chinese literature. According to Huhu’s mother, they had only purchased one book from Huhu’s favourite series; the rest were “*borrowed [from libraries] when [we] went back to China*” (1st interview). Huhu’s fondness for these comic books illustrates her strong interest in Chinese culture and history, but not in the classical texts selected by her mother. Instead, the materials she chose for herself were more closely aligned with her lived experiences of Mainland China.

Niya, on the other hand, enjoyed reading historical books with her father:

Niya: *The most impressive [story]{pause} I think it’s the story of Zhishangtanbing⁹ ... I remember reading it from a really really thick book, named Five Thousand Years. It’s about things in Chinese history... I was astonished by the story, because the main character looked like he knew everything, but he lost really poorly. This totally showed the differences between*

⁹ 纸上谈兵, an idiom used to describe people who only talk about stratagems on paper, do empty talk, or are armchair strategists.

being a professional and an amerture... I kept thinking about it... If the main character really knew what he was doing, would he still lose? (1st interview)

Niya's quote demonstrated that she not only engaged deeply with the story but also extracted life lessons from it, which is a common experience in Chinese HL learning where stories are used (Ganassin, 2020). Furthermore, the book she referred to was written in simplified Chinese script, rather than in classical *Wenyanwen*¹⁰. Thus, teaching culture through historical narratives may remain an effective strategy in Chinese HL learning, provided that the content is appropriate to the language varieties children are learning, relevant to their understandings of China, and connected to their daily lives.

In addition, Niya's enjoyment of reading activities may have boosted her motivation for Chinese learning. Both Niya and her father believed that Niya's vocabulary was significantly improved by these parent-child reading activities, which they identified as her main method of learning Chinese (see Section 3.5). Section 4.3 further discusses adolescents' emotions and motivations in Chinese HL learning.

4.2.3.3 Summary

The case illustrations in this section highlight that adolescents' engagement with cultural content in Chinese HL learning is closely linked to the relevance, accessibility, and personal resonance of the materials. Throughout their Chinese HL learning, culture remained an integral part of the process, regardless of the learning methods employed – whether self-directed by the adolescents, guided by parents, or led by teachers. This finding aligns with the ideology that often prevails in overseas Chinese communities that Chinese language learning is closely tied to culture (Ganassin, 2020; W. Li et al., 2011).

However, the understanding of what constitutes “cultural knowledge” varied among parents and adolescents in this study, and potentially even among teachers (Archer et al., 2010; Ganassin, 2020), as suggested by the adolescents' quotes. While most parents and teachers tended to adhere to traditional cultural content, adolescents were more interested in contemporary and trending topics through social media, which they actively explored. The difference in cultural preferences led to some challenges and negative emotions experienced

¹⁰ 文言文, a classical literary language used in ancient China, books such as The Analects of Confucius are written in it.

by adolescents in their Chinese HL learning. In Section 4.3, I emphasise how these challenges and negative emotions may impact adolescents' motivations for HL learning as well.

4.2.4 English as the dominant language in England

This section discusses the dominant status of the English language in England across various settings in the lives of adolescent Chinese HL learners, including mainstream schools, families, and interactions with peers. It also explores the ways this dominance can influence adolescent Chinese HL learners' attitudes and ideologies concerning the different languages and language varieties in their lives.

4.2.4.1 Adolescents' preferences for English

English is the dominant language for everyday use in England (Fashanu et al., 2020), including in mainstream schools (Curd-Christiansen, 2020). Its status appears to have influenced the participating adolescents' long-term language practices. Several adolescents interviewed in this study expressed a preference for speaking English, particularly in school settings:

Haijin: *When we are in school, there are a lot of British people, they just speak English. So we feel speaking English is the proper¹¹ thing to do. (3rd interview)*

Haijin's words illustrate how the linguistic environment in schools can shape adolescents' language practices when interacting with peers, especially monolingual English-speaking peers (Rojas et al., 2016). Moreover, many adolescents in this study showed a preference for using English even with their siblings, beginning from their school years.

Ximeng and Haijin's father observed a similar shift in his sons' language practices:

Ximeng and Haijin's father: *They used to speak [Chinese to each other] when they were young. After they went to school, it changed very quickly. (1st interview)*

Thus, the school environment can significantly influence not only children's peer communication but also their sibling interactions. Heritage language input often declines when children attend mainstream schools five days a week, and elder siblings may introduce

¹¹ 正常, which can also be translated to "regular" or "normal". "Proper" is chosen based on the probe following this question.

additional English input rather than maintaining heritage language practices (Bridges et al., 2014). Similarly, Harry reported preferring to speak English with his younger brother:

Harry: When I talk to my brother in Chinese, it feels really awkward and I don't know why. So we just use English. (1st interview)

Harry went on to recall the times when he had used Chinese with his brother, suggesting that language shifts between siblings can occur as soon as the elder child starts formal schooling (Bridges et al., 2014), even before the younger sibling enters school:

Harry: I think, we have a couple clips of Christmas when we [he and his younger brother] were younger. There were a couple times I did talk to my brother in Chinese [back then]. But I think my memory goes back to {pause} yeah, when I was seven. (1st interview)

Harry's recollections resonated with findings by Little et al. (2024) that Chinese HL learners tend to start shifting their speaking preference to English at certain key junctures in their lives. In Harry's case, the shift occurred at the age of seven, which points to the significant influence of mainstream school commencement on young HL learners' language practices (Little et al., 2024). Following this shift in Harry's language practice, his parents adopted a *one person, one language* strategy (Zheng, 2009), whereby children use different languages with siblings and parents. This strategy was also adopted by other families in the study who had two or more children. Only Hanting, whose elder brother did not migrate to England until adulthood, continued to use only Chinese varieties at home, as their parents were not fluent in English (see Section 3.5).

Shifts to English were also evident among children without siblings. Niya and Bella both reflected on how their reading preferences changed from Chinese to English after starting school in England:

Niya: *I used to read [in Chinese] quite often, but now I have more books in English to read... I prefer [to read in] English now.* (1st interview)

Bella: *Now, on the contrary, I think Chinese editions of books are hard to understand. It's easier to understand them in English.* (1st interview)

Although both participants had begun their formal schooling in Mainland China (where Niya had attended nursery and Bella went to a bilingual nursery and primary school), both gradually shifted their language preferences to English during their school years in England. This further underscores the powerful influence of the broader English-dominant environment in England.

Language shift is a common phenomenon in heritage language families across diverse backgrounds (see Bougie et al., 2003; DuBord et al., 2021; Dubiel et al., 2021; Hunt et al., 2019). D. Zhang (2008) attributes language shift to the combination of insufficient heritage language input and low motivation to use them, particularly when heritage languages are perceived as difficult or lacking in practical value. The experiences reported by adolescents in this study suggest that both factors contributed to shifts in their language practices.

Additionally, the English-dominant environment in mainstream schools in England may not be particularly supportive of linguistic diversity. Bella, for example, described an incident where speaking Mandarin Chinese at school was discouraged:

Bella: *We were speaking Chinese at the corner. I didn't even know how they [staff in her school] heard it. They just walked towards us and said this is a public space, what language should you speak? Then we were like [she made some noises of disapproval], then we switched to English... I found it quite odd, cannot speak your mother tongue. (4th interview)*

Bella's experience reflected that some staff in English mainstream schools may regard speaking other languages at school as a "violation of normative and homogenous linguistic codes", which needs to be prevented (Cushing, 2023, p. 906). This further illustrates how the dominant status of English may shape institutional ideologies and school policies in mainstream schools (Curdtt-Christiansen et al., 2023), which in turn may influence adolescents' attitudes towards their HLs. For example, some adolescents in this study no longer viewed Chinese as highly relevant to their future:

Haijin: *I think it's good that I understand [Chinese]... [But] I don't think I must learn Chinese, because I would stay in Britain for quite a long time. (3rd interview).*

Some parents similarly indicated a preference for integration into British society rather than maintaining strong connections with Chinese language and culture. Bella's mother, for example, expressed concern about Bella's English proficiency and her preference for Chinese culture:

Bella's mother: *I don't know [her English proficiency] very well. Because she doesn't speak English with me, nor does she talk about British stuff with me. So as far as I know, she may be too good at Chinese culture. She knows all the popular things [in China], including the popular slang, reality TV shows. [When she reads] news, [she] uses Weibo to read news about China. I think she should read British news, like the BBC... Maybe not BBC, but [you should read] other news. I mean, you need to be comprehensive. Maybe you don't just listen to one voice. If you only read Chinese news, there is only one voice. You can read British [news]. Then [there will be] two voices. Then you may have more comprehensive thoughts. (1st interview)*

Bella's case highlights that first-generation immigrant parents may prioritise integration into the host country (Shin, 2010), even though HL learners' identities tend to be fluid and multifaceted (S. Hall, 2015; Holliday, 2010, 2021; Holmes, 2015). In Section 4.3, adolescents' identities are further discussed.

Regarding their attitudes towards various languages and language varieties, Bella seemed to have a strong emotional attachment to Chinese language and culture and a comparatively weak attachment to British culture. Her mother, however, appeared to favour cultural integration, a stance also reflected in her language portrait:

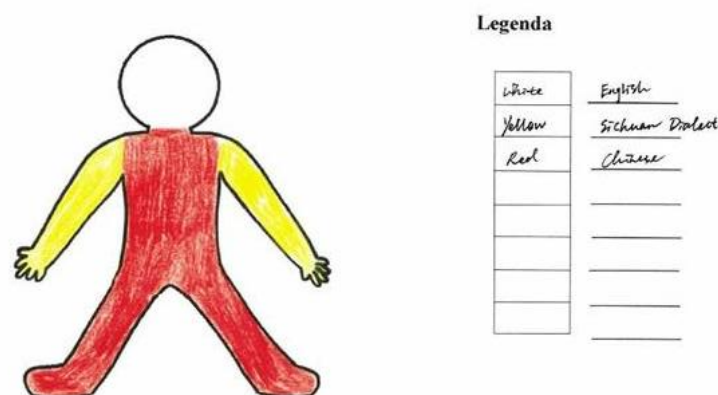


Figure 3 Bella's mother's language portrait

Bella's mother: *Now I'm more {pause} I think my ideas are more open, and more western. It may also because I use English more, like speaking, writing emails, communicate (with other people), etc. (1st interview)*

According to Bella's mother, having bilingual skills enabled her to adopt a more open and critical perspective. This may explain her wish for Bella to access cultural and linguistic resources from both Chinese and British contexts. While this finding challenges previous research suggesting that parents who value their own bilingualism often encourage heritage language maintenance (Mu et al., 2015; Weger-Guntharp, 2006), it aligns with findings by Jo et al. (2023) that parents sometimes promote multilingualism to foster critical thinking skills.

In summary, this study found that adolescents' and parents' high regard for English significantly influenced their attitudes towards heritage language maintenance and future Chinese education, as further discussed in the next section.

4.2.4.2 Limited support in mainstream schools for other languages and language varieties

The strong preference for English among adolescents and their parents may also be shaped by the environment of mainstream schools in England. As discussed in the previous Section, mainstream schools may not be particularly supportive of linguistic diversity and HL maintenance. Furthermore, the range of languages offered within the curriculum is often very limited. As outlined in Section 2.1.2.1, pupils in England are required to study at least one foreign language from Year 3 to Year 9 (DfE, 2013). However, recent reports suggest that it is not only the language choices that are restricted, but the allocated teaching time also frequently falls short of official recommendations (Collen, 2023).

According to the latest *Language Trends England* report, only 25.8% of independent secondary schools and a mere 5.66% of state secondary schools offer Mandarin Chinese as part of their curriculum, with similar figures for extracurricular Mandarin provision (Collen et al., 2024). Notably, the only Chinese variety officially recognised in mainstream teaching is Mandarin, although Cantonese remains an option for GCSE examinations (Collen et al., 2024). In other words, families have to arrange their own teaching and learning to prepare for the examination.

Consistent with the Language Trends England report, this study also found limited support for heritage languages and language varieties within mainstream schools. For example, in Bella's

independent secondary school, Mandarin Chinese was offered only as an extracurricular activity:

Bella: *[My school] doesn't offer Chinese lessons in the curriculum. [But] there is {pause} a [Chinese] teacher who would come [to our school]. The teacher also gives you homework... It's on every Friday... for half an hour... during lunchtime.* (1st interview)

The brief weekly Mandarin Chinese sessions described by Bella fall significantly below the recommended 2-3 hours per week for modern foreign languages (Teaching Schools Council, 2016). Furthermore, these sessions were only available to pupils who selected Mandarin as a GCSE subject. Bella's school, notably, had a relatively large cohort of Chinese heritage students, yet there was no extracurricular provision for heritage languages other than Mandarin:

Bella: *[There is] no [extracurricular activity for other heritage language learners]. Because there are more Chinese [in our school].* (1st interview)

Opal's primary school briefly offered a Mandarin club, in collaboration with a local Confucius Institute:

Opal: I think it was Year 5... I remembered the [primary] school did a Chinese Mandarin learning club for a bit. (4th interview)

However, this after-school club only lasted one term, and the reasons for its discontinuation were unclear:

Opal's mother: *[The after-school club] was only run for one term. [We] don't know if it was [cancelled because of] the availability of the teacher, or the popularity level of the session. Because there were not a lot of people in that club, maybe only 4 or 5.* (4th interview)

Beyond these examples, none of the other adolescents in this study reported any exposure to Chinese language education through their mainstream schooling. Typically, pupils were only offered French, German, or Spanish, the three most common foreign languages taught in England (Collen, 2023).

Ximeng and Haijin's independent school was the only school that offered languages other than French, German and Spanish in the curriculum – but they were classical not modern foreign languages:

Ximeng: *I studied French, Spanish, as well as ancient Latin and ancient Greek.*
(1st interview)

Notably, Ximeng and Haijin's independent school had previously offered Mandarin Chinese, but this was removed from the curriculum before their enrolment:

Ximeng: *One year before I entered the school, there were Russian and Mandarin Chinese to choose from, but then they were removed [from the curriculum].* (1st interview)

Meanwhile, Niya's grammar school provided Italian as an extracurricular option, supporting evidence from *Language Trends England* that grammar schools and independent schools tend to offer slightly more diverse foreign language options than state schools (Collen, 2023). In contrast, pupils in some state schools, such as Simon's, had no choice at all:

Simon: Spanish was the only language. I wish there was more. (3rd interview)

Even where multiple languages were available, school practices restricted individual pupils' choices, often obliging them to continue with the language begun in primary school, without consultation:

Harry: I was doing French and then when I got to secondary school, we kept on doing French. And for a while, I thought everyone was doing French, but then I heard that some of my friends were doing Spanish and some were doing German. So I was like, oh, so I just got to stay in French. But. yeah, I kind of wish we got to choose. (1st interview)

Harry's experiences following transition to secondary school reflected the findings in the *Language Trends* report (Collen, 2023) that pupils in some schools were facing narrower foreign language options because the schools were responding to financial pressures by reducing their provision to focus on the languages pupils had studied in primary school.

Few adolescents in this study expressed positive attitudes towards their foreign language lessons in mainstream schools. Instead, the negative emotions felt by several participants concerning their foreign language lessons were reflected in the language portraits they drew. For example, Simon explained his choice of yellow for Spanish, the foreign language he was studying at school:

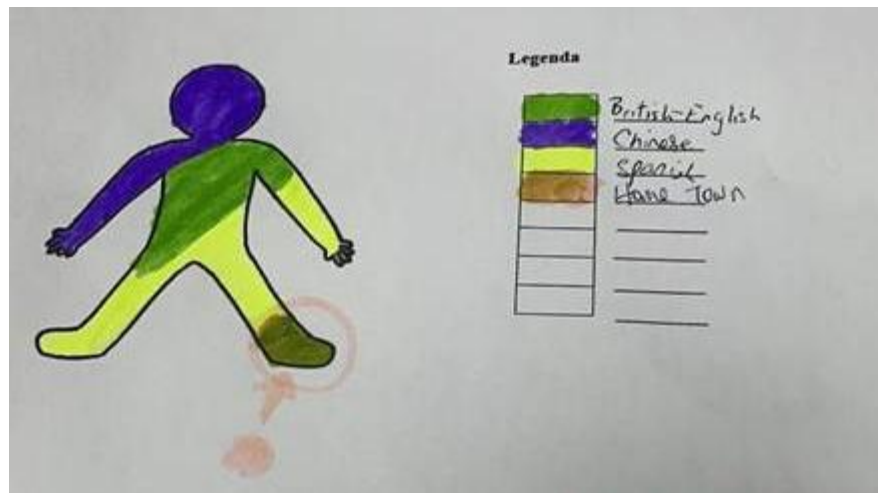


Figure 4 Simon's language portrait

Simon: Because I hate the colour yellow and I hate Spanish. (1st interview)

Hanting represented Spanish on the lower half of the torso in his portrait:



Figure 5 Hanting's language portrait¹²

Hanting: *Because {pause} sometimes I want to vomit when [I'm] learning*

¹² Translation to Hanting's agendas, from top to bottom, are: Spanish, Chinese (although it refers to Mandarin Chinese), English, and hometown speech.

Spanish {both laugh}. So it's drawn on my belly. (1st interview)

These comments by Simon and Hanting suggested that adolescent Chinese HL learners may not actively incorporate foreign languages from their mainstream school curriculum into their linguistic repertoires. The limited options and support for language classes may contribute to their reduced enjoyment of foreign language classrooms within their mainstream schools.

Turning to the parental perspective, few parents in this study brought up other foreign languages their children were learning in mainstream schools when discussing their children's broader language learning experiences. Instead, they tended to link relevant questions directly to their children's Chinese HL learning. However, parents had evident doubts about relying on mainstream schools to support Chinese HL learning. Some parents said that they had considered schools' languages provision when choosing a secondary school, but ultimately, they prioritised pragmatic factors (Curd-Christiansen et al., 2023) such as proximity and teaching quality:

Anna's mother: *You need to consider your capabilities as well, such as the picking up and dropping off, and many other problems. They can all be your stumbling stones. You don't have the freedom to choose the kind of thing [secondary schools with Chinese lessons] as you wish. (2nd interview)*

Although most of the adolescents lacked formal lessons in Mandarin Chinese at their mainstream schools, some parents still encouraged their children to take Mandarin as a GCSE subject:

Anna's mother: *Either you don't study [Mandarin Chinese] at all, or you study with the right attitude. By right attitude, I mean the certificates, to prove that you have reached a standard {laugh}. (1st interview)*

Few families mentioned the alternative option of the HSK (Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi) proficiency test (Peng et al., 2021), the internationally recognised official standard for assessing Mandarin Chinese proficiency among non-native speakers. This aligns with findings in previous studies that Chinese heritage parents in England tend to place significant value on the nationally recognised examinations, GCSEs and A-Levels (Ganassin, 2020). Nonetheless, most parents in this study are not “supporting children's Chinese learning towards GCSE” (Huhu's

mother, 2nd interview). Many parents expressed concerns about the quality of Mandarin instruction for GCSE and in some cases for foreign languages generally:

Bella's mother: *All these [modern foreign language lessons] in the whole British educational system, including the independent schools, I think they're just gimmicks¹³. Or maybe [I] shouldn't say that, it might be too {pause} harsh. [I] just mean they cannot really learn much... The GCSE level in England is actually quite low. Even if you get an A plus, your Chinese proficiency could still be low. (2nd interview)*

For the families determined to pursue Chinese GCSE qualifications, support from mainstream education was limited. For example, Niya's father described the challenges of arranging a qualified examiner for the speaking test:

Niya's father: *Chinese GCSE, for speaking test, you need to find a Chinese teacher [to take the exam]. Niya's school doesn't offer that, and they couldn't find one. They asked us to look for the teacher on our own... If they take Spanish, French, or German, her school can offer the teacher [to take the exam]... It took us a lot of effort. Eventually, we found a qualified teacher in another city... I only wish, I mean, you don't need to have a Chinese teacher for each school. But Chinese is listed as a subject for GCSE tests, right? So for one schools' network, for example, for one certain region, there should be a reachable Chinese teacher qualified [to be the examiner]. (2nd interview)*

Thus, Chinese HL learning in England remains heavily reliant on parental initiative and complementary schools, rather than mainstream education (Little, 2020). Thus, Chinese HL learning in England remains heavily reliant on parental initiative and complementary schools, rather than mainstream education (Little, 2020). The limited institutional support for linguistic diversity arguably consolidates the hegemony of English and strengthens adolescents' and parents' integration with British culture.

4.2.4.3 Uncertainties about learning Chinese in the future

Although all adolescents in this study were engaged in learning Mandarin Chinese through various means, both adolescents and parents expressed uncertainties regarding their future

¹³ 噱头, which could be translated into gimmicks or stunts.

Chinese learning and support. One common reason for this uncertainty appeared to be the increasing academic burden faced by children. For example, despite Harry's generally positive attitudes towards the Chinese language and culture, he expressed frustration about the additional homework assigned by his Chinese complementary school:

Harry: It's a bit annoying because I get added homework. (1st interview)

Harry's statement also suggested that the homework load from HL learning in addition to homework from mainstream schooling may push HLs to the periphery, reinforcing the dominance of English in children's language ideologies and practices. This finding aligns with research on Chinese heritage families in both Australia (Huang & Liao, 2023) and the UK (Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2018). Similarly, Simon reported feelings of fatigue from the burden of attending Chinese lessons on weekends:

Simon: I don't want to be offensive, but I kind of think learning Chinese for someone who can already speak it is {pause} Maybe {pause} learning Chinese {pause} on a weekend, I think it might just be the slightest waste of time, slightest... Because it's a Saturday and I've already done 5 days of 15 lessons. And I can speak moderate Chinese. I don't know. I'm not saying it's bad, but I'm just really tired. (3rd interview)

Simon's comment highlights the prioritisation of mainstream schoolwork over heritage language learning, particularly given that Chinese language varieties are generally not part of the mainstream curriculum in England (Collen et al., 2024), as discussed further in Section 4.2.4.3. Both Harry and Simon linked their feelings of tiredness specifically to their Chinese complementary school attendance, suggesting that additional schooling outside mainstream education can contribute to adolescents' negative feelings about heritage language learning. Section 4.3 further explores the impact of emotions and motivation on Chinese HL learners' experiences.

Nevertheless, both Harry and Simon continued their Mandarin learning, which points to a persisting imbalance between parental expectations and children's enthusiasm for HL education (Little, 2020; Mu, 2014; Phinney, 2003). However, some parents also expressed doubts regarding their children's future Chinese learning. For example, Niya's father referred to the increasing time pressure once Niya entered secondary school, reflecting a broader

conflict between mainstream schooling demands and HL education (Curd-Christiansen et al., 2023; Y. Wang, 2023):

Niya's father: *Time is an issue now. You cannot take too much [of her] time [to learn Chinese], since she also needs to learn English, right? And other subjects.*
(2nd interview)

Although specific concerns around GCSE pressures found in previous studies (Denscombe, 2000; Putwain, 2009; Roome et al., 2019) were not explicitly mentioned, Niya's transition to secondary school appears to have marked a turning point in her father's priorities, suggesting a pragmatic focus on mainstream academic achievement (Curd-Christiansen et al., 2023).

Similarly, when Huhu's mother was asked whether she would consider enrolling Huhu in a Chinese complementary school after the COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, she expressed hesitation:

Huhu's mother: *We will see {pause}. Because her availability is gradually reducing, since she needs to prepare for GCSEs. So she may not be able to spend a whole Saturday outside for just one thing. The golden time for her to learn Chinese is actually the past two years, during lockdowns.* (1st interview)

At the time of the interviews, Huhu was in Year 7, suggesting that her mother viewed the early secondary school years as the end of the optimal period for heritage language development. Her emphasis on GCSE preparation mirrors the importance attributed to mainstream educational milestones in England (Denscombe, 2000; Putwain, 2009).

Anna's mother made an even more explicit contrast between the importance of Chinese learning and mainstream academic pathways:

Anna's mother: *[Mandarin] Chinese is important, but she won't need [Mandarin] Chinese to get into universities.* (2nd interview)

Although many parents recognised the emotional and cultural significance of passing on their heritage languages, their practical expectations for children's proficiency often shifted to basic communicative competence (Little, 2020). As shown in this study, the increasing academic pressures of secondary schooling, together with aspirations for high achievement within the mainstream system, appeared to curb both children's and parents' engagement in HL learning

(Luyao Li et al., 2023). This tendency may also reflect the influence of the “model minority” ideology among British Chinese communities (Y. Zhou et al., 2023). Additionally, Little et al. (2024) find that adolescents’ efforts to maintain their HL tend to increase as they grow older, which may also contribute to uncertainties regarding their future Chinese HL learning, particularly as mainstream academic pressures intensify. The shift in priority towards mainstream education can also be understood as a pragmatic response by Chinese heritage families to the frustrations of the English education system with its limited recognition and support for Chinese languages, in the context of wider society where English is dominant (Curd-Christiansen et al., 2023). These themes are explored in more detail in Section 4.2.4.3.

Uncertainty about future HL learning was also linked to the Covid-19 pandemic, which had disrupted families’ original plans for complementary schooling. Several adolescents reported a decline in motivation when Chinese lessons moved online during the pandemic, which is discussed further in Section 4.3. At the time of data collection, some Chinese schools had not yet fully resumed in-person teaching. Anna’s mother, for example, expressed uncertainty about available learning options:

Anna’s mother: *Some friends are recommending [online] Chinese education agencies {pause} but she never likes online [lessons], so I’m indecisive now.*
(1st interview)

Although restrictions on in-person education have since been lifted, the pandemic's impact created lasting uncertainties in heritage language learning trajectories. While the long-term effects were beyond the scope of this study, the disruptions reported here suggest valuable avenues for future research on post-pandemic HL learning experiences.

In summary, both children and parents expressed increasing uncertainty about Chinese HL learning during adolescence and for the future, largely due to the environment of mainstream schooling in England. This aligns with findings in Curdt-Christiansen et al. (2023), indicating that although Chinese heritage families want more government support for heritage languages in schools, they believe that heritage languages are not valued on education policy agenda. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic introduced additional challenges for maintaining heritage language engagement. While these combined influences are complex and evolving, the findings suggest that Chinese heritage families are responding pragmatically. They are prioritising the demands of children’s mainstream schooling and moderating their expectations

of children's HL learning. But their frustrations also point to the need for school policy changes to support heritage languages – and the need for societal changes towards greater linguistic equalities – rather than all the pressure for HL maintenance falling on parents (Curd-Christiansen et al., 2023).

4.2.4.4 Summary

This section reviewed the dominant status of English in adolescent Chinese HL learners' linguistic repertoires, highlighting their gradually increasing preference for English in daily language practices. It also examined the limited support for Chinese language varieties in mainstream schools in England and the uncertainties surrounding adolescents' future Chinese language learning due to these factors.

4.3 Development and construction of adolescents' Chinese HL learning motivations

This section examines the development of adolescent Chinese HL learners' motivations and emotional experiences related to HL learning, drawing on Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) *L2 Motivational Self System*. Central to the Motivational Self System is adolescents' own understanding of their future selves. Other influencing factors are also considered in the data analysis, in line with the study's social constructionist framework. In this section, the following themes are explored: ideal selves of adolescent Chinese HL learners in England; ought-to selves of adolescent Chinese HL learners in England; and the contesting of adolescents' motivations and emotions by others. Emerging subthemes are also explored.

4.3.1 Ideal selves of adolescent Chinese HL learners in England

In this section, adolescent Chinese heritage language learners' ideal selves are discussed, as well as the factors contributed to the constructions of their Ideal Selves and related emotions.

4.3.1.1 The multilingual ideal self

As outlined in Section 2.3.1 of the *Literature Review*, for some language learners who engage with multiple languages and language varieties, a multilingual ideal self can be a key source of motivation for learning Mandarin Chinese (see Dörnyei et al., 2017; Henry, 2017; Lasagabaster, 2017; Little et al., 2024; Ushioda, 2017). This study similarly found that several adolescents identified with the image of being multilingual, which motivated their HL learning. For example, Huhu expressed a strong enthusiasm for language learning in general:

Huhu: *Of course [learning Chinese] is interesting! It's very interesting... I like attending Chinese lessons the most...Especially current Chinese lessons.*

Huhu's mother: *Which do you think is better, learning just one [language] or two?*

Huhu: *It's better to learn three {laugh}. (1st interview)*

This conversation further illustrates that emotions and motivation are deeply intertwined (Saito et al., 2018). Huhu's positive emotions regarding Mandarin Chinese learning suggest a strong motivational orientation. Moreover, her preference for "current Chinese lessons" may reflect how changes in learning environments can positively influence motivation. As discussed in Section 3.5, Huhu transitioned from learning solely with her mother to joining Zoom-based lessons alongside a peer, potentially boosting her motivation through peer interaction (Costigan et al., 2009), even in a virtual setting.

In addition to her Mandarin Chinese learning, Huhu enthusiastically studied French – the third language she was referring to – both at her mainstream school and through Duolingo, a widely used language learning app (Loewen et al., 2019):

Huhu: *I have learned [French] with Duolingo since last November or December... for 93 days already... Also, my school has [French lessons] as well... I also like [learning French]. (1st interview)*

Huhu's simultaneous engagement with multiple languages, and her positive emotional experiences of language learning in general, suggested that a multilingual ideal self may underpin her motivation for Chinese HL learning.

Language learning applications like *Duolingo* were only mentioned once in the entire study, in relation to foreign language learning – which may reflect their limited utility for HL learning (Little, 2019b). Still, various adolescents in this study used other online platforms to support their Chinese HL learning and practices, as discussed in Section 4.2.

Peer influence also appeared to contribute to Huhu's multilingual ideal self. When asked about role models, she identified a child of her mother's friend, who she admired for their multilingual achievements:

Huhu: *They are really outstanding... When they were 13 years old, just a bit older than I am, they learned a new language, Danish... They can also speak English [and Mandarin Chinese]. (1st interview)*

Rather than illustrating general peer support that may increase pupils' motivations (Tse, 2001; G. Li, 2006), this case points to the concept of a near peer role model (NPRM) (Murphey, 1996; 1998), defined as "peers who are close to our social, professional and/or age level whom we respect and admire" (Murphey, 1998, p. 201). NPRMs can provide relatable examples that enhance learners' confidence and readiness (Murphey & Arao, 2001; Yashima, 2009) and, within HL contexts, can foster positive emotions in relation to both the HL community and the pursuit of multilingualism (Leeman et al., 2011).

Similarly, Opal expressed motivation rooted in a desire for multilingualism. Although Cantonese and English were mainly used at her home (see Section 3.5), Opal independently chose to resume Mandarin Chinese learning after a two-year break from a Chinese complementary school:

Opal: Just {pause} knowing a language is nice, you know? (3rd interview)

In the final interview with Opal, she elaborated:

Opal: [Being able to read in Mandarin Chinese] would be nice. I have a massive encyclopaedia of science, but it's all in Mandarin... [Also,] you get to understand more people and speak to more people that can speak the language... I'm doing GCSE French... so that means more languages I will know. (4th interview)

Opal's motivations, both to access knowledge contained in Chinese scripts and to expand her communicative network through both Mandarin Chinese and French, demonstrate how multilingual ideals can drive HL learning. Additionally, Opal's decision to take a language as part of her GCSE qualifications might reflect her quest for proficiency in multiple languages, which might be motivated by the potential academic and career opportunities that GCSE qualifications can lead to (DfE, 2013). In the next subsection, adolescents' ideal selves in relation to future opportunities are further explored.

Like Opal's aspiration to read Mandarin books, other participants' motivations stemmed from a desire to access Chinese-language media. Niya explained:

Niya: *There are a lot of novels from China. Some shows played on the television are also in Chinese. So it's quite convenient to understand Chinese... Take Japanese animations as an example. If you are not Japanese, you cannot understand Japanese, you need to read subtitles, or you can watch the English voice-over version. But I don't like English dubbed Japanese animations, because sometimes the voice doesn't match [the character], or maybe the voice comes out before the character speaks. I feel that's not good. Also, if you need subtitles, you need to pay attention all the time, you cannot leave the screen for snacks while still listening to it, because you cannot understand when you just listen to Japanese. But if you understand Japanese, you can... even when you go to sleep, you can rest your eyes while listening to it, which is kind of like Chinese [for me]. (3rd interview)*

Niya's explanation suggested that her desire to engage with Chinese-language media authentically – without relying on subtitles – served as a strong motivation for her to learn Chinese. She referred to her experience with Japanese programmes as an example, emphasising her preference for original audio over English-dubbed versions. This indicated her appreciation for consuming media in its original linguistic and cultural form, which may reflect a broader valuing of proficiency in multiple languages. In this context, Niya appeared to mirror her father's emphasis on cultural and linguistic authenticity (see Section 4.2.3.1). Her motivation thus seems tied to a wider aspiration for multilingualism in an authentic way. Her reflections revealed that her HL learning goals extended beyond functional communication, encompassing personal enjoyment, cultural immersion, and deeper engagement with diverse cultural contexts. Niya's case illustrates how, for the adolescents in this study, HL learning is closely intertwined with cultural exploration, as discussed in Section 4.2.3.1.

Similarly, Harry's motivation for learning Chinese appeared to be driven in part by his broader appreciation for multilingualism. When discussing his experiences, Harry framed language learning in general terms:

Harry: So another reason I learn Chinese is also because learning languages is a good thing... I'm Chinese, and I kind of had, what you could say, like a head start. (3rd interview)

Harry recognised the benefits of multilingualism, but when referring to Chinese as one of the languages he might be interested in, he pointed to the practical advantages afforded by learning a HL, rather than linking the language to his sense of belonging to Chinese heritage and culture.

Similarly, Opal cited the practical advantages of Chinese HL learning, due to the familial connections:

Opal: My mum knows it {chuckled}. (3rd interview)

Since HL learners may be exposed to the heritage language from birth (Jo et al., 2023; Kwon, 2017) and can receive continuous support from their family and extended family (Jee, 2018; Wen, 2011), they potentially have the “head start” mentioned by Harry. This advantage may be one of the reasons why some adolescents prefer HL learning to foreign language lessons in pursuit of realising their multilingual ideal self (Jo et al., 2023; Kwon, 2017). The other factors potentially influencing their language learning preferences in relation to foreign language lessons are discussed in Section 4.2.4.2.

For Simon, the multilingual ideal self also involved the satisfaction he gained from demonstrating his linguistic abilities to monolingual peers:

Simon: There was one lesson, I was really good. I just knew everything, it felt great. Yeah, I just boasted, I boasted about it to everyone... like, “Oh, imagine. Cannot learn Chinese, how unfortunate {laugh}”. (4th interview)

In the same interview, Simon acknowledged that he “felt more confident” (4th interview) after this successful lesson. His increased confidence highlights the positive relationship between language achievement, positive emotional experiences, and learner motivation (W. G. Kim et al., 2014; Sevinç et al., 2023; C. You et al., 2016), in what might be called a virtuous circle. Such positive emotions can also enhance learners’ resilience in language learning, whereas negative emotions may reduce engagement (Goetz et al., 2014). For example, for some learners, online language classrooms can help reduce their communication anxiety by providing a relaxed environment which allows more spontaneity and creativity (Al Jahrami, 2019), which

likely contributed to Simon's positive experience of this particular lesson. In Section 4.3.2.3, Simon's negative emotions and his resistance to attending the Chinese complementary school are further discussed as a contrast to his experience with online lessons.

In brief, when adolescents picture themselves as a person who is multilingual, they are likely to develop an ideal self that stimulates their motivation for Chinese HL learning.

4.3.1.2 Potential future opportunities

As mentioned in Section 4.2.1.2, some parents in this study viewed their children's HL learning as an investment, anticipating future returns in the form of career opportunities (Norton, 2013). Although Investment Theory is often applied to analyse adult immigrants' language learning motivations, findings from this study suggest that some adolescents similarly perceive their HL learning as a strategic investment in their futures, , which links their ideal selves with future opportunities.

For example, Bella reflected on how proficiency in Chinese could broaden her professional prospects:

Bella: *If I will take some jobs involved with international communications in business, economics or finance, Chinese [ability] will be very beneficial [for my future career] ... For example, if I can become an actor, or director [in the future], maybe I can work in China, Britain, or even America. Because I can speak two languages... So I will have more options for characters to act. (4th interview)*

Bella's aspirations in fields such as acting and directing may reflect parental influence, as her mother works as a part-time actor. Furthermore, Bella's age and educational stage likely shape her emerging career considerations. As noted in Section 3.5, Bella was 15 years old at the time of interviews and had already selected her GCSE subjects, a process often linked to adolescents' initial career planning (Rodeiro, 2007). Bella herself also acknowledged the influence of her GCSE drama lessons on her career goals:

Bella: *It's mainly because I'm learning drama now, so I'm very interested in acting. (4th interview).*

Moreover, Bella described a sudden positive shift in her feelings about acting during early adolescence:

Bella: *Actually, I didn't like acting before... I felt awkward... I hated [acting]... But from Year 7, 2020, I suddenly became very interested in acting, I don't know the reasons why either, it's just a sudden interest {laugh}. (4th interview).*

Previous research suggests that adolescents' motivations can be linked to their need for self-expression, as well as their pursuit of fame or social recognition (Bargh et al., 2002; Dunne et al., 2010; Trepte, 2005; Shao, 2009). This may help explain why career considerations were directly articulated by adolescents in this study, whereas in studies of pre-adolescent children (e.g., Little, 2020; Mu, 2014), it tended to be the parents who emphasised future careers.

For example, Huhu talked about her professional ambitions and the advantages that her bilingual skills could offer:

Huhu: *If I study both Chinese and English well, I can go to China for work... For example, I want to be a translator when I grow up, or a painter, or a musician, so [Chinese ability] may give me a better advantage. Because, if I became an artist in the future, I could paint in China... and communicate with Chinese [audience]... and [I] would be more familiar with that place [compared to other artists who cannot speak Chinese]. (3rd interview)*

Notably, the careers Huhu and Bella mentioned are both associated with self-expression, underscoring that adolescents' motivations for Chinese HL learning are related to their emerging ideal selves, particularly among female participants. Huhu's references to future work opportunities in China suggested that adolescents might envision their futures in more dynamic and transnational terms (Hirsch et al., 2018), as she did not exclude her future in England at the same time. Such aspirations reflected not just her motivations for learning Chinese, but deeper processes of identity formation, which further highlighted the connections between adolescents' ideal selves and identities (Little et al., 2024). Section 4.4 focuses on adolescents' identities.

Potential for educational opportunities in China also emerged as a motivation for some participants. Both Bella and Hanting expressed interest in pursuing further and higher education in China:

Bella: *I just really like acting. I may go to drama school in China to study. I don't know yet. (4th interview)*

Hanting: *If I attend a university in China, I can [use my Chinese ability] to work while attending the university. Then I can learn more Chinese as well. (4th interview)*

As discussed in Section 4.2.3.1, both Bella and Hanting were actively exploring Chinese culture and studying Chinese language varieties via social media, which may fuel their desires to study in China. They were the only participants who explicitly stated ambitions to study outside of the UK, but others who intended to study in the UK also acknowledged the potential advantages of Chinese language skills for their university applications:

Opal: [My Chinese ability may be beneficial for] university applications and stuff. It will look better if you speak another language. (4th interview)

Although several adolescents in this study linked their ideal selves to future education and career opportunities, their use of tentative language, such as “may” and “can”, suggested a more exploratory attitude rather than determination. Unlike adult immigrants, whose professional opportunities may be heavily constrained by language proficiency (Peirce Norton, 1995), adolescents may perceive HL skills as just one of several potential assets, rather than a pivotal investment. This is evident in Bella’s reflection:

Bella: *I don't know what I should do in the future, so I don't know which direction I will pursue yet. I just meant that currently I am more interested in acting and directing, and other things related to drama. (4th interview)*

Although adolescents in this study have not made solid decisions for their futures, it is evident that they have begun to anticipate how their linguistic abilities might fit into their broader life trajectories. Although considerations of career and education opportunities are often associated with parents’ motivations for children’s HL learning (Little, 2020; Norton, 2013), adolescent Chinese HL learners may also make the links between HL learning and their potential career opportunities, as pupils in England are encouraged to think about their future plans through career guidance initiatives in mainstream schooling (Ofsted, 2023).

In brief, when adolescents foresee themselves as a person obtaining opportunities due to Chinese proficiency, they may develop an ideal self in relation to their Chinese HL learning. Importantly, however, while many adolescents expressed willingness to apply Chinese language skills in future employment, their motivations were framed around meeting external expectations, which could indicate the development of an ought-to self rather than an intrinsic desire to fulfil the ideal self. Section 4.3.2.1 explores adolescents' career planning and the emergence of their ought-to selves in more detail.

It is important to highlight that the future opportunities pictured by the adolescents in this study were mostly linked to Mandarin-speaking contexts, likely in part due to the fact that all were learning Mandarin Chinese. Consequently, when adolescents mentioned “China” in their interviews, it can be reasonably understood that they were predominantly referring to Mainland China, even though they did not explicitly distinguish between regions during the interviews.

4.3.1.3 Sense of belonging

When adolescents discussed their motivations for Chinese HL learning, a recurring theme was their sense of belonging to their Chinese ethnic community, which appeared to encourage them to pursue their Ideal Self through Chinese language acquisition. Although Bella attended a boarding school during term time, away from her family, she remained motivated to learn Chinese, a motivation that was shaped significantly by peer influence within her school:

Bella: *There are lots and lots of Chinese [students] in our Year. If you cannot speak, understand, or write [in Chinese], [you] may be incompatible [with others].* (3rd interview)

Bella's experience aligns with research showing that ethnic peer groups can significantly bolster adolescents' HL engagement (Costigan et al., 2009; L. N. Huang, 1998). It is important to note that although Bella's school hosted many pupils of Chinese heritage, its environment was not fully supportive of using heritage languages (as discussed in Section 4.2.4.2).

Bella's experience stands out because most of the other adolescents in this study were in mainstream schools where there were few pupils with Chinese heritage. Nonetheless, their HL learning motivations may also be linked to their sense of belonging within Chinese complementary classrooms. For example, Harry reflected:

Harry: I knew the teacher [in my Chinese school] very well. She was really nice and so were all the students, and I made friends with a couple of them. It was quite fun doing it. The teacher made learning Chinese really fun. (1st interview)

Harry's words reveal that his Chinese HL learning was also motivated by a supportive classroom environment which fosters pupils' active and effective engagement in learning (Greenhalgh, 2002). Additionally, Harry had a network of peers in the Chinese complementary school, a feature which typically contributes to HL learners' sense of belonging to the Chinese ethnic community (Ganassin, 2020). Section 4.4.1 further explores how HL classrooms may influence adolescents' identities.

Nonetheless, the Covid-19 pandemic potentially disrupted Harry's engagement with Chinese HL learning, as online delivery of classes reduced opportunities for peer interaction and fun classroom activities, which he associated with enjoyment and motivation:

Harry: But I think I don't enjoy [Chinese lessons] as much now. That's because of Covid-19, we cannot do games and stuff in class. I think I still enjoy it, [because] the teacher is really nice. (1st interview)

Similar studies have found an association between online schooling and pupils feeling a lack of connection to their school community (L. E. Kim et al., 2024), Harry's experiences suggest that this may also be experienced in complementary schools. There would be merit in future research focused on pupils' sense of belonging in Chinese complementary schools in the UK. While Harry's positive emotions about HL classes were somewhat diminished by the online learning experience, his strong bond with his teacher helped maintain his motivation, highlighting the crucial role of teacher-student relationships (Gregersen et al., 2014).

A similar dynamic was observed in Niya's case. Her early experience of linguistic isolation after arriving in England shaped her long-term view of language learning:

Niya: *I didn't know a single word in English, so I felt a bit lonely... After I learned English, the feeling of loneliness was gone... If you can speak more languages, you may not feel as bored when you visit more places... [So if I learn Chinese] I may integrate into Chinese society.* (3rd interview)

For Niya, learning Chinese became tied to a desire for social integration and avoiding feelings of isolation. Her motivation, therefore, was oriented to her Ideal Self rather than her ought-to self, as it was driven by personal growth and pursuit of positive emotions rather than by a sense of obligation. Niya's experience reinforces other findings that highlight the motivational power of positive emotions and feelings of belonging in language learning (Dewaele et al., 2014).

In brief, adolescents' motivations for Chinese HL learning were often closely intertwined with their sense of belonging and other positive emotions associated with being in a community or network, which is not necessarily geographically close to them (e.g., in Niya's experience). When adolescents picture themselves as a member of this network, they may develop an Ideal Self that encompasses their Chinese HL learning.

4.3.1.4 Communication with other Chinese speakers

The desire to be able to communicate with other speakers of Chinese language varieties, including those who primarily or exclusively speak Chinese, emerged as a significant motivation for several of the participants in this study. Niya, for example, said that improving her Chinese proficiency could make her future interactions smoother:

Niya: *[If] I learn Chinese, my life in the future might be more convenient as well. By this way, I won't need any translation when I communicate with people from Mainland China. (3rd interview)*

It is worth noting that Niya specifically referred to communicating with people from Mainland China. As noted in Section 4.3.1.1, all adolescents in this study were learning Mandarin Chinese, and their proficiency in other Chinese language varieties was limited (see Sections 3.5 and 4.2.1). Therefore, when participants referred to communication with speakers of Chinese language varieties, they were predominantly referring to speakers of Mandarin Chinese, unless otherwise specified.

Niya's expectation appeared to be shaped by her experience assisting Chinese-speaking tourists:

Niya: *I remember when I was in primary school, we once met some tourists from China and I could communicate with them quite smoothly... They seemed very happy, [because] they finally found someone they didn't need to struggle to communicate with in English at a place where nobody could understand their language. (4th interview)*

This experience not only increased Niya's confidence in her Chinese communication skills but also offered her positive emotional reinforcement, aligning with previous findings on the positive relationship between communication experiences, learner confidence, and motivation (Dewaele et al., 2014; W. G. Kim et al., 2014; Saito et al., 2018). In particular, positive experiences like this can help Chinese HL learners realise that their HL proficiency is useful, which boosts their motivation and strengthens their Chinese heritage identities (Little et al., 2024). In this way, positive emotions linked to meaningful interactions can strengthen HL learners' ideal selves and long-term engagement with the heritage language – for example, Niya was picturing her future communications with other speakers of the language. Likewise, Bella's motivation to learn Chinese stemmed from the desire to maintain communication with family and friends back in Mainland China:

Bella: *I still have friends and families back in China. If I cannot speak Chinese, I won't be able to communicate with them. That will be a pity. (3rd interview)*

Bella's words reflected the importance of sustaining close ties with networks back in the heritage country. Her family's frequent travel to China – typically during summer, Easter, and Christmas holidays – and their shared travels to neighbouring countries (as reported by Bella's mother, 1st interview) suggest strong intergenerational and extended family bonds. These findings resonate with earlier research highlighting how supportive peer and familial relationships can boost HL learners' motivation (A. He et al., 2008; Tse, 2001).

Anna also linked her motivation with communication goals:

Anna: *If we know more languages, it's better to communicate. (3rd interview)*

However, Anna did not specify the type of communication or the contexts in which she imagined using Mandarin Chinese to interact with individuals beyond her core family. As such, her quote may be interpreted as a more generalised or even vague desire to communicate with other Mandarin Chinese speakers. This vagueness may be linked to her limited opportunities to use Chinese in daily life, given the dominance of English in England (Fashanu et al., 2020; Kanto et al., 2013). Also relevant is the fact that Anna's visits to China had declined significantly after she began formal schooling, as her mother explained:

Anna's mother: *After they started schooling, I mean after they gradually started regular schooling, it became quite difficult. [We] needed to wait till the*

holidays. Because this country quite values children's education. So you cannot ask for absence as you want... [When she was in nursery], you can go back [to China] twice every year. And it didn't matter if you missed one or two months for the new semester... [Before she entered primary school], the longest period we stayed in China was 10 months... [Afterward they entered the primary school, our trip] had to be shortened to about one month... [Even] before the pandemic... for example, after Year 2 or 3, [we] may go back [to China] every two years or three years. (1st interview)

Furthermore, her mother described Anna's communication difficulties with her cousins in China, attributing them to her shyness:

Anna's mother: *[Anna] barely communicates with [cousins in China]... Because her personality is quite shy... Secondly, [she] hasn't communicated with other children [in the family] for a long time, so they are not familiar with each other. (1st interview)*

Anna's experiences suggest that social anxiety and avoidance behaviours, which are common among shy individuals (Melodia et al., 2020; Mohammadian, 2013), could contribute to lower engagement with the HLs. Feelings of insecurity, as Pavlenko (2005) argues, can hinder language development and willingness to communicate. In terms of extended family relationships, this could contribute to strain. Anna's mother described Anna's recent interactions with her cousins as brief and awkward:

Anna's mother: *She still communicates with grandparents [during the national lockdowns in England], but not with other children [in our family]. For example, with my younger brother's kid, they just stare at each other during video calls. Soon they lose patience without talking to each other. Then they will just say "bye". They have lost things to talk about. (1st interview)*

Little evidence was found of family members actively supporting her in overcoming communication barriers with her cousins. Such limited interactions may explain in part why Anna's desire for communication in Chinese remained vague. Nonetheless, Anna maintained relatively positive interactions with adult family members, particularly her grandparents, who demonstrated more patience. Successful communication with grandparents is likely to have

reinforced her sense of achievement and encouraged her Chinese learning, given the positive relationship between enjoyment and motivation (C. You et al., 2016).

These experiences might also have strengthened Anna's sense of family obligation, a value that is strongly emphasised in Chinese culture (Fuligni et al., 2004), and promote identification with her Chinese heritage (Louie, 2006; N. H. Wu et al., 2009). The role of family obligations in shaping adolescent heritage learners' Ought-to Self will be further explored in Section 4.3.2.

In brief, when adolescents want to communicate with other speakers of the same language, this motive may contribute to the development of their ideal self in relation to their Chinese HL learning.

4.3.1.5 Travel to the heritage country

Travel to China was also mentioned by several adolescents as a motivation for Chinese HL learning. For example, Haijin noted:

Haijin: *[With my Chinese ability,] I can also go travel in China, just explore around* (4th interview)

In Little's (2020) study, parents from heritage families often associated their children's HL abilities with the ease of future travel to the heritage country, reflecting parents' emotional attachment to the language and culture, although they were not necessarily linking it with their children's wellbeing. A similar pattern was observed among adolescents in this study. Haijin expressed a positive attitude toward his heritage, as he stated, "I would like to stay close to Chinese heritage... Because I like China" (3rd interview). His ideal self appeared to centre on future travel opportunities rather than a deeper sense of belonging. This may be linked to Haijin's reduced opportunities to maintain connections with Chinese language and culture since his mother, who had been in charge of engaging him in Chinese cultural events, had returned to China during the Covid-19 pandemic:

Ximeng and Haijin's father: *Their mother was more willing to [take children to] attend more events related to China... She has come back to Wuhan, China... since July 2020.* (1st interview)

With his mother's departure and the restrictions on in-person activities during the pandemic (see Khalifa et al., 2021), Haijin's direct exposure to Chinese cultural activities decreased.

Although Haijin and his family had previously visited China every summer, international travel restrictions during the pandemic (see Cai, 2021) prevented further visits for an indefinite period. Consequently, Haijin's sense of connection to his heritage may have weakened due to limited physical and virtual interactions with his extended family, leading him to view Chinese language proficiency as primarily useful for occasional travel instead.

Beyond travel for leisure, Opal also referenced the potential of moving to China:

Opal: A while ago, my mum said she wants to move back to China, and I said take me with you {laughed}... If she wants to go to China, I would want to go... [I just want to] go with my mum. (4th interview)

Opal's sentiments are supported by her mother's interview as well:

Opal's mother: *She said she would go back to China with me... [when] I said I'm going back to China after retirement.* (2nd interview)

Opal's desire to accompany her mother back to China may have contributed to her renewed motivation to study Mandarin Chinese, as discussed in section 3.5. Her experiences underscore a key distinction between heritage and second language learners: the familial and emotional ties that HL learners usually maintain with the heritage country. These ties may foster not just a transnational lifestyle (Hirsch et al., 2018; Klok et al., 2020; Little, 2020) but an Ideal Self that centres on a sense of belonging to the heritage culture.

Hanting also referred to the practical benefits of language learning for travel, and expressed a strong desire to visit China:

Hanting: *If you don't learn Chinese, and you can only speak English... you won't know how to ask questions [in Chinese]. If you get lost, you have to know how to ask for directions. You won't be able to do so if you don't speak Chinese.*

Hanting: *I'm telling my mum every day that I want to go back to China* (1st interview)

Hanting's use of the phrase "go back to China" was worth noting, as it seemed to reflect his strong emotional attachment to China and identification with Chinese ethnicity. This aligns with Little's (2020) argument that heritage families often express a desire to "return to" their

heritage community. Further discussions of adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities are presented in Section 4.4.

In this section, where adolescents referred to travelling to China, they often meant Mainland China, where their extended families reside and where they had previously visited. Despite the widespread use of Mandarin Chinese in other countries and regions such as Taiwan, Malaysia, and Singapore, none of the adolescents expressed a motivation to travel to these areas in relation to their HL learning, including those individuals with family ties to Malaysia or Taiwan, such as Flora and Huhu. One potential reason for this may be the relatively weaker connections these adolescents had with extended family members from those regions.

For example, Flora's family had never visited their heritage countries, a fact which distinguishes them from other families in this study. Flora's father is a second-generation immigrant, and all of his relatives reside in England, thus reducing the family's inclination or necessity to visit their heritage country. Although Flora's maternal relatives continue to live in Malaysia, Flora's mother reported that she had never returned to Malaysia since Flora's birth, citing parenting responsibilities as the reason:

Flora's mother: Because Flora [is] too small... She needs to go to school. I never go back home. Never. (1st interview)

Flora's maternal grandparents had only visited England once, shortly after Flora was born, and their reluctance to return was attributed to discomfort with the British climate and their own advancing age:

Flora's mother: They came to visit me {pause} 14 years ago, [when] Flora [was] born. {pause} They don't like England. The weather [in England], my family doesn't like it. {pause} Because they [are] old, they don't like [the British weather being] so windy. (1st interview)

Although Flora's mother maintained regular weekly contact with her relatives in Malaysia via WhatsApp and continued to use her hometown language variety during these conversations, Flora's opportunities for direct, embodied engagement with her heritage countries were markedly limited compared to other adolescents in the study. Most of the other families had either made regular trips to China prior to the Covid-19 pandemic or hosted grandparents for extended stays in England. Flora consistently expressed strong resistance towards Chinese

learning, which is further explored in Section 4.3.2 in relation to her ought-to self. These findings suggest that online contact with heritage countries, without corresponding opportunities for physical visits and face-to-face interactions with extended family members, may offer only limited benefits for the development of adolescents' motivations for HL learning.

Compared to other factors that may influence construction of an adolescent Chinese HL learner's ideal self, travel was mentioned by fewer participants in this study. This may be because the data collection was conducted during the pandemic when the restrictions on international travel were still a major issue that would likely prevent participants and their families from planning trips to China (most travel restrictions were not lifted until early 2023) (see British Council, 2023). In future studies, it may be worth revisiting participants in this family to see if their ideas about travelling have changed in the post-Covid era, and how these changes may affect their Ideal Selves related to travelling to China.

4.3.1.6 Summary

Section 4.3.1 explored how adolescent Chinese HL learners' *Ideal Self* develops with and through their motivation to learn Mandarin, often shaped by personal aspirations rather than external obligations. Five key subthemes emerged: multilingual ideal self; future opportunities; sense of belonging; communication with Chinese speakers; and travel to the heritage country. Across all subthemes, the Ideal Self was shaped by emotional experiences, the personal relevance of the heritage language and culture, and an evolving sense of belonging. These findings highlight the dynamic, individualised nature of adolescent HL learners' motivations.

4.3.2 Ought-to selves of adolescent Chinese HL learners in England

Along with the Ideal Self, the Ought-to Self is considered an important driver of a language learner's motivation. (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). The learner's motivation can be influenced by both these imagined selves. This section explores the ought-to selves of adolescent Chinese HL learners and the factors that contribute to their construction – principally, future career aspirations and the sense of external obligation to learn Chinese.

4.3.2.1 Future career opportunities

As reported in Section 4.3.1, some adolescents in this study expressed a willingness to use their Chinese proficiencies in their future careers or to work in China. Others indicated that their perception of the value of Chinese language skills for career prospects may be rooted more in

parents' expectations than their own personal aspirations. As a result, although they may acknowledge the potential professional advantages that Chinese skills may bring, some may struggle to envisage specific career pathways where this potential might be realised. For example, Harry noted:

Harry: I think it [Chinese ability] opens a lot more doors... Like {long pause} Oh, that's really awkward because I just told you that there's loads of things that you can do, but I'm trying to think of just one. {long pause} Oh, I know one! You can do business with Chinese companies; it makes it a lot easier. You can access a lot more things in China. Because China has good things too, compared to England. (1st interview)

Harry's long hesitations suggest that his understanding of the future benefits of Chinese proficiency was somewhat nebulous. Later, he indicated that his comments were echoing his parents' views:

Harry: My mom and dad told me this, like [learning Chinese can bring] a lot of lot more job opportunities, things like that. (3rd interview)

Therefore, Harry's HL motivations concerning future employment appear to be grounded mainly in parental expectations rather than his own career interests and personal ambitions.

Similarly, other adolescents such as Simon and Niya expressed only a tentative connection between their Chinese skills and future career prospects. Simon, for example, portrayed Chinese proficiency as a fallback option:

Simon: Let's say all my jobs fail, I doubt that, but let's say all those jobs fail, I can still become a translator [with my Chinese skills]. And I'll be pretty good at that, then [I can] make money. Say I went to a job interview. They would ask, are you skilled at anything? [I can say,] I can speak Chinese. (3rd interview)

While Simon acknowledged the potential utility of his Chinese skills, he views them as a "safety net" rather than a core element of his future career plans, as he would not need his Chinese skills (other than as a bonus point on his CV), unless those plans did not work out.

Niya similarly described her Chinese proficiency as a potential asset but framed it in a subordinate way:

Niya: *My future plan is to learn Chinese well... if in the future, the companies want me to go on a business travel to a place where Chinese is speaking, then [the company] might think they've got a bargain by hiring me... (3rd interview)*

Niya: *In the future, [due to my Chinese ability] it may be easier for me to change the place [of living]. Because if one day I get tired of staying in England, then I will have a place to go back... Sometimes, I think, if I run out of choices, I can still be a translator in Britain. By translating Chinese to English, [I] can still get some decent payments and have a decent life. (4th interview)*

Niya's use of conditional phrasing, "if I run out of choices", reinforces the interpretation that she sees her Chinese skills mainly as a backstop. As Dörnyei (2005, 2009) argues, motivations based on meeting external expectations align more closely with the ought-to self rather than with the ideal self. Such expectations may stem from parental influence or societal messages, particularly during times of uncertainty, when career aspirations are often shaped by the need for practical and secure options. Given that data collection took place during the Covid-19 pandemic – a period marked by heightened anxiety among adolescents (Kumra & Patange, 2025) – it was possible that the broader socio-economic climate influenced participants' motivational orientations. In this context, some adolescents may have been more attuned to external pressures or fallback plans, which could have shaped the way they imagined their futures and approached Chinese HL learning.

Parental influence was evident across several families. Many parents regarded Chinese proficiency as a form of valuable capital (Bourdieu, 1986), likely to enhance their children's future employability. This view is common among first-generation immigrants (Little, 2020; Mu et al., 2015; Weger-Guntharp, 2006). Harry's parents, for example, emphasised the career benefits of bilingualism:

Harry's mother: *[I] hope learning Chinese can bring him opportunities in the future. One more language may mean one more possibility... By opportunities, I meant jobs, directions for career development... Simply put, [he may take] jobs that involve Chinese speaking or maybe {pause} training in China for a few months. Because he can understand both languages and both cultures, he can handle work on both sides. (2nd interview)*

Harry's reflections on his parents' immigrant experiences revealed the emotional weight attached to their aspirations for his future:

Harry: My mum and dad, they talk to me a lot about all the things I can do in the future, because they were immigrants. And then, when they got to England, they didn't have very many choices, as they had to make a living first. My mum and dad are really good at cooking, so this was the easiest option for them. And it was the least risky option, so that's what they went for... Because their parents were in China, they [their parents] cannot really do very much. So I have my parents supporting me. They always say how I have all these choices, and I should start thinking about the future, which is kind of annoying because I don't know what I'm gonna do. But I get that they want it because it's good for me.
(1st interview)

Harry's parents' encouragement to capitalise on bilingualism in his career planning can be seen as a way for them to compensate for the limited choices they faced as immigrants, and to ensure that Harry would have better opportunities than they did. However, this parental pressure also appeared to cause Harry some anxiety and ambivalence regarding his future career choices.

Beyond parental influence, some adolescents also received encouragement from staff in their mainstream schools regarding the career value of multilingualism. Schools are obliged by the national curriculum to provide career guidance (Ofsted, 2023). For example, Hanting's teachers had highlighted the professional advantages of Chinese proficiency:

Hanting: *Learning Chinese [may help] in [my future] jobs.* (3rd interview)

Hanting: *Because teachers from English [mainstream] schools have told me that, if you can understand Chinese or other various languages, companies will be more likely to hire you. This is because China also has a lot of companies now, a lot of things produced by them [British companies] are made in China as well. So [employees] being able to speak Chinese will be very helpful for British companies.* (4th interview)

Similarly, Bella said that teachers in mainstream school urged students to consider their future careers:

Bella: *Many people, including teachers, will tell me to think about what job I want to do in the future.* (4th interview)

These quotes suggested that mainstream school provision reinforces the association between language skills and employability, particularly for students approaching the stage of GCSE qualifications (Denscombe, 2000; Putwain, 2009).

Interestingly, although prior research has suggested that middle-class heritage language learners are more likely to view multilingualism as an advantage (Menjivar, 2002), this study found that participants from more working-class backgrounds also took this view. This may reflect the growing emphasis on career guidance and employability in secondary education across England (Ofsted, 2023).

Nevertheless, most adolescents in this study did not frame Chinese proficiency as central to their desired careers, although they did recognise its value. Instead, they tended to see it as a safeguard against future uncertainties or as a bonus on their CV.

4.3.2.2 Learning Chinese is an obligation

In this section, I examine the cases of adolescents who link their motivations for learning Chinese to duties or requirements imposed by others, including supporting parents' survival in England, avoiding disappointing family members, and meeting academic and social expectations.

In some families, at least one parent faced language barriers with English. Consequently, adolescents may be expected to learn the heritage language to serve as translators to facilitate day-to-day activities, thus ensuring their parents' survival in England in practical terms (Beiser et al., 2006; Little, 2020; Little et al., 2024). In Hanting's family, both parents have limited English proficiency:

Hanting's mother: *There is no other way. At least he should be able to communicate with me. [But] we parents cannot speak English, right?* (2nd interview)

Although Hanting's mother attempted to learn English when Hanting was younger, she ultimately found the process too difficult. This was illustrated in her language portrait, where she initially omitted English but later added it to her depiction, marking it on her hands to symbolise her desire but inability to grasp English:

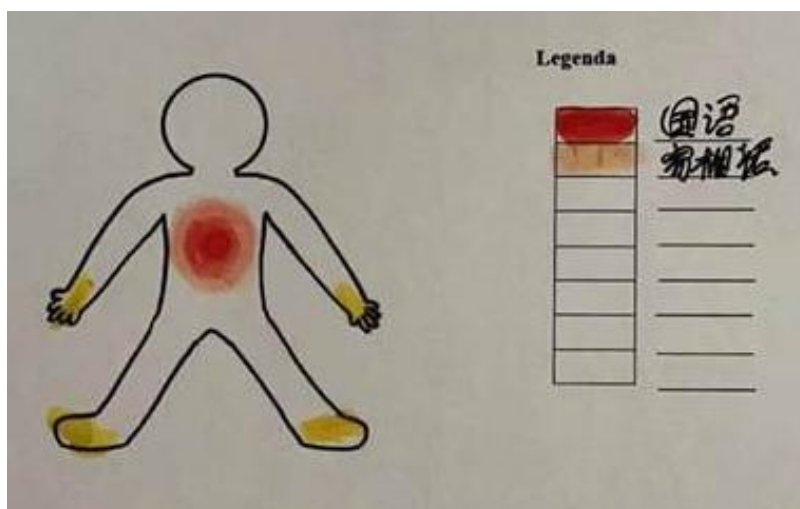


Figure 6 Hanting's mother's language portrait¹⁴

Hanting's mother: *Because I want to catch it, but I cannot hold it... I really want to learn English. But I will soon forget after learning. Sometimes, during conversations, I hear other people (talking in English), I can understand a bit. Um... a little bit. But (I) cannot speak (English to respond). Alas, at that moment, it's really... Alas. (1st interview)*

For Hanting's mother, the desire to learn English has been outweighed by the negative experiences of failed learning attempts, leading her to cease studying English. Witnessing his mother's struggles, Hanting appeared to have internalised a sense of duty to facilitate family communication. Accordingly, he had never rejected learning Chinese:

Hanting: *If I don't learn Chinese, it will be difficult to communicate with my parents. Especially when neither of my parents can understand English, it will be hard for them to understand you [if you only speak English], and the communication [between me and my parents] won't be good. (3rd interview)*

Hanting reported no frictions regarding language use at home. He described his linguistic adaptability when he was struggling with vocabulary or when his parents could not understand

¹⁴ Translation to Hanting's mother's agendas, from top to bottom, are: Mandarin Chinese and hometown speech. English, which was indicated in the colour yellow, was not included in the legenda by the participant.

him. At these times, Hanting would rephrase his expressions, “*to switch to other words... [or] change another way of speaking*” (4th interview). His approach reflected a broader identification with the traditional Chinese values of family obligation and respect for parents (Louie, 2006; Nesteruk, 2010; N. H. Wu et al., 2009), consistent with his strong emotional ties to Chinese culture as discussed in Section 4.2.

In families where only one parent faced English language barriers, adolescents’ experiences appear more complex. Both Anna and Simon related their Chinese learning to the limited English skills of their fathers:

Anna: *[It’s] important [for me to learn Chinese]... my dad cannot speak English... So we can only speak Chinese to him.* (1st interview)

Simon: Yeah, I see the importance [of learning Chinese]. I can communicate with my dad [if I can speak Chinese]. I see it. (4th interview)

Both adolescents recognise learning Chinese as an essential responsibility for communicating with their fathers. However, because their mothers and siblings are English-speaking, Anna and Simon generally prefer using English in their daily lives. This dynamic occasionally led to communication barriers. Anna, for example, relied on her mother to mediate when encountering difficulties in conversations with her father:

Researcher: If when you speak to your dad, you cannot remember that specific Chinese word, what would you do?

Anna: I ask my mum. (4th interview)

If her mother was unavailable, Anna might simply abandon the communication:

Anna’s mother: *She would try to explain [in Chinese]. If she fails to explain, she will say, “never mind, you don’t need to understand this, daddy”.* (4th interview)

Anna’s communication behaviour illustrated that adolescents might avoid interactions with non-English-speaking parents if alternative formats of communication can be achieved within the family. Her case contrasted with Hanting’s persistent and flexible communication strategies and also with a study by Tran et al. (2021) where adolescent Vietnamese HL learners had

fulfilling conversations with non-English-speaking family members. Anna's avoidance or curtailment of conversations may have arisen from frustration and negative emotions associated with unsuccessful communications (Little, et al., 2024; J. S. Oh et al., 2010; Sevinç, 2018; 2020). These patterns of interaction may marginalise non-English-speaking parents within family communication, echoing previous findings on the emotional challenges faced in families where language proficiency levels vary (Paradis, 2023). Similarly, Simon's mother highlights the risk of the father's exclusion:

Simon's mother: *Because [his] dad cannot speak English. [If Simon learns Chinese,] he can communicate with [his] dad. Otherwise, when we talk to each other, dad will look like a fool. (1st interview)*

This further suggested that when most family members are English-proficient, English may dominate family communication, which may marginalise those less proficient in the family dynamics. Judging by the experiences of Hanting, Anna and Simon, it seems that language learners motivated by a strong ideal self tend to demonstrate greater persistence (Saito et al., 2018), but adolescents motivated by a sense of responsibility to meet their parents' language needs may demonstrate more varied learning behaviours and language practices. Additionally, the identified parental language barriers may contribute to the broader trend observed in this study that mothers were primarily responsible for children's heritage language learning (see Section 3.5).

On the other hand, some adolescents may connect their motivation for learning Chinese to a desire to avoid disappointing family members. For example, Harry noted:

Harry: Because all my relatives are Chinese, [and] I kind of, need to build that bridge. (1st interview)

Harry's use of the words "need to" instead of "want to" when explaining his motivations suggested that he framed his Chinese learning as an obligation. Additionally, his motives were shaped by his concern about his parents' expectations and the emotional implications for them if he failed to learn his HL:

Harry: It feels obvious to me that I should learn Chinese... I think it's kind, just, of, I feel like, my parents would be a bit disappointed, if I didn't learn Chinese. (3rd interview)

Harry's case suggested the influence of the ought-to Self, which is rooted in perceived obligations rather than intrinsic individual goals (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). Moreover, Harry's motivation to learn Chinese was closely intertwined with his own emotional experiences of interactions with his parents, particularly in response to being corrected by his fathers:

Harry: That was a bit annoying. Because I would like to say it [Chinese words] and then I [think] I'm saying it right. And then my dad would tell you, no, you're saying this [another word]. Because my head's telling me that I'm not saying that, I'm saying the right one. And that was a bit frustrating... It was kind of like, when I say the word, I'm probably saying this wrong... It felt like someone's always watching you. If you made a mistake, they immediately pointed it out. (1st interview)

As Norton (2000) argues, repeated corrections in imbalanced power relationships, such as that between parents and children, can generate negative emotions and discourage learners' engagement. These findings are echoed in more recent research which highlights how disharmonious communication with parents can have adverse impacts on adolescents' HL learning (Little, 2023). In Harry's case, repeated correction by his father had led Harry to doubt himself and to feel less confident in his Chinese proficiency (Pavlenko, 2005), as he spoke of feeling "frustrated" and "annoyed". The negative sequelae of the corrections were also evident in Harry's reluctance to take tests for Mandarin Chinese:

Harry: I don't want to take a test... I don't think there should be tests for languages. (1st interview)

Furthermore, Harry indicated that these emotional barriers intensified when he reached early adolescence:

Harry: At the same time, I was also getting a bit older and I kind of didn't like being told what to do. That sounds really rebellious, but yeah. (1st interview)

The developmental shift that Harry alluded to is consistent with existing research findings that adolescents often seek greater autonomy and resist parental control (T. F. Su et al., 2009), which could cause tensions in parent-led language learning practices and hinder the adolescent's HL engagement:

Harry: I think after like a year or two, he kind of got a bit tired of correcting me, so he would wait. But then he waited to see if I remembered. And sometimes I would remember. But other times he had to remind me again... But it helped. It gave me a bit of time to think, and I didn't get as frustrated. (1st interview)

This turn towards a more patient and less intrusive method of language learning support helped reduce Harry's frustration, allowing him more space to process language independently and gradually rebuild his motivation. Harry's experience supports the argument that motivation for learning a language is dynamic and sensitive to relational and contextual changes (Saito et al., 2018). As discussed in previous sections, Harry's motivational selves have changed over time.

Harry: [Last week] we didn't have a lot of time to study, and we missed one Chinese lesson, but the next week we also have to miss it. But I was like, "I have to learn Chinese". So my brother missed it, but I asked my mum if I could still do it. And I'm really proud of that because I wanted to do that... I think I kind of realised that I need to do it because it's good for me. I think that's kind of how I would say it. (1st interview)

Although Harry continued to frame his motivation using the phrase "need to", his acknowledgement that learning Chinese is "good for me" suggested a shift from a sense of obligation (ought-to self) towards a more intrinsic and aspirational ideal self (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). This motivational development reflects a broader trend identified in previous studies, where adolescents' acceptance of their HLs and bilingual identities tends to strengthen with age and personal growth (Caldas, 2008; Caldas et al., 2002; Little et al., 2024). The development of adolescents' identities is discussed further in Section 4.4.

Like Harry, Anna's motivations were potentially related to avoiding disappointing her mother and grandparents. Anna said that she used to communicate with her grandparents regularly, which also supported her Chinese HL development, aligning with findings by Guardado et al. (2014):

Anna: I used to contact them every single morning because I had the phone until I forgot the password for it {laugh} ... like maybe 2 weeks ago... Because it's good to have a close relationship with your grandparents... Because {pause} sometimes they can get really lonely, you know. And then all their kids can be separated from them, they can get very lonely, so {pause} yeah. (3rd interview)

Anna's strong commitment to maintaining intergenerational relationships may reflect her internalisation of traditional Chinese familial values, particularly those related to *filial piety* (Fuligni et al., 2004; Mengwei et al., 2020). However, when Anna's minor phone issue led to loss of contact with her grandparents for two weeks, her lack of effort to remedy the problem is telling. It suggested that her motivation for connection with them might be for the most part be externally driven, by a perceived obligation to fulfil familial expectations (Gruszczyńska-Thompson, 2024). This assumption is further supported by her comment quoted in Section 4.4, where she associated being Chinese with the need to follow many rules, indicating a sense of duty and compliance in relation to her identities.

Beyond family obligation, Anna also indicated that her motivation to learn Chinese is grounded in her academic goals and her desire to be seen as a high-achieving student, which might be an alignment with the stereotype of the *model minority* (see Y. Zhou et al., 2023). For example, although Anna occasionally put aside her Chinese homework due to difficulties, she consistently returned to it on her own initiative. She elaborated:

Anna: Sometimes when it's like really really hard... you just don't want to learn it... [But I return to it] because like... we might go and learn it next lesson. So then if you don't know it, then the teacher might ask you and you don't know it. That means that you didn't properly revise it... [It's] very important [for me to do well in learning Chinese]... Because you want to make a good impression, so you can get a good thing in your report. Then it will look good when you go out in the society. (3rd interview)

Anna's emphasis on academic performance and external recognition suggested that her commitment to Chinese HL learning may be motivated more by extrinsic pressures than personal desires. The following statement gave weight to this assumption:

Anna: I like everything to be done good. So if I learn Chinese, then I would want to be very good... My feelings [about learning Chinese] are like, learning any other subject. I don't really mind it. (3rd interview)

Here, Anna explained that she regarded Chinese learning similarly to her efforts in other school subjects and was motivated primarily by the desire for excellence. The connection between her motivations and academic performance was further demonstrated by her decision to withdraw from online Chinese classes during the Covid-19 pandemic:

Anna: Sometimes the internet doesn't work, and my younger brother is annoying [next to me]... I feel really irritated. (3rd interview)

This comment highlighted how technical issues and family distractions disrupted her learning, prompting her to withdraw. This aligns with previous research that shows that negative emotions, such as frustration, can undermine learners' motivation (Saito et al., 2018). Nevertheless, Anna chose to continue her Chinese studies with her mother rather than stop learning altogether:

Anna: Because it's interesting and {pause} you get to learn new things. I never knew about it [new knowledge in Chinese], until I read it. (3rd interview)

This suggested that she found some intrinsic satisfaction in learning, although her motivations appeared to be primarily rooted in ambition for high achievement. However, due to her mother's demanding work schedule in the family restaurant, Anna was aware that her home-based learning might lack consistency. Consequently, Anna expressed reluctance to return to in-person formal classes:

Anna: I don't think I will because like then I'll be like, behind everyone else. Then it might be better if you just learn it at home. (3rd interview)

Anna's mention of her fear of falling behind further highlighted her anxiety about academic performance and strengthens the idea that this was what fueled her HL learning motivation.

In summary, the adolescents discussed in this section appear to view Chinese HL learning primarily as an obligation, whether to their family members or to fulfil broader academic and societal expectations. Their motivations align with the concept of the Ought-to Self, which is driving their behaviour to meet perceived obligations and avoid negative outcomes.

4.3.2.3 Adolescents' motivations being contested

Due to parents and children having different levels of desire to connect with Chinese culture and maintain Chinese language proficiency (Little, 2020), tensions may emerge within the family. A common source of tension reported by adolescents in this study is the feeling of being forced into learning Chinese (K. F. Wong et al., 2010). This was often mentioned by adolescents who experienced little or no enjoyment from their learning experiences. Both the adolescents

discussed in this subsection, Simon and Flora, also expressed frustrations that their subjective desires were neglected.

For example, before the Covid-19 pandemic, Simon had attended a local Chinese complementary school where he encountered a teacher he described as “horrible” (Simon, 1st interview). This negative classroom experience significantly influenced his emotional response to learning. Simon elaborated on this experience:

Simon: I don’t know how to describe it, she is weird. She’s just strict and {pause} for some reason, [She was] very very angry for like half the time... She gave me a negative impact on my Chinese learning... Really, I lost interest because of the teacher... [She was] very strict. I forgot homework, once or twice. I had to stand up in front of everyone, explain to everyone why I did it. (1st interview)

Simon’s quote illustrated how a punitive teaching approach and tense teacher-student relationships can provoke negative emotions in language learners (Gregersen et al., 2014). Being publicly punished harmed Simon’s self-esteem and undermined his sense of emotional safety in the classroom. These issues are particularly acute during adolescence, when self-consciousness and sensitivity to peer judgment are increased (Y. Pan et al., 2020; Pavlenko, 2005). Simon’s mother corroborated the negative impact of these experiences on Simon’s motivation to learn Chinese:

Simon’s mother: *My son didn’t like the teacher in the Chinese school. She damaged his confidence... Actually, his interest in Chinese was quite high at the beginning of learning Chinese, but [his interests] got gradually worn away...[At the beginning, he] just watched cartoons [about Chinese learning] at home and drew [characters] with a paper himself... He just thought it was fun to draw the characters. I thought he had potential, that was why I took him to [the Chinese school] (1st interview).*

Simon’s shift in interest seemed to be closely linked to his bad experiences with this particular “horrible” teacher, whom he encountered from Year 2 onward:

Simon: I did it [Chinese learning in that school] for 4 years, never liked that teacher... It was in Year 2, the teacher, horrible teacher [became my teacher].

One year gone, ok, [I thought] she's gone. Next year! Still there! Oh my god!
Another year [passed]. Next year, she's still there. [I just decided] I'm not doing
that anymore. (1st interview)

Simon's decision to leave the Chinese school was largely due to the prolonged presence of this teacher. During the Covid-19 lockdowns, as online learning became more widespread (Young et al., 2022), Simon's mother enrolled him in LingoAce – an online Chinese learning platform for overseas Chinese children – without his prior agreement. Simon resisted this Chinese learning route too:

Simon: I didn't want to... She even signed up without me knowing... Just one
Sunday she's like, oh, you stay at home, do this [online Chinese lessons]. (1st
interview)

His mother's actions might reflect traditional Chinese values of *filial piety* and parental authority (Fuligni et al., 2004). Within these ideologies, communication and negotiation with children tends not to be regarded as essential; children are expected to follow parental guidance without question. Simon's sense of being forced into learning was reinforced by his lack of agency in the decision-making process.

However, Simon's emotions in relation to Chinese learning changed after meeting a more supportive teacher, which led him to enjoy Chinese learning:

Simon: I didn't want to [take the online lessons]. But wow! Magic! I like it...
The current teacher is awesome... She's cool... She's not strict. She's quite laid
back. {pause} She's not really a mean one. I don't want any mean one. And yes,
she's always in a great mood. (1st interview)

This shift highlighted the importance of positive teacher-student relationships in shaping learners' motivation and emotional engagement. As Greenhalgh (2002) notes, learners are more likely to be motivated when they feel safe and accepted in the learning environment. Simon's newfound enjoyment of Chinese lessons demonstrated the close link between positive emotions and the development of his Ideal Self. Simon's mother also observed that “*his interest [in learning Chinese] has recovered a bit.*” (2nd interview). Still, Simon's doubts about learning Chinese lingered, which may be linked to the higher value he put on English in a social context where it is the dominant language, as discussed in 4.2.4.2.

Like Simon, Flora consistently rejected learning Mandarin Chinese in her complementary school. She attributed her resistance to Mandarin Chinese in part to her difficulties in mastering the language:

Flora: Because Chinese is hard, so I'm never gonna like it... Because the characters, they just look more like drawings than words. (3rd interview)

Flora's family language policy might play a critical role in shaping her views, as Mandarin Chinese was not commonly used in her home (see Section 3.5). Still, her parents compelled her to learn Mandarin Chinese due to the potential advantages it may bring in the future:

Flora: because [My parents said] it's a worldwide language, a lot of people speak it... (3rd interview)

Flora expressed a somewhat dismissive view of Mandarin's practical value and a derisive interpretation of her parents' motives:

Flora: Because they [my parents] don't know it and they want me to be able to read the menu in a Chinese restaurant. (3rd interview)

Flora's stance is consistent with research findings that children's perceptions of heritage languages are shaped by their lived environment (Fashanu et al., 2020). In contrast to Mandarin, Flora's attitude toward Cantonese was more positive, as she associated it with meaningful interactions:

Flora: It's good [that I know Cantonese] because then I can speak to my family members. (1st interview)

Additionally, having minimal connection with the heritage countries (see Section 4.3.1.5) might limit opportunities for meaningful language use, given that HL motivations can arise from family connections rather than broader societal or pragmatic goals (Little, 2020). The fact that Cantonese was a key part of the FLP might motivate Flora to learn. However, Flora's parents refused to let her learn Cantonese.

It appeared that Flora's parents did not foster open communication about Flora's emotional experiences in language learning, as reflected in her mother's quote:

Flora's mother: When she refused [to learn Mandarin Chinese], she didn't have a choice. Her dad wants her to learn until GCSE. He said, "you [need to] finish your GCSE [in Mandarin Chinese], then, [it's] up to you. [Whether] you want to learn, [or] you don't want to learn [after GCSE], [it's] up to you. Like Flora's dad said, we have given you [the opportunity of] learning Mandarin. If one day, when you grow up, you don't know Mandarin, don't blame us. (2nd interview)

This account indicated a rigid, non-negotiable parental authority, as evidenced by the statement "she has no choice." Flora's parents' decisions about language varieties were made unilaterally and seemed to override Flora's own preferences and emotional disposition (Little, 2020). Their disregard for her emotional needs was also evident in their decision-making about her learning methods.

During interviews, Flora recalled having a teacher she liked in the complementary school, who seemed to influence Flora's attitude and reduce some of her negative feelings towards Mandarin Chinese learning:

Flora: She made [Mandarin Chinese learning] a bit easier. She gave me extra time to like, think about {pause} Like when we used to have to memorise a few lines, she would give me extra time, an extra 2 minutes. When everyone gets like 5, I get 7. (4th interview)

Flora's experience, mirroring Simon's, illustrated how a patient and understanding teacher can help students feel more accepted in the classroom (Greenhalgh, 2002). Unfortunately, the teacher that Flora appreciated likely returned to China during the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the school did not explain the reason for her departure, the reduction in foreign language teaching positions reported in mainstream schools during the pandemic (Collen, 2021) may have also affected staffing in complementary schools.

However, Flora's fond recollection of this teacher suggested that she did not entirely reject Mandarin Chinese learning, and this was further supported by her engagement with a personal tutor. Due to her parents' limited Mandarin skills, they were unable to provide academic support themselves (Unsworth et al., 2019) and instead hired "a tuition teacher coming [to] teach Flora Chinese homework... on Sundays" (Flora's mother, 1st interview). Flora shared that she preferred these one-to-one sessions with her tutor to the group class format:

Flora: [There are] less people... it's easier to concentrate. (4th interview)

In addition, Flora's experiences of Mandarin learning were more positive after lessons moved online:

Flora: There was a test online and then the teacher said it [Chinese words] out [loud]. Then I did good in listening. (4th interview)

This recollection also showed that Flora's perception of her proficiency in Mandarin Chinese may not be the main reason, or should not be the only reason, for her reluctance to engage with learning at her Chinese complementary school. Although Flora responded more positively to online learning, her parents refused to shift to that approach. Since Flora showed a strong preference for online lessons and also the one-to-one sessions with her personal tutor, I asked if Flora's mother considered signing her up for online platforms such as LingoAce, which was also recommended by her friend, Opal's mother. However, Flora's mother refused to try any online methods:

Flora's mother: Flora likes it online or one by one, okay, [but] I don't like it... [The online lessons of Chinese complementary schools are] always in the Zoom. The teacher wants to see the students' faces. Only Flora doesn't like to show [her] face. A lot of students answer the teachers, only Flora doesn't open her mouth and answer the teacher. She needs to go back to the Chinese school, in front of the children and the teacher. (4th interview)

It seemed that Flora's mother interpreted her daughter's behaviours in online group lessons as a lack of engagement. She was overlooking Flora's stated preferences and needs for a more supportive and personalised learning environment. Such lack of mutual understanding often leads to emotional friction between parent and child (Little, 2023).

On the other hand, Flora's parents' unwillingness to explore alternative teaching methods was also due to financial considerations:

Flora's mother: Also, I pay more [for LingoAce]. I pay more, then nothing. (4th interview)

Although no participant mentioned specific figures for LingoAce, fees for Chinese complementary schools in England generally remain below £100 per year (Mau et al., 2009;

Chu, 2019). This affordability makes complementary schools more accessible to families from various socioeconomic backgrounds, whereas higher fees for other methods may inhibit parents' efforts for HL maintenance due to pragmatic reasons (Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2023). Additionally, parents may see their children's language learning as a form of long-term investment (Norton, 2013), as reflected by Flora:

Flora: They [my parents] say it's [Mandarin Chinese] a good language to learn... if I know it [Mandarin Chinese], I can also get an extra GCSE. (3rd interview)

However, if parents perceive little return on their investment, especially in terms of children's engagement or visible progress, they might be less inclined to support their child's preferred learning methods. In Flora's case, it was also possible that her parents can only afford the complementary schools, though this sensitive issue was not directly addressed in interviews. Nonetheless, the affordability of Chinese complementary schools helps ensure broader access to HL education for Chinese heritage families (Mau et al., 2009). While this study has captured the perspectives of adolescent learners and their parents, future research could include the voices of complementary school practitioners to offer a fuller picture of teaching practices and their influence on learners' emotions and motivations.

It was clear that Flora felt that learning Mandarin Chinese was something she must do for her parents:

Flora: I don't care about it [learning Mandarin Chinese], but I want {pause} but it's better if I learn it for them [my parents], I would understand it as well, then I can read stuff. (3rd interview)

Two details in Flora's quote are worth attention. First, although she initially used the word "want" to describe her motivation, she quickly retracted it, which might indicate a reluctance to link her personal desire or agency to her Mandarin Chinese learning. Second, she expressed an appreciation for multilingualism, which could reflect a genuine interest in language learning. Still, in terms of her motivational selves, this interest might be suppressed due to the impacts of her parents' non-negotiable attitudes towards Flora's Mandarin learning.

Flora chose to participate in this study despite appearing reluctant. She demonstrated identification with her Chinese ethnicity, which is further discussed in Section 4.4. Upon

reflecting on all interviews conducted with both Flora and her mother, it seems likely that Flora saw the research as an opportunity to communicate her thoughts in a more neutral environment, mediated by a third party outside the family structure. Nevertheless, her mother's educational preferences barely changed during the data collection process. A follow-up study may be worthwhile to revisit Flora's family and explore how their intergenerational communications about heritage languages have developed.

In summary, parents and teachers have an influential role in shaping adolescents' emotions and motivations in Chinese HL learning. However, these adult figures can also contest or challenge adolescents' emotions and motivations. The resulting tensions can lead to negative experiences for the adolescents and reduced or passive engagement in Chinese HL learning.

4.3.2.4 Summary

Section 4.3.2 explored how adolescent Chinese HL learners' *Ought-to Self* develops with and through their motivation to learn Mandarin, often shaped by external expectations. Three key subthemes emerged: future career opportunities; learning Chinese is an obligation; and adolescents' motivations being contested. Across all subthemes, the ought-to self was also shaped by emotional experiences, as well as the personal understanding of the heritage language and culture, and intergenerational dynamics within different families. These findings offer a comparison to adolescents' ideal selves, and how their ought-to selves may be converted to ideal selves across time and spaces (e.g., different learning environment/methods).

4.4 Linking adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities with their languages and language varieties

This section associates adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities with their linguistic repertoires. Identified themes in this section include: language as an identity marker: speaking Chinese and feel Chinese; translanguaging and fluidity of adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities; speaking Chinese and feeling special; "I'm Chinese because my parents are Chinese"; language learning and the construction of cultural identities; microaggression and racism against adolescent Chinese HL learners; and adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities being confirmed and contested.

4.4.1 Language as an identity marker: speaking Chinese and feeling Chinese

As discussed in Section 2.2 and 2.4, languages typically contribute significantly to individuals' identities (Costigan et al., 2009; Kramsch, 1998; Yip et al., 2002). In this study, many adolescents reported that their Chinese language abilities enhanced their identification with Chinese heritage. Through interactions with their HLs, learners may also acquire social rules, cultural norms, and emotional expressions (Dewaele, 2016; Pavlenko, 2004). Therefore, learning and using a language can be crucial for individuals to develop a membership of a language community. It is worth noting that when adolescents referred to "Chinese" in this section, they all meant Mandarin Chinese, supporting the idea that Mandarin can contribute to the ethnic identity of HL learners from varied Chinese linguistic backgrounds (Ganassin, 2020; W. Li et al., 2011).

Harry identified as Chinese and regards his Mandarin Chinese ability as an important part of constructing his sense of belonging:

Harry: I think I would have a stronger emotional attachment with Chinese because I talked to all my relatives with Chinese. And if I didn't know Chinese, I couldn't do all of that. (1st interview)

Harry's quote, confirming his emotional connection to his heritage language, reflected the close relationship between emotions and identities (Saito et al., 2018). His words suggested that HLs can play a vital role in learners' ethnic identities by enabling intimate communication with family members, including extended family (see Dewaele, 2010; Ladegaard, 2018; Sevinç et al., 2017). In the same interview, Harry talked explicitly about the pivotal role of Mandarin Chinese language in his understanding of his ethnic identity:

Harry: I suppose it [learning Chinese] makes me feel more Chinese, if that make sense. Because I wasn't born in China so I kind of need to {pause} need that connection... Because I'm Chinese... I don't know, it's kind of just a part of who I am... Half of me wants to say, I want to keep on doing it because I like it, but the other half tells me that I want to keep on doing it because I'm Chinese. (1st interview)

Harry's identification with his Chinese ethnic membership emerged naturally as he explained his motivation for HL learning: he referred to Mandarin Chinese abilities as "part of who I am".

This aligns with the ideology of language as an identity marker (W. Li. et al., 2011). However, despite his strong identification with Chinese ethnicity, Harry described feeling “awkward” when speaking Chinese outside of his family (see Section 4.3.2.1 and 4.4.2), likely due to the dominance of English in England, particularly in the educational system (see Section 4.2.4.2). In Section 4.4.6, I discuss the bias experienced by adolescent Chinese HL learners in England mainstream schooling and the potential influence on their identities.

Hanting also related his identity to his Mandarin Chinese language ability, as he recognised Mandarin Chinese proficiency as a core feature of Chinese membership:

Hanting: *If you cannot speak Chinese very well, it's not very good if you call yourself a Chinese... [If I never learned Chinese], I may say I'm British, but I can also speak a little of Chinese. (4th interview)*

Dual nationality is not accepted by the PRC government (Habicht & Richter, 2022). Apart from Ximeng, all the other adolescents in this study hold a British nationality, chosen by their parents for practical reasons. Although Horowitz (2000) defines ethnicity as an expansive concept that may encompass nationality, scholars like Fuller (2012) argue that nationality and ethnic identity are often experienced and perceived as separate in modern multicultural societies. Thus, when participants identify as “British,” their interpretations may be out of consideration of citizenship rather than ethnic belonging. In this case, when Hanting said he might describe himself as British, he was not necessarily expressing a sense of belonging to British ethnicity. Nonetheless, adolescent Chinese HL learners’ identities are fluid and they may also embrace the influence of English language and culture for their identity constructions. Section 4.4.2 further discusses this aspect of adolescent Chinese HL learners’ identities.

Additionally, Hanting expressed strong positive in-group attitudes in relation to his Mandarin Chinese ability, as he associated his Chinese membership with his Chinese proficiency (Phinney, 1990):

Hanting: *[I] feel good [about being able to speak Chinese]. Because you can understand what people from your country are saying, you will feel more relieved... When [I'm] back in China, most people [in China] speak Chinese. So [when I] speak Chinese, I'm like {pause} with them, instead of being excluded. (1st interview)*

Hanting's use of "your country" to refer to China indicated his identification with his heritage origin (Costigan et al., 2009), aligning with his self-categorisation and labelling with Chinese ethnicity (Ashmore et al., 2004). He also positioned himself as an "insider" by using the shared language of his ethnic group (Giles et al., 1977), further underscoring that speaking the language is a key ethnic behaviour (Yip et al., 2002).

Niya's reflections also illustrated the connection between language and identity:

Niya: *Also, as I'm not a native British person, it was nice for me to meet someone who spoke Chinese outside of my family as well. (4th interview)*

Here, Niya clearly distinguished herself from native British people, showing that Chinese ethnicity was part of her self-categorisation/labelling too (Ashmore et al., 2004).

Niya's early experience of linguistic isolation when she had just arrived in England might have shaped her long-term view of language learning and identity:

Niya: *Take my experience when I just came to England as an example... I didn't know a single word in English, so I felt a bit lonely. Because people tried to communicate with me, but I couldn't understand them, not to mention they understood me... After I learned English, the feeling of loneliness was gone, because people could understand me. I guess when you travel to a place where you cannot understand the local language, [you] may still feel a kind of loneliness. So if you can speak more languages, you may not feel less bored when you visit more places... [So if I learn Chinese] I may integrate into Chinese society. (3rd interview)*

Speaking Mandarin Chinese within a group or network where many of one's peers also speak Mandarin might also enhance adolescents' understanding of the close relationship between language and identity. Harry, for example, indicated that he felt a stronger sense of belonging to his ethnicity in the Chinese complementary school:

Harry: We learn better [in the Chinese school] than in [mainstream] school because {pause}... because everyone there's Chinese, and there is kind of a connection. (3rd interview)

Harry's experiences echoed Ganassin's (2020) argument that Chinese complementary schools in the UK play a crucial role in community building and fostering pupils' relationships with peers from the same heritage background. In Bella's case, although she did not attend any complementary schools, the large number of students with Chinese heritage at her boarding school (as discussed in Section 4.3.1.3) may have similarly provided her with a peer network that supports both engagement with Mandarin Chinese practices and a stronger sense of belonging to the Chinese community (Costigan et al., 2009).

Bella: *[If you cannot speak Chinese] You know you are Chinese, [but you] feel like a foreigner.* (3rd interview)

Bella's reflection linked language proficiency directly to Chinese membership and a sense of belonging, underscoring the connection between Chinese language and ethnic identity in her understanding (Chaparro, 2019; Phinney, 1990).

Harry recalled feeling inspired by peers, with whom he was not personally acquainted, who confidently spoke Chinese with each other at his mainstream school:

Harry: I kind of started to accept it [speaking Chinese] with Chinese friends. I always see this pair of friends at school, I don't know if they're friends or brother and sister, but they always go around and they talk Chinese to each other. I kind of wonder what they think [about speaking Chinese with each other]. Because for me, me and my sibling never really spoke Chinese [to each other]. But if they can do it, the least I can do is to do it with my friends, right? So sometimes I would talk Chinese with my friends, and I got more comfortable with that. We still talk in English like, 60% of the time. I think that's quite good, considering most of the time I think it's quite awkward. (1st interview)

Harry's comments indicate the positive influence of the "near peer role models" in HL use. Although the inspiration the "near peer role models" provided did not eliminate Harry's feelings of "awkwardness" while speaking Chinese with his younger brother and friends, his willingness to engage showed his desire to connect with the Chinese-speaking community (Phinney, 1990).

The adolescents' language portraits also highlighted the emotional links between their Mandarin Chinese abilities and their identity. For example, Bella used red (representing Mandarin Chinese) to draw a heart:

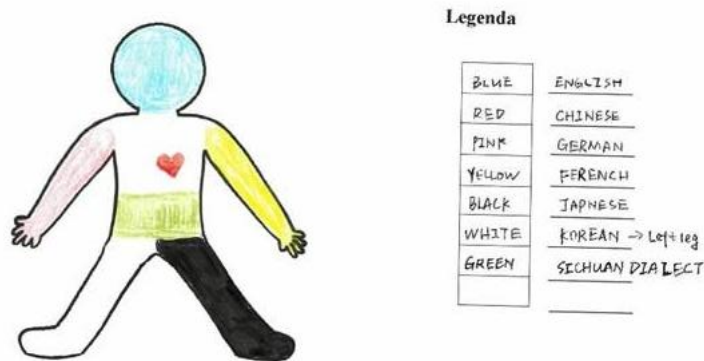


Figure 7 Bella's language portrait

Bella: *I feel {pause} because I really like China, so the heart is an embodiment of patriotism. (1st interview)*

Harry put blue (English) on the body and red (Mandarin Chinese) on the head:

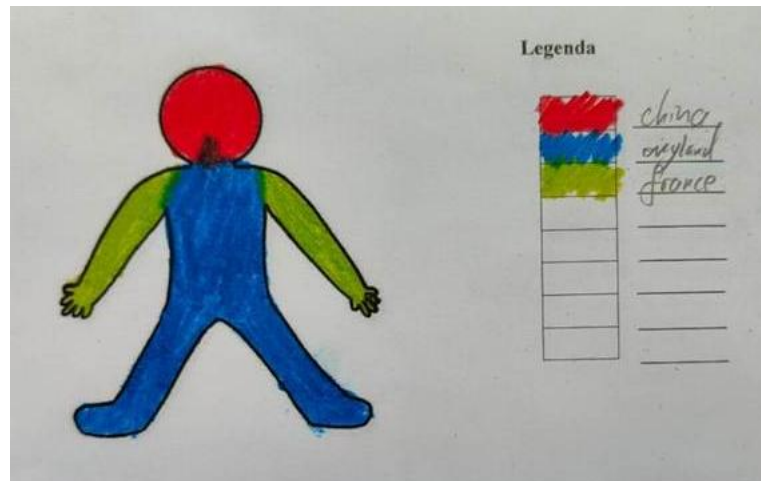


Figure 8 Harry's language portrait

Harry: *I live in England. Like, the clothes I wear are blue. Not, not blue, they're English. But that's why I put blue for the body... But my mind is still Chinese... Like, I'm Chinese {pause} my brain functions like a Chinese person. I live in England but I'm not English mentally. (1st interview)*

These portraits demonstrated not only the strong emotional attachments felt by participants, but they also show the potential of language portraits as a research tool to elicit participants' thoughts and feelings about their identities (Stavrakaki & Manoli, 2023). In line with existing research on Chinese HL learners in England, this study found that many of the adolescents regard Mandarin Chinese as a crucial identity marker, which resonates with social identity theory. However, as this study adopts a social constructionism approach, I also acknowledge the complexity and fluidity of adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities, which are discussed in the next sections of this chapter.

4.4.2 Translanguaging and fluidity of adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities

Apart from the importance of Mandarin in their identity construction, some adolescents in this study also actively embraced translanguaging in their language practices and expressed the fluidity of their identities.

Hanting, for example, talked about experiencing different emotions when speaking English and Chinese:

Hanting: *When you are speaking English in England, you would feel like you understand this place. Or you see, you know all the words in English, so you won't be too cautious. Unlike when you are speaking Chinese, you need to be careful, or you need to think which words you want to say. (3rd interview)*

While Hanting's uncertainty about the accuracy of his spoken Chinese exemplified the bilingual imbalance commonly reported among HL learners (Kondo-Brown, 2005; Montrul, 2008), his feeling of being "safe" when speaking English in England suggests a sense of belonging to English society. This sense of belonging co-exists with his attachment to Chinese language and society as discussed in the previous section. Additionally, Hanting reported that in conversations with his bilingual cousins, he often mixed English and Mandarin Chinese together, which he could not do with his parents:

Hanting: *Sometimes we don't know how to say a certain word, so we switch to English or Chinese... It feels good {laugh} because it's easier... [When it happens with my parents,] I just use other words [in Mandarin Chinese] {laugh}. I speak English with my cousin, because she can understand [English].*

My parents cannot understand English, so I just changed the way of speaking.
(4th interview)

Hanting's positive emotions about translinguaging, as he said it made him feel good, demonstrate that he embraced his language skills in both English and Chinese. This is consistent with previous studies (Ganassin, 2020; W. Li et al., 2011). Additionally, Hanting's comments suggest that interlocutors' English proficiency is a key factor in whether adolescents mix language varieties in conversations. In other words, language mixing typically occurs when speakers know their listeners are bilingual/multilingual (Gardner-Chloros, 2009).

This assumption can also be supported by Bella's words:

Bella: *This situation [translinguaging] only happens between me and my friends or people I'm close with. [They are] all people who can speak both Chinese and English. If [people I'm talking to] are purely Chinese or purely English, I will just use Chinese only or English only.* (1st interview)

Bella's explanation indicates that she did not see herself as "purely Chinese or purely English". Instead, she seemed to embrace both languages in her life and identified as bilingual, which challenges the ideas of Chinese identities being homogeneous (Ganassin, 2020).

Harry also translinguaged across English and Mandarin when he talked with his Chinese heritage friends, although his behaviours might relate to the value he placed on linguistic authenticity:

Harry: We were talking about phones. In English, we think the brand is called XIAOMI¹⁵, or that's how they pronounce it. But it felt really weird saying it like that [way]. It was actually more comfortable to say *Xiaomi*¹⁶, because that is what you would count as the Chinese version... I mean, we did have choices [to say these words in English], but it was so uncomfortable saying them [in English]. So you might as well to say the Chinese actually. There was also *Huawei*¹⁷ I think it's like HUAWEI¹⁸. It [The English way of pronunciation] sounds so weird because we don't talk that way, but they [English native

¹⁵ Pronounced in the English way, without the tones of Mandarin Chinese

¹⁶ Pronounced in Mandarin Chinese, with tones

¹⁷ Pronounced in Mandarin Chinese, with tones

¹⁸ Pronounced in the English way, without the tones of Mandarin Chinese

speakers] don't know another way. I mean, I don't think most of them do. (1st interview)

Here, Harry explained that he preferred pronouncing Chinese brand names in the correct Chinese way, even during English-dominant conversations, illustrating that bilinguals often merge vocabularies into an inclusive language repertoire (O. García et al., 2014). His quote also shows that linguistic “authenticity” may be embraced not only by Chinese parents, but by their adolescent HL learners as well (W. Li et al., 2010). Harry's emphasis on the authenticity of languages and identities was also apparent in his understanding of other individuals' identities, which is further discussed in Section 4.4.4.

The adolescents' emotional attachments to both languages were also visible in their language portraits. For example, Niya selected two very similar shades of dark blue to represent Mandarin Chinese and English in her drawing, in contrast to the two lighter shades used for French and German:



Figure 9 Niya's language portrait

Niya: *I chose similar [colours] on purpose... For me, Chinese and English are very similar. [They are] two mother tongues (for me). I can communicate in English, and I can also communicate in Chinese, without any barriers. So I chose two similar [colours] on purpose. (1st interview)*

The fact that Niya was willing to identify both Chinese and English as her mother tongues suggested her strong and positive emotional attachments towards both communities represented by these languages (Kreuzer et al., 2018). This finding also reflects the fluidity of

adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities (Ganassin, 2020) and how HL learners actively embrace their bilingualism (Gruszczyńska-Thompson, 2024).

Moreover, peer networking also has a role in the adolescent Chinese HL learners' translanguaging and identities. For example, Huhu valued her English skills, as they enable her to form friendships in England as well:

Huhu: *I also made a lot of friends through [speaking] English. That's very joyful... I feel quite happy, and lucky [to be able to speak English].* (1st interview)

Peer networks are highly valued by adolescents (Kapelari et al., 2020), as they influence various aspects of adolescents' lives (see Brown, 2018; Costigan et al., 2009).

Similarly, Harry talked about how English helped him build friendships:

Harry: I've probably been able to make a lot of friends with it [English]... I suppose I feel grateful that I was born in England {pause} but I have Chinese parents, so that I can learn Chinese. But I can also speak English very well. (1st interview)

The fluidity of adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities was also reflected in how Harry's and Simon's awareness of being Chinese developed over time:

Harry: I think at the start, I didn't really know why I was doing it. I probably didn't know that I was Chinese. At the start, I kind of just {pause} I did it because my mum told me to. {pause} Yeah, I think that's really it. (3rd interview)

According to his mother, Harry began attending Chinese complementary lessons from the age of five, yet he reflected that he had little awareness of being Chinese at that time. This observation challenges findings from earlier studies, such as Gillen-O'Neel et al. (2011), which suggest that ethnic awareness emerges relatively early in childhood. Interestingly, Harry was not the only adolescent participant in this study to report a lack of ethnic awareness in their younger years:

Simon: So when I was younger, I didn't even know I was Chinese... I thought I was British. I thought I was a proper British person. I didn't even realise I was [Chinese], until my parents told me when I was like three, you're Chinese...

But when I'm older, I'm just like, I'm Chinese. Hello, I'm in the world now... My parents told me I was Chinese once. I didn't really think anything of it. I was like, okay, sure. I don't know, I just gradually changed. I don't know how [my thoughts about my ethnicity changed]. (4th interview)

Neither Harry nor Simon could recall precisely when or how their understanding of their ethnic identity shifted. This suggests a gradual and perhaps subconscious development of ethnic awareness during childhood and adolescence. These findings highlighted the potential value of further research, particularly longitudinal studies, to explore how younger Chinese HL learners' identities may develop over time.

In brief, translanguaging was actively embraced by multiple adolescents in this study, which showed the fluidity of their identities, challenging the potentially essentialist limitations of social identity theory and echoing the social constructionism approach adopted in this research.

4.4.3 Speaking Chinese and feeling special

In this study, some adolescents also expressed that they felt special when they were speaking Chinese (Ganassin, 2020). For example, Hanting often spoke Mandarin Chinese with other Chinese-speaking friends in England as a secret language:

Hanting: *I have many friends. I know some of them from the Chinese school... Since British people don't understand it, sometimes we speak Chinese to each other, so they won't understand us {laugh}. (1st interview)*

Hanting's quote reflected the significance of peers in adolescents' lives and indicated the positive influence of a supportive peer group who share the same heritage (see G. Li, 2006; Tse, 2001). Here, Hanting also showed that speaking heritage language, as an ethnic behaviour, may in turn enhance the connections with peers from the same heritage background (Costigan et al., 2009; Yip et al., 2002). Hanting's enjoyment of speaking a language that mainstream society cannot understand was also reported by other adolescents in this study. Harry noted:

Harry: It's really satisfying when I'm talking in Chinese on the phone with my mum, and then my friends are around me and then... Because they don't know what I'm saying, it's really satisfying... It's kind of like I can code all of my messages, even requests. It's really satisfying because they don't know what

I'm saying, and then they just look at me and they're like really confused. (1st interview)

It was noticeable that Harry mentioned “satisfying” multiple times in his recollections, which reflects his enjoyment related to Mandarin Chinese. The quote also suggests that adolescents may particularly enjoy being able to speak a language that others do not understand. This enables covert communication; for example, in Harry’s case, he could ensure that the “requests” he made of his mother were concealed from his peers. As adolescents start to construct their own identities separate from their parents (T. F. Su et al., 2009), they may not want to be regarded as weaker than their parents in front of their peers. As a result, being able to hide personal information in another language may be beneficial for their self-esteem, which is a sensitive area for adolescents (see Y. Pan et al., 2020). Thus, even though young children’s HL learning and practice can be negatively impacted by monolingual peers (Rojas et al., 2016), adolescent HL learners may feel more positive about their bilingual abilities, echoing longitudinal studies by Caldas et al. (2002) and Caldas (2008) on French HL learners.

4.4.4 “I’m Chinese because my parents are Chinese”

Some adolescents in this study, rather than linking their identity directly to their Chinese language varieties, attributed their ethnic identity simply to their parents’ ethnic heritage. This section discusses the adolescents who identified as Chinese but did not see their language abilities as influential in that identification. Flora, for example, noted:

Flora: I am [Chinese]. I was born Chinese... Because my parents are Chinese.
(4th interview)

Flora’s quote, which is selected as the headline for this section, stated clearly that her Chinese identity was rooted in her parents’ heritage (a Malaysian Chinese and a second-generation Chinese immigrant from Hong Kong). Her perspective may also reflect a lack of deeper exploration of Chinese community and culture (Phinney et al., 2007), which could be linked to the fact that Flora’s parents lacked strong connections with their extended families, as discussed in Section 4.3.1.5. Nevertheless, her identification with Chinese ethnicity, alongside her rejection of Chinese heritage language learning, illustrates the diversity in the ways in which adolescents understand HL learning and negotiate their identities, as observed by Little et al. (2024).

As well as her resistance to learning Mandarin Chinese (as discussed in Section 4.3.2.3), Flora also showed negative emotions towards including Mandarin Chinese as part of her identity. This was vividly illustrated in her language portrait, where she excluded Mandarin Chinese. This made her the only participant, across both adolescents and parents, to do so. Flora explained:

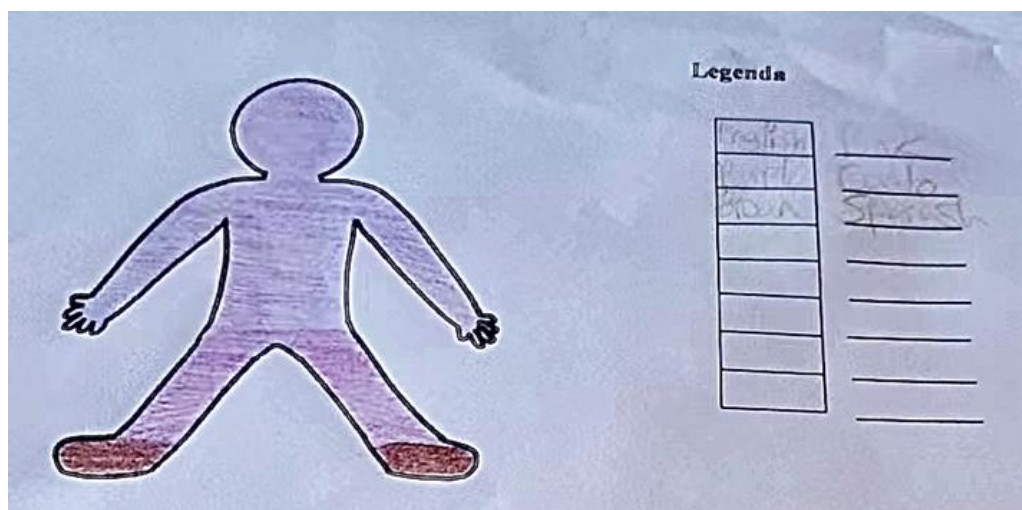


Figure 10 Flora's language portrait

Flora: So the top one, it's English. The other one in the middle, it's Cantonese. And then the bottom one is Spanish.

Researcher: I noticed that when you were painting, you didn't put Mandarin Chinese in your painting, right? Can I ask why?

Flora: Because I don't like it. It's just not important to me... Because I've learned Chinese for 9 years and I still don't get anything. (1st interview)

Flora's quote indicated that her low proficiency in Mandarin Chinese could be one of the reasons she has not internalised Mandarin as part of her identity, and hence it was excluded from her language portrait. However, in the instruction for the language portrait activity, I emphasised that the languages that participants chose to depict in portraits did not have to be ones they can speak or are particularly good at. But it is telling that Flora chose to include Spanish in her drawing, even though her proficiency in Spanish, like Mandarin, was limited:

Flora: I'm not that good at it [Spanish] and you know, I can't really speak it that well. (1st interview)

On the other hand, further interviews did reveal that Flora was in fact able to manage basic communication in Mandarin, such as introducing herself and discussing her hobbies with me, indicating that her negative self-assessment of “not getting anything” may have been an exaggeration influenced by other factors. In the third interview, she elaborated her feelings about Mandarin Chinese:

Flora: There’s nothing really special about it [Mandarin Chinese], [it’s] just a bunch of stuff with words... (3rd interview)

Here, Flora suggested that she has little or no positive emotional attachment to Mandarin Chinese. While her parents regarded Mandarin as a valuable tool for accessing the global job market (see Section 4.2.1.2), Flora appeared not to perceive Mandarin as relevant or meaningful in her current life or anticipated future. Further comments by Flora underscored this lack of personal connection with Mandarin Chinese. For example, she seemed eager to stop her Mandarin Chinese learning after acquiring a GCSE certificate in Mandarin, which was her parents’ stipulation:

Researcher: Do you remember how your mom and dad responded [when you wanted to stop learning Mandarin Chinese]?

Flora: I need to do it till I’m 16 when I do GCSE... I thought it was far, but now I’m 14, I only got two more years, so I’m not really that bothered... I’m not like, looking forward to it [taking the GCSE test in Mandarin] because I want to do it, but [I’m] looking forward to it, because that means if I pass then I don’t need to do it ever again. (3rd interview)

In contrast, Flora did not express negative emotions about Cantonese, which was one of the dominant language varieties in her family (see Section 3.5). For example, she understood that her *mother tongue* is Cantonese, since she spoke it with her mother:

Flora: I would think Cantonese [is my mother tongue]... Because I speak Cantonese with her [her mother] and I was brought up to learn that from her. (1st interview)

Flora's understanding of *mother tongue* touched on stereotypes implied by this term: that mothers make more significant contributions to children's language development (Preece, 2009), which can be seen by the gender ratio among parents interviewed in this study as well.

Flora's quote also suggested that she embraced Cantonese in her life. Certainly, Cantonese was included in Flora's language portrait as her second most important language variety.

Given that Flora continued to identify with her Chinese ethnicity, her case highlighted the diversity and complexity of experience in adolescent Chinese HL learners, aligning with previous research (W. Li, 2011; Little et al., 2024). Consequently, researchers, practitioners, and parents who interact with adolescent HL learners need to acknowledge the differences in how adolescent HL learners understand their identities.

Like Flora, Ximeng expressed less emotional attachment to China and Chinese language varieties compared with other adolescents discussed in previous Sections, although he still identified with his Chinese ethnicity:

Ximeng: *There is no special meaning [of being able to understand Chinese]. It's just about me being able to speak one more language than other people. Of course, being able to speak Chinese is a useful skill. The more languages you can speak, the more people you can communicate with... My ethnicity is Chinese... [my answer to my] ethnicity won't change... ethnicity is your blood.*
(4th interview)

In these comments, Ximeng described Chinese as a "skill", which reflected a positive but largely pragmatic attitude that does not encompass the deeper emotional attachment expressed by some other participants. He also stated that his ability to speak Mandarin held no particular personal significance. In subsequent interviews, Ximeng revealed his intention to change his nationality to British upon turning 18:

Ximeng: *I won't connect with a lot of Chinese people, besides my family.* (4th interview)

Although Ximeng said that he would continue to identify as ethnically Chinese, his sense of ethnic identity appears rooted in familial ties rather than a broader sense of belonging to the Chinese ethnic community, as he could not think of circumstances where he would use Chinese

beyond communicating with his family. He also encapsulated his view with the words “ethnicity is in your blood”.

Harry’s perspectives provide an interesting comparison. While Harry linked his ethnicity to his language ability and embraced the fluidity of his identity (as shown in previous subsections), his understanding of what it meant to be ethnically Chinese involved parental ethnicity and genetic inheritance, as evident in his reflections on his friend’s ethnic background:

Harry: Adam’s dad is actually white, I think he’s from England, or Scotland... And his mum is Chinese. I think it’s really weird when someone is not fully Chinese, but they’re like half of a different race. You can tell that their face is kind of a cross. He’s not Chinese because he’s probably the whitest, like the most English Chinese person you will ever see. It’s really interesting. (1st interview)

By describing his mixed-heritage friend Adam as “not fully Chinese,” Harry seemed to view parental ethnicity as the main factor determining a child’s ethnic identity. By doing so, he might be excluding Adam from the Chinese ethnic group due to his mixed heritage, a phenomenon observed in prior research (see Giorgio et al., 2021; Maxwell, 2021; Shaff et al., 2024). This suggested that essentialist views on Chinese identities are still embraced by overseas Chinese (Y. Zhou et al., 2023), including some adolescent Chinese HL learners themselves.

Furthermore, previous studies have shown that mixed-heritage children often experience a lack of belonging to either heritage community and tend to question their own identities (Ali, 2020; Pao et al., 1997; Shin, 2010). Harry’s perspective raised interesting questions about the identity formation of children with Chinese heritage in mixed-heritage families. Unfortunately, despite efforts to recruit Adam and his family via snowball sampling, they declined to participate in interviews without providing further explanation. As a result, none of the adolescent participants in this study come from mixed-heritage backgrounds, although Opal lived in a mixed-race household due to her stepfather’s ethnicity (see Section 3.5), which might have shaped her attitudes towards Chinese language learning and use (see Section 4.3). Future research could explore the identities of mixed-heritage Chinese HL learners in greater depth.

4.4.5 Language learning and the construction of adolescent HL learners' cultural identities

As discussed in Section 4.2.3, several adolescents in this study recognised the significance of learning culture in their HL learning process, and enjoyed the cultural content learned through Chinese HL learning. Several, but not all, of the adolescents in this study also highlighted the importance of culture in relation to both their HL learning experiences and their identity construction and development, reflecting the ideology that links culture closely with language among overseas Chinese (Ganassin, 2020; W. Li et al., 2011) For example, Harry highlighted the influence of culture in his understanding of being Chinese:

Harry: I think, if you're Chinese, being able to speak Chinese is a big part of that. I think half of it is culture, a quarter would be language, and then the rest would be... foods, places, relatives, things like that. (1st interview)

Flora expressed a clear preference for forming friendships with people of Asian heritage, particularly East Asian, due to shared cultural elements, especially festivals, food, and language:

Flora: It is easier [to make friends with Asian heritage], compared to becoming friends in other races, but especially White people, they are a bit sneaky... Because it's just better to have friends of your own race. You can really connect... Like the New Year, the food, [also] like speaking to each other. Stuff like that.

Researcher: Are your current good friends from Asian countries?

Flora: Yeah. Some are East Asians themselves. (4th interview)

Existing research has found that festivals foster a sense of connection, as they provide opportunities to experience shared histories and cultures through communal events (Karlsen, 2007; Quinn, 2005). In this light, Flora's desire to befriend those who celebrate common Chinese festivals can be seen as an expression of her identification with Chinese culture. Additionally, Flora's quote suggested that she might prefer to identify with "East Asian" rather than "Chinese", a leaning which could be influenced by the mismatch between her Mandarin proficiency and that of her Chinese HL learning peers, as suggested by Hashtpari et al. (2021). Although this study did not aim to judge adolescents' language proficiency, it is clear that this factor did influence the formation of their identities.

Huhu's case illustrated the deep personal significance that Chinese culture can hold. Her strong emotional connection to Chinese culture was reflected in her fascination with the Chinese zodiac. Huhu's experiences also highlighted the role of adolescents' active engagement with Chinese culture, often through reading activities involving written Chinese script, often through reading activities involving written Chinese script (Alvesson et al., 2017; Kramsch, 1998), in their Chinese identity development. Huhu's emotional attachment to her cultural identity was evident in the pseudonym she chose for herself: *Huhu*, meaning tiger in Mandarin Chinese, which is also her zodiac sign. When asked what she most wanted people to remember about her, she proudly responded:

Huhu: I'm the queen of tigers. That's the most important. (4th interview)

In brief, although this study did not principally focus on the links between culture and identity, the close relationship between heritage language learning and culture is evident in the construction and development of the adolescents' identities.

4.4.6 Microaggression and racism against adolescent Chinese HL learners

The adolescent Chinese HL learners participating in this study discussed experiences of microaggression and racism that influence or contest their identities. For example, Harry asserted that people should refrain from widely promoting their heritage culture, a viewpoint that may be shaped by his school environment:

Harry: I actually don't think we need to tell everybody about our culture. I think it's kind of like you can just celebrate it with your family. I don't think everyone needs to know. I think it's a – it just seems very unnecessary. But, I could tell them {pause} I mean you could [tell them] how red {pause} we like the colour red, I guess that seems quite important. I don't think anything else sticks out a lot. I because everything else is specific to that festival. But red is something that is in most of them, though... So there are people who already accept the whole race, like different races. But the people who don't accept it as much like that, it's incredibly hard to get them to. Because it's like, even if you tell them about all of these traditions and other things, they never really care too much.

Researcher: So did you meet anybody in school who refused to accept other cultures and other races?

Harry: I didn't meet – I mean, I did meet them. They're in my school, I can't really not meet them. But it's like – because they don't tell you that they don't accept it, because most of the people who do this are like the popular kids. And then... So they would never do that because then they will get unpopular. In 2022, they will get called out and then everyone [would] yell at them or whatever. So they don't tell you, but you can tell from their actions that they don't really care... I think there's one kid in our class and he's like, I think he's African. And then they bully him, I think they bully him quite a lot... I think they yelled at him sometimes, But I don't see them that much... I think in the classes I'm in with him, I {pause} I did actually tell the teacher once. I think he got moved to a different seat. Other than that, not really. (3rd interview)

Although Harry referred to what he witnessed as “bullying” rather than “racism”, this may have been due to his young age (13 years old), as his understanding of racism was still evolving (Little et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the tensions in school that he described were clearly rooted in racism. This suggests that witnessing potentially racist behaviour against minorities within mainstream schools may shape HL learners' attitudes to sharing their own cultural heritage. Additionally, racism, even where it is witnessed rather than experienced directly, could hinder the development of a multicultural environment for pupils in England's schools and other institutions. Although Harry did not explicitly say he was fearful of being “bullied” himself, his experiences would not have been conducive to a sense of safety in relation to his own cultural expressions within his mainstream school. As a result, HL learners might be discouraged from actively exploring or expressing their culture (Phinney, 1989; Y. Zhou et al., 2023). While this study did not focus specifically on the mainstream school environment, the experiences of students from global majority backgrounds in British schools, and their cultural identity formation, may be a valuable area for future research.

Meanwhile, Flora maintained a positive in-group attitude toward her membership of the Chinese community. Positive in-group attitudes are typically marked by pride, pleasure, and satisfaction in one's ethnic community, while negative attitudes often manifest as denial of one's ethnicity and a desire to assimilate into the dominant White culture (Francis et al., 2009;

Phinney, 1990). Flora expressed a clear preference for Chinese ethnicity and a negative view of the dominant White culture:

Flora: It's decent [to be a Chinese]. It's better than being White... Any race is.
(4th interview)

Flora's negative emotions related to White British culture might result from her mainstream schooling environment as well. She described White British pupils at her school as unfriendly and expressed general dislike toward the White British community:

Flora: They kind of lie a lot, and they always go out vaping. They think they are cool, but they're not... They just are all, kind of, fake... Because they are all privileged. They think they're better than everyone else and they just aren't... You get [that impression from] some children from my school. And you know, in history when we learn about white people? (4th interview)

Although Flora did not provide more detailed examples of her interactions with White pupils, her comments made it clear that she disagreed with the values she perceived as dominant in her mainstream school. Since values are considered a central part of cultural identity (Whiting et al., 1953, as cited in Jensen, 2011), Flora may also reject identification with British values and beliefs. Flora's attitudes towards White British culture can also be seen as a response to being "othered" by her White British peers (Hashtpari et al., 2021).

Moreover, Flora expressed enthusiasm about the prospect of making friends with Chinese students at university. However, she did not believe this will require her to improve her Chinese language ability, noting that "I must be speaking in English to them anyway" (4th interview), which suggests a preference for using English, potentially influenced by the dominance of English in England (Habicht et al., 2022; Little, 2024), as discussed in Section 4.2.4. While various studies have highlighted the close relationship between HL maintenance and young people's cultural and ethnic identity development (e.g., Curdt-Christiansen, 2016; W. Li, 2015; Little, 2020), Flora's statement suggested that some adolescent HL learners may see language and identity as separate constructs. This echoes findings by Little et al. (2024) that adolescent Chinese HL learners in the UK have diverse understandings of the role of language in their identity constructions and developments. Flora claimed both her Chinese identity and English as her language, which may reflect an essentialist understanding of language and identity, as reflected by her quotes in Section 4.4.4 as well.

Similarly, Hanting expressed a positive in-group attitude towards his Chinese community membership and emphasised the need to defend it when faced with racial bias:

Hanting: *[Being Chinese] means traditions and other things are our responsibility. Regarding traditions, you cannot let others slander them... You cannot let others speak badly of China.*

Researcher: *Have you ever encountered such people?*

Hanting: *Yes.*

Researcher: *Were they your classmates?*

Hanting: *Well... people from the same school... They said something like Chinese eating dogs. Then I retorted¹⁹ back to him and said, “Your whole family eats dogs. It’s very rude to say that.” ... How come they don’t say anything when they are eating our Chinese takeaways? (4th interview)*

Hanting’s response showed that he placed high value on his Chinese identity. Moreover, it highlighted the unwelcoming institutional environment for minority students in England, chiming with calls made by Curdt-Christiansen et al. (2023) for greater equality in school policies in the UK. His experiences also challenge existing research claims that adolescents may develop negative attitudes towards their minority cultures in response to racism from mainstream society (Phinney, 1989) or at least question their worth and identity (Little et al., 2025). Hanting’s experiences also indicate that HL learners’ awareness of racism and anti-racism is shaped by their socio-cultural context. For example, Hanting leveraged the popularity of Chinese foods to challenge racial bias against Chinese people, a perspective influenced by the fact that many of his family members worked in the catering industry. In contrast to Harry’s attitudes, Hanting’s more active response to racism mirrored the finding by Little et al. (2025) that awareness of racism is a developing process, with older pupils typically exhibiting greater understanding of the issue (Hanting was 15 years old). His very assertive stance in defending his community was unique among the adolescents in this study. This points to the potential value of a dedicated study focusing on the racial injustices experienced by adolescents in England with a Chinese heritage and from various social-cultural backgrounds.

¹⁹ 怼, it used to mean poking at people, but now it mainly refers to arguments, which can be either harsh or playful.

4.4.7 Adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities being confirmed and contested

Drawing on social constructionism, this section discusses how adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities are confirmed or contested by others, particularly their parents.

4.4.7.1 Parents link their children's identities with their own well-being

As mentioned in Section 4.3.2.3, Simon's mother enrolled him in online Mandarin lessons without his prior consent. In his interview, Simon attributed this decision to his mother's identity:

Simon: Mum, over here, very nationalist, and really loves her country and wants me to learn [Mandarin Chinese]. (1st interview)

Simon's choice of the word "nationalist" suggested that he had a limited understanding of, or even a subtle resistance towards, his mother's strong emotional attachment to her Chinese heritage. Her sense of attachment to Mainland China and her Chinese language variety also illustrated how sociopolitical climate may shape one individual's identity (Nunes, 2021). Simon's experience resonated with Little's (2020) observation that parents and children within heritage families may have mismatched desires to "return" to their heritage roots. Whereas parents often link their children's HL learning with their own feelings of satisfaction and well-being, children may not share this sense of identification with the HLs and culture (Little, 2020). This disparity was visualised in the language portraits drawn by Simon and his mother.

In her language portrait, Simon's mother acknowledged the complexity in her identity, positioning Mandarin Chinese as representative of her more traditional self:

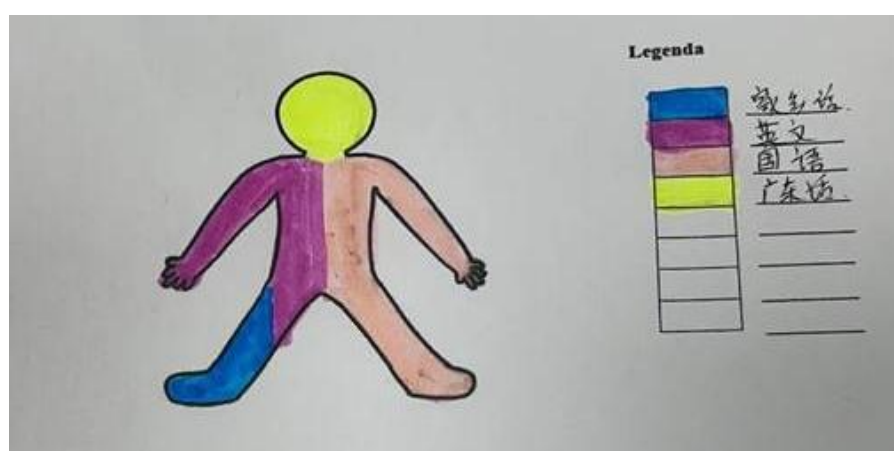


Figure 11 Simon's mother's language portrait²⁰

Simon's mother: *Half is my {pause} more traditional thoughts. And the other half is (non-traditional thoughts). Because I grew up here (in England).*

Researcher: *Which side would be the traditional side?*

Simon's mother: *The side with Mandarin Chinese.... I myself would think I'm half and half. But too many people said that (I'm) more Chinese. (1st interview)*

Simon's mother expressed a strong sense of cultural belonging to the Chinese community, and it is notable that her identity was also positioned by other people (Kraus, 2006; Little et al., 2024) who perceived her as "more Chinese". Her pride in China increased significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic:

Simon's mother: *[Before the pandemic,] my mode of thoughts was like British, [I] just adopted a free-ranging parenting method. [I] didn't care what he did. However, since the pandemic... [I] have started to [feel] really proud of China, so I'm telling him that you must be learning Chinese... In the past, I cannot be bothered. If you want to learn, you get to learn, if you don't want to learn, that's all right... I just think about [China during] Covid... Oh my god, so brave... They built a hospital in three days. Wow, it amazed my eyes... That shows us the power of being united... So suddenly, you feel you're so proud that you are Chinese... I'm so proud of being a Chinese. That's why I'm telling him you should [be] proud that you are Chinese. (1st interview)*

The statements by Simon's mother highlighted her pride in the rising power of Mainland China and the efficiency of Chinese action in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Pride has also been observed in earlier studies of language and identity (Francis et al., 2009). The fact that Simon's mother's pride grew during the pandemic specifically may be linked to awareness of the racism against Chinese during this period, as observed in a study of Chinese mothers in the United States (Y. Yang et al., 2022).

Simon, by contrast, did not appear to share his mother's pride, as his language portrait reflected stronger emotional ties to English. He depicted English with the colour green and placed it at

²⁰ Translation to Simon's mother's agendas, from top to bottom, are: hometown speech, English, Mandarin Chinese, and Cantonese.

the centre of the body, around the chest, whereas Mandarin Chinese was coloured blue and placed on the head (see Figure 4):

Simon: When I think of green, I think of a very truthful person. So, green is kind of, where I'm truthfully {pause} from... Green often means correct. So it is like a truthful essence. So I think that's where I'm originally from... Blue is on my face, to show what I look like. Green, British English, is in my chest, because that's {pause} near the heart. So it's where I was actually born to. (1st interview)

While Simon acknowledged his appearance was regarded as Chinese, he expressed a stronger identification with English values and culture. This contrast between mother and son also reflected different ways of expressing emotions: Simon's mother focuses on broader societal narratives, while Simon's reflections were centred on personal feelings (Pavlenko, 2005). When parents and children hold differing emotions in relation to Chinese language varieties, heritage, and culture, intergenerational frictions may arise – such as Simon's frustration at his mother's decision to enrol him in online Chinese lessons, as discussed at the beginning of this section.

Similar to Simon's mother, Anna's mother also linked Anna's Chinese HL learning to her own well-being:

Anna's mother: *[I think] even you [her children] were born here, and your nationality belongs to here, you are still Chinese. As a Chinese person, you shouldn't forget your origin... I don't want my children not being able to speak Chinese. I think it would be quite terrifying.* (2nd interview)

The emphatic language used by Anna's mother here, including the word “terrifying”, conveyed her insistence on her daughter being Chinese and preserving the language related to their Chinese heritage. This view may fall into the stereotype of the authenticity of identity (Y. Zhou et al., 2023) and neglect the fluidity and complexity of adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities.

Apart from tensions around children's Chinese HL learning, frictions may also arise around food in Chinese heritage families. In this study, many Chinese parents viewed food as a core element of cultural identity and said they feel frustrated or disappointed when their children

reject traditional cuisine, reflecting the historical emphasis on food in Chinese culture (W. Li, 1994; Reddy et al., 2020). When children did not show the expected level of appreciation for Chinese food, parents might feel negative emotions. For example, although Harry expressed a strong emotional connection to China and his extended family when he was visiting, he also admitted to avoiding certain Chinese dishes “if there was something that didn’t look like an English vegetable” (1st interview). He also said that Chinese food that looked different from English food seemed like “alien foods” (1st interview), indicating that he might require a degree of re-acculturation to China (Takhar et al., 2021). His view of what was “safe” to eat appeared rooted in his food experiences in English society. Harry’s ambivalence reflected the concept of transculturality (Kreuzer et al., 2018), where processes of accommodating, re-acculturating, and resisting (Takhar et al., 2021) were found in his negotiation of Chinese and English food cultures. In response to Harry’s experiences, his mother expressed both surprise and frustration:

Harry’s mother: *When we are with other Chinese friends, we often eat Chinese food, but children don’t like that... Isn’t that bizarre? I also think so {laugh} ... His appetite is typical British.... It’s really odd. Because I work in the food industry, the food we serve at home, I cannot say it’s the best, but I think it’s prepared attentively {laugh}. But he doesn’t like it. I’m so mad, [but] there is no solution for it... His younger brother is much better, not like him. He is just like a typical British [at eating]. For things he never had before, he won’t have one bite... You have to try it to know [if you like it]. He just peeked, black [food], [he] won’t eat; [food that] not good-looking, [he] won’t eat... He said he didn’t want to eat tree fungus and mushrooms. I asked why? [He said because they are] black. I said, “Chocolate is also black, why do you eat that then?” [He] will just be silent {laugh}. (2nd interview)*

Harry’s mother’s account further highlights the importance Chinese parents place on food culture, as well as the way she was contesting Harry’s identity – framing his food preferences as “British” despite his continued embrace of his Chinese identity, as discussed earlier.

Similarly, Simon’s mother also expressed disappointment over his disinterest in some Chinese foods, contrasting his behaviour with that of his sister, who enjoyed traditional Chinese dishes:

Simon’s mother: *He said, he might as well have a piece of pizza [instead of eating Chinese food]. He would still, just not much. He could only pick what he*

{pause} For example, if we buy roasted duck or pork, he would eat a bit, with some rice. Things like lobster, pasta, he won't eat them at all. When he eats {pause}, with all due respect²¹, his mouth is quite dumb, not as fastidious as us Chinese. He never eats foods like lobsters, prawns, and crayfish. He doesn't eat anything with shells on. My elder daughter, her mouth is quite smart. [She] likes eating prawns and crabs. Yeah, [she] likes fancy foods. But he only likes poultries... Oh, right, sometimes I make curry chicken, he always asks me, "Did you remove the bones?"... He could still eat [with bones], but he would be like, "Oh my god, why don't you remove the bones?"... Their mouths are just not that excellent. (2nd interview)

The comparisons Simon's mother drew between Simon and his sister regarding their food preferences add weight to the suggestion that Simon might identify more closely with British culture than with Chinese. However, it was unclear whether his mother's attitude – associating a preference for Chinese food with being "smart", and a preference for British food with being "dumb" – was contributing to Simon's resistance towards the Chinese language as well.

Similarly, when parents requested children to follow the Chinese traditions or values they held, without negotiating with children, frictions might emerge:

Anna's mother: *It's just sometimes, when she writes things like birthday cards, I will tell her to write some auspicious words in China red, I think that's more joyous... There are some taboos in China [about colours]. For example, names cannot be written in some colours.... In China, only dead people's names are written in red. Often [names] are written in black and blue pens. So, anyone, I just let her use some common colours, which should be better... Also, good manners when dining, etc. But in Britain, you know, children are often free-range parented... But in my opinion, I always think, we are Chinese, so we should have a Chinese mode, even though you are abroad... But for her, it might be tiring. Because it's quite liberal²² in schools... Suddenly, [when she] comes back, [she] may need to be quiet while eating, and [she] may need to be cautious [at home]. Suddenly she cannot understand. And she is not used to it. [She*

²¹ 说难听一点, which can be translated as "to be more negative", but that may also cause ambiguity.

²² 开放, which can also be translated as "open". "Liberal" was chosen based on the context.

would think] why there are so many rules from China... She always thinks Chinese traditions are weird. (4th interview)

This generational and cultural gap was also reflected in emotional expression. While Anna's mother took into account others' feelings and societal expectations, Anna focused on her own discomfort, which may result from adolescent's high self-esteem (Y. Pan et al., 2020). This difference is also consistent with Pavlenko's (2005) observations on differences between Eastern and Western emotional expression. Her mother's insistence on cultural adherence might also reflect "long-distance nationalism" (Anderson, 1998), overlooking the diversity of contemporary Chinese cultural experiences (Jin, 2017). Consequently, Anna expressed that being Chinese can feel burdensome:

Anna: [Being Chinese] is quite hard, because it has a lot of rules. You're not allowed to do a lot of things... Like sometimes on birthday cards and then you draw a picture, and it's in yellow, right? Then my mum will say that you cannot do one colour. You have to do a, like a different colour with it because yellow represents bad luck or something... She has a lot of things that you're not allowed to do because [we are] from China. (4th interview)

Anna's reflections suggested that her mother might not fully recognise the fluid and evolving nature of adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities, and this lack of recognition had caused Anna some negative emotions concerning Chinese culture and being Chinese.

In brief, these family tensions observed in the cases of Anna, Simon, and Harry, highlighted how parents often held on to traditional values and practices (T. F. Su et al., 2009) and even linked them to their own contentment and well-being (Little, 2020), while children born in the host country might struggle to relate to values unfamiliar to them and feel negative emotions as a result.

4.4.7.2 Adolescents' identities being contested by strangers

Parents were not the only people who sometimes contested the identities of the adolescent Chinese HL learners in this study. Some of the adolescents encountered this challenge among interactions with strangers. For example, Niya had a strong in-group attitude toward her Chinese ethnicity, but her identity was contested in an online Chinese community by members based in China:

Niya: *[Speaking Chinese] can also prove I'm still connected to China. Some people think I have no relation to China if they know I grew up abroad. But I can speak their language, can't I? So I'm Chinese in some ways... I saw that [kind of viewpoint] on some domestic websites. It seems like some people back in China think overseas Chinese who grew up abroad are not real Chinese. I believe this viewpoint is quite silly... I saw [this kind of viewpoint] a few times when I used Douyin in the past... That is also one of the reasons I deleted the app.* (1st interview)

Niya clearly identified as Chinese, as illustrated by her reference to Chinese websites as “domestic.” She also saw her ability to speak the language as a marker of authenticity and belonging, reinforcing the link between HL proficiency and a sense of connection to the heritage community (W. Li et al., 2011). While earlier research suggests that heritage families often lack robust ethnic social networks in host countries (Costigan et al., 2006; Preece, 2016; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2006), Niya’s case shows how HL learners might instead seek to form connections with Chinese communities through social media – a dynamic increasingly enabled by digital technologies.

At the same time, Niya’s reflections revealed that overseas Chinese may face negative perceptions from within the heritage country, as many Chinese people’s understandings of identity may fall into the stereotypes of essentialism and position others based on where they were born or lived (S. Hall, 2015; Ganassin, 2020; Machat-From, 2017). Meanwhile, learning the HL may be a way for overseas Chinese to reclaim their agency and ownership in the construction and development of their identities (Little et al., 2024). Niya’s account also challenged assumptions that children from middle-class backgrounds are more likely to disassociate from the broader immigrant community of their heritage origin (Chaparro, 2019), as Niya’s family could be considered middle-class (see Section 3.5).

In Opal’s case, strangers’ assumptions about her language proficiencies – based on her appearance as ethnically Chinese – had an influence on her motivation to learn Mandarin:

Opal: *[If I learn Mandarin Chinese], it will be easier to talk to people. Because I had quite a few people assume that I speak Mandarin and it's like, really awkward because I don't know how to explain [that] I don't speak Mandarin {laugh}.* (1st interview)

Opal's response to other people's assumptions suggested that she was influenced by the commonly held ideology that links Mandarin Chinese to the appearance of Chinese ethnicity (Ganassin, 2020). The experience might have added another dimension to Opal's motivations for Mandarin Chinese learning – to avoid awkwardness in social situations. Opal's case illustrates that adolescents may internalise the ways they are positioned by others (Kraus, 2006), particularly given the heightened sensitivity of their self-esteem during this age phase (Y. Pan et al., 2020).

4.4.7.3 Translanguaging means low proficiency

As discussed in Section 4.4.2, adolescent Chinese HL learners tend to embrace translanguaging in their language practices. However, some parents in this study appeared to interpret their children's translanguaging as a sign of low proficiency in Chinese, even though this viewpoint had been challenged by previous studies (Gardner-Chloros, 2009; Yow et al., 2018). For example, Simon's mother held misconceptions about his translanguaging:

Simon's mother: *He doesn't have enough abilities [to speak a whole sentence in Chinese only]. (1st interview)*

Research shows that children's vocabulary development is not necessarily hindered by switching between Mandarin and English (Yow et al., 2018), indicating that translanguaging does not negatively impact children's proficiency. Still, some parents expressed concern that translanguaging might harm their children's Chinese maintenance, rather than understanding these practices as a natural part of bilingual language use:

Huhu's mother: *When you are mixing [Mandarin Chinese with English], it's because your brain didn't try to search that word in Chinese in your mind. So you used a more convenient way for you. Then your way of thoughts will become this way. But you could have used this [Chinese] word. If you don't try to [use the word in Mandarin Chinese] in your brain, you will rely on English to express. I think it will impact the progress of your Chinese. (1st interview)*

Huhu's mother's comments suggested that she understood translanguaging practices as a failure rather than as part of a flexible multilingual repertoire (O. García et al., 2014). Her perspective also reflected a concern for authenticity in language and identity (Ganassin, 2020; Y. Zhou et al., 2023)

Since parents link their children's Chinese identities with Chinese proficiency, they might contest children's identities in relation to Chinese language varieties too. For example, Opal's mother was surprised and confused when Opal described her language portrait where she had depicted Mandarin Chinese just on her fingertips:

Opal: I {pause} I'm not good at it. {pause} I only know how to understand some of it. They're like tiny finger tips.

Opal's mother: Your fingertips {All laugh}?

Opal: Yeah.

Opal's mother: I don't think fingertips are useful.

Opal: My fingers are not useful {laugh}? My fingers are useful!

Opa's mother: Is that hence you want to learn it, want to use it?

Opal: Yeah (1st interview)

This conversation revealed the importance of open parent-child communications during the HL learning process (Little, 2023), which are often neglected in heritage families. When Opal's mother contested Opal's Mandarin Chinese proficiency and identity, Opal in turn reclaimed her identity, which also helped her mother understand her motivations for Mandarin Chinese learning.

On the other hand, some parents tried to apply *Chinese-only* family language policies in order to prevent translanguaging. However, this approach sometimes backfired and led to children feeling negative emotions and resisting the use of Mandarin:

Simon: I'd rather speak English. (1st interview)

Moreover, enforcing a strict *one language only* policy appeared difficult in practice. Simon's mother, for example, would often insist that the family speak Chinese at home, but then quickly forget:

Simon: And then, like 2 minutes later, she forgets everything she says. So, we get away with it. (1st interview).

The contradictions between parents' FLPs and practices, as Curdt-Christiansen et al. (2023) argue, may arise from the parents' own language shifts, as first-generation immigrants (Sevinç, 2016). This could be a consideration in Simon's family's case, given the young age of Simon's mother when she migrated to England.

Anna's mother tried to apply a *minimum grasp* strategy, refusing to respond to her children unless they spoke in Chinese, if she thought they were capable of doing so:

Anna's mother: *[I] use English to explain when she cannot understand the words. If you know that word [in Chinese], I force them to speak it [in Chinese] ... I just don't respond to them [if they insist on speaking English], and they often continue to speak in English. At the second time, [I] would tell her to speak it again in Chinese. If she speaks Chinese, I will respond. (2nd interview)*

Anna also expressed frustration with this policy:

Anna: I think... Sometimes it's a bit annoying, because it's something that, um, like one thing that we just want to say in English, and we might not know how to explain it in Chinese. Then we'll have to start explaining a lot so that sometimes our explaining gets very complicated, my mum doesn't know what it is. It's a bit annoying. (3rd interview)

By contrast, Huhu's mother adopted a distinctive kind of family language policy that is not widely reported in the existing literature. She intentionally used the language *opposite* to the dominant environment to support her daughter's bilingual development:

Huhu's mother: *If the environment is Chinese, I would speak more English with her. If the environment is English, I would speak more Chinese with her. The opposite. Because [I] worry that she might forget. Because language is an issue about habits. (1st interview)*

This unique *opposite to the dominant language* family language policy had caused anxiety and stress for Huhu when she was younger, but her mother believed this policy had contributed to her Mandarin Chinese proficiency in the long term:

Huhu's mother: *When [she was] 3 or 4 years old... She thought following this rule was difficult. [She] even cried... because she felt frustrated... But this stage has passed, you are now enjoying the benefits of it, right?*

Huhu: *Yeah.* (1st interview)

Although Huhu appeared to agree with her mother during the interview, this was a leading question, and Huhu's response may have been shaped by the power imbalance between parent and child (Little, 2020). Therefore, more investigation of families employing this type of FLP would be needed before its impacts can be meaningfully interpreted.

To tackle their children's declining proficiency in Mandarin Chinese, some of the participating families adopted transnational lifestyles – a practice that is especially common among middle-class families (Hirsch et al., 2018). Regular communication with extended family abroad and visits to China were frequently mentioned as meaningful ways of strengthening children's cultural ties (Klok et al., 2020). Harry's family, for example, visited China annually prior to the Covid-19 pandemic:

Harry's mother: *[We] used to go back to China quite often... Once every year, during summer holidays... [We would] stay a month or five weeks. [We] just tried to stay as long as possible... [When we were in China we would] visit families, and let them experience the environment, culture and food in China. We would also take them to visit other cities in China.* (1st interview)

Both Huhu's and Niya's families had temporarily relocated to China and enrolled their children in local schools – a move considered beneficial for HL maintenance (Kwon, 2017):

Huhu's mother: *She went back to China for a year, after [taking] Year 1 in Britain... She took Year 1 again in China.* (3rd interview)

Niya: *I was born in Britain, but when I was one year old, my parents took me back to China. I finished Year 1 there. I came back to Britain in Year 2 and have lived here since then.* (1st interview)

It is noteworthy that both families opted to return to China for extended periods, rather than just brief holidays, during the early childhood phase. Huhu's mother explained her reasoning:

Huhu's mother: *Because she was younger back then, so her learning [in mainstream schools] was not very intense. (1st interview)*

However, as children grow older, parents tend to shift their focus towards academic success within the English education system. This shift may in turn influence both parents' and children's attitudes toward Chinese heritage language learning during adolescence, which was examined in Section 4.2.4.2.

4.4.7.4 Parents who understand the complexities of HL learners' identities

Unlike the parents who resisted their children's translanguaging, some of the parents in this study showed understanding of the complexities of their children's relationships to the various languages and language varieties in their lives. Harry's mother, for example, adopted a more flexible and empathetic stance in their family language policy, as well as toward her son's language practices:

Harry's mother: *Our attitudes [as parents] are, you can choose the way in which you can express [your ideas] clearly, and it is convenient for you to say... We also need to know their language mode, young people's language structure. So I don't reject this [children mixing Chinese and English together]. If he talks to me, I'm willing to listen. Because my world and his world are different. So if I can listen to him more often, I can understand more about what things they are interested in, how they make friends, [how they] discuss things. (2nd interview)*

Although Harry's parents still tended to express emotions in Chinese, like many immigrant parents (Sevinç et al., 2018), Harry's mother's comments demonstrated a deeper understanding of HL learners' lived realities. This also reflected a flexible family language policy and aligned with Wilson's (2021) observation that the *move-on* strategy can support harmonious parent-child relationships. As presented in the analysis of the second research question, Harry's family exemplified the importance of mutual emotional understanding in the context of HL learning in multilingual households (Little, 2023).

Similarly, Ximeng and Haijin's father applied the *adult repetition strategy* in family conversations (Lanza, 2007). Being fluent in multiple languages, he evidenced a more nuanced understanding of the language practices of children in Chinese heritage families:

Ximeng and Haijin's father: *If a child is exposed to a bilingual setting from birth, they cannot tell languages from each other. They can only distinguish sounds... Gradually, they will categorise one kind of sound as a language, and [sounds made by] another group of people as another language. This is why I never force them to use a certain language. When they talk to me, they know the sounds I keep making are from one system... But when they try to use sounds from this system, they cannot make certain sounds, because they haven't learned it. So they just use the sounds they know [in English] to talk to me. When this happens, I often show my understanding of their ideas, and I respond to them, [telling] them the ideas you want to express should be said like this in this [heritage] language system... They still do it now, if they don't know how to pronounce a [Chinese] word or use it [in sentences]. (2nd interview)*

Although his explanation might reflect some misconceptions about bilingual infants' linguistic development, as infants can already differentiate languages through babbling (Giancarli, 1999, as cited in Gardner-Chloros, 2009), his approach helped to support the children's HL development while maintaining a positive family atmosphere. However, despite this harmonious environment, neither Ximeng nor Haijin expressed strong motivation to improve their Chinese proficiency or engaged more deeply with Chinese culture. This suggests that harmonious parent-child relationships, albeit important, do not inevitably translate into increased motivation for HL learning.

4.4.8 Summary

In summary, this section has explored the interconnections between adolescent Chinese HL learners' linguistic repertoires and their identity constructions. The findings indicate that most adolescents take pride in their Chinese HL abilities and actively embrace the multiplicity in their linguistic repertoires and identities, echoing the findings of previous studies (Ganassin, 2020; W. Li et al., 2010; Little et al., 2024). Furthermore, parents in this study acknowledged the fluid and complex nature of their children's identities. Nonetheless, essentialist perceptions of Chinese identity as fixed and homogeneous persist among some parents and, in certain cases, among the adolescents themselves, highlighting the ongoing negotiation in the construction and development of adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

Chapter Overview

Following a recap of the study's aims and methodology, this chapter sets out the main conclusions of the study in respect of the three research questions, highlighting and synthesising key findings and points of discussion from Chapter 4. The chapter proceeds to the contributions of the study – theoretical, methodological, and practical – to the research literature on identity, adolescence, heritage language, and families from migration backgrounds. It then sets out recommendations for educators, heritage families, and policymakers. The study's limitations are considered, in light of the findings and discussion in Chapter 4. Finally, the chapter sets out directions for future research.

5.1 Main conclusions of the study

Set in the context of England, the central aim of this study was to explore the language learning experiences and identities of adolescent Chinese HL learners in various settings, including mainstream schools, complementary classrooms/schools, and home environments. The study investigated how these experiences influence the construction, development, negotiation, and contestation of identities among adolescent Chinese HL learners. Additional insights were provided by their parents. Existing studies have explored family language policies (Curd-Christiansen et al., 2023), mainstream school language policies (Cushing, 2020, 2021, 2023), Chinese complementary schooling (Ganassin, 2020), and the identities of adolescent Chinese language learners in the UK (Little et al., 2024). This study investigated the interplay of these factors in the identity construction of the participating adolescent Chinese HL learners.

For this investigation, the study explored adolescent Chinese HL learners' attitudes towards the various languages and language varieties in their lives, as well as the ideologies that shape these attitudes. The study also examined the learners' motivations and emotions, together with the approaches and methods adopted for their HL learning, such as online classrooms. Additionally, the study considered the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on these factors.

The study addressed the following research questions:

RQ1: What are adolescent Chinese HL learners' attitudes towards their languages and language varieties, and what may inform their attitudes?

RQ2: How are the motivations and emotions of adolescent Chinese heritage language learners constructed and developed in the context of their heritage language learning?

RQ3: How do adolescent Chinese HL learners negotiate their identities in the context of their languages and language varieties?

To answer these research questions, the study adopted a bricolage approach to the theoretical framework, linking various concepts and theories addressing language learning, motivations and emotions, and identities. Following a qualitative methodology, a total of 40 semi-structured online interviews were conducted with 10 families from various regions across England, comprising 10 parents and 11 adolescent Chinese HL learners aged 12 to 16. Each of the 21 individual participants also created a language portrait and offered detailed interpretation of their drawing. Data analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke's (2006) guide for thematic analysis.

Next, the conclusions for each research question are set out and discussed, highlighting the main findings of this study.

RQ1: What are adolescent Chinese HL learners' attitudes towards their languages and language varieties, and what may inform their attitudes?

Section 4.2 explored how adolescent Chinese HL learners understand the various languages and language varieties in their lives, including Chinese HL varieties, English, and foreign languages that adolescents learn at mainstream schools or by themselves.

This study found that Mandarin Chinese was valued over other Chinese language varieties by both the adolescent Chinese HL learners and their parents. All adolescents in this study, regardless of their Chinese HL learning methods, were learning Mandarin Chinese, which aligns with the shift from teaching Cantonese to Mandarin observed in Chinese complementary schools in previous studies (Ganassin, 2020; W. Li et al., 2011; Mau et al., 2009). Additionally, adolescents in this study demonstrated limited awareness of the distinctions between Mandarin Chinese and other Chinese language varieties, often referring to all varieties simply as "Chinese" (Ganassin, 2020). Parents also showed a clear preference for Mandarin Chinese, both as the variety used for parent-child communication at home and as the variety their children learned

in complementary classrooms/schools. Although the popularity of teaching Mandarin Chinese in Chinese complementary classrooms/schools contributed to parents' preference, their choices may also be shaped by broader dynamics such as the promotion of Mandarin through Mainland China's language policies (see X. Su et al., 2017; L. Zhu et al., 2025), as well as China's rising global influence (W. Li et al., 2009; Zeng et al., 2021).

Regarding the ability to write Chinese characters, this study challenges previous arguments that both children and parents in Chinese heritage families highly value Chinese handwriting abilities (Ganassin, 2020; Kondo-Brown, 2005; W. Li et al., 2010; Montrul, 2008). While some fathers in the study still emphasised the need for children to manually write Chinese characters or even become skilled in Chinese calligraphy, the mothers demonstrated understanding of adolescents' frustrations with the handwriting work required by fathers or Chinese complementary schools. Furthermore, both parents and adolescents expressed doubts about whether a requirement for manual writing of Chinese characters was still practical or realistic in the contemporary era and in the future, due to technological developments such as voice-to-text functionality (Da et al., 2024). As a result, pinyin, the phonetic system associated with Mandarin Chinese and simplified Chinese characters (Ding et al., 2018; Lü, 2017; E. Zhou, 1956), emerged as the more important skill for adolescents to acquire.

Regarding the learning of Chinese culture, many adolescents in this study actively engaged in exploring cultural content on social media. They viewed culture as an inseparable part of their Chinese HL learning, consistent with findings from previous studies (Ganassin, 2020; T. F. Su et al., 2009). However, adolescents tended to engage in contemporary culture, pursuing trending content online, while the cultural materials selected by their parents and teachers generally adhered to traditional, or even essentialist, interpretations of Chinese culture. These cultural materials often did not align with the lived experiences of adolescent Chinese HL learners or their understanding of contemporary China via the internet (Ganassin, 2020; H. Y. B. Yim et al., 2011).

On the other hand, the adolescents' future learning of their heritage languages appears uncertain. Like previous studies (Curdt-Christiansen, 2020; Cushing, 2023; Fashanu et al., 2020), this study highlights that the dominance of English across various settings in adolescent Chinese HL learners' lives, resulting in a language shift towards English in their language practices. Additionally, due to frustrations with mainstream school language policies, including experiences of being "othered" and having limited or no support for Chinese language varieties

in the mainstream curriculum, parents and adolescents in Chinese heritage families may have to make pragmatic choices and “sacrifice” adolescents’ Chinese HL learning for the sake of their mainstream schooling (Curd-Christiansen et al., 2023; Little et al., 2024). Nevertheless, some parents still hoped for their children to obtain UK-recognised certifications in Mandarin Chinese such as GCSEs or even A-Levels (Ganassin, 2020).

Finally, few adolescents highlighted the foreign languages they learned at mainstream schools as part of their linguistic repertoires. When asked about their foreign language lessons, they often expressed frustration with the limited language choices available at their mainstream schools; some even had negative emotions associated with foreign language learning. Their attitudes towards foreign language lessons may stem from their dissatisfaction with the lack of diversity and limited provision for foreign languages across mainstream schools in England (Collen, 2023).

RQ2: How are the motivations and emotions of adolescent Chinese heritage language learners constructed and developed in the context of their heritage language learning?

Section 4.3 explores adolescent Chinese HL learners’ emotions alongside the development of their motivations in their Chinese HL learning experiences, drawing on participants’ views and also their parents’ perspectives. Employing Dörnyei’s Motivational Self System (2005, 2009) as a framework, the analysis examines adolescents’ *Ideal Self* and *Ought-to Self* across multiple thematic areas, alongside factors contributing to the construction and development of their motivational selves. The *Ideal Self* refers to a language learner’s internal desires for their future self, while the *Ought-to Self* reflects the learner’s awareness of duties, responsibilities, and obligations that must be followed to avoid negative outcomes or meet external expectations (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009).

Examining the adolescent Chinese HL learners’ *Ideal Self*, this study identified five common themes reported by adolescent participants. First, some reported strong enjoyment in developing multilingual abilities (Henry, 2017), with a preference for skills in their Chinese HL. A clear pattern in most adolescents’ *Multilingual Ideal Self* was that their desire for Chinese language proficiency was oriented to Mandarin Chinese rather than other Chinese language varieties, echoing the prestige of Mandarin Chinese identified in the findings for the previous research question. Second, some adolescents expressed a strong desire to use their Chinese HL abilities to gain career and academic opportunities in the future (Callahan et al., 2014), which

may reflect the influence of curriculum design in England on adolescents at different stages of mainstream schooling (Ofsted, 2023). Third, some adolescents fostered a sense of belonging to the Chinese community, which spurred their motivation for Chinese HL learning (Little et al., 2024). Beyond their emotional connections with extended families in China, these adolescents also experienced a sense of belonging and positive emotions through interactions with Chinese-heritage peers in mainstream or Chinese complementary schools (Ganassin, 2020; C. You et al., 2016). Fourth, some adolescents expressed a desire to communicate with more Chinese people using their Chinese language skills (W. G. Kim et al., 2014). However, since all adolescents in this study learned Mandarin Chinese, they might be only considering Chinese people who can speak Mandarin Chinese rather than other Chinese language varieties. While there was mention of successful communication with strangers and how this experience may bring them confidence in learning Chinese HL, the focus of most participants was on communicating with extended family members. Finally, the convenience of knowing Chinese for future trips to China was also cited, but by fewer numbers of adolescents – possibly due to the Covid-19 pandemic travel restrictions (Cai, 2021). These individuals had previous experiences of travelling to Mainland China and successfully using their Chinese abilities during these trips. They tended to view their Chinese language skills as less closely tied to their well-being, in comparison with individuals who were mainly motivated by belonging or extended family communication (Little, 2020).

Conversely, their *Ought-to Self* was shaped by perceived responsibilities, including securing future employment, fulfilling parental and other external expectations, and maintaining good academic performance. In contrast to the *Ideal Self*, adolescents who linked future career opportunities with their *Ought-to Self* might be seen as illustrating Norton's (2013) investment theory: they considered their Chinese proficiency strategically as a tool that they were investing in to enhance their competitiveness in the labour market or safeguard them from unemployment (Nye, 2023), rather than as a pursuit to satisfy intrinsic needs or desires. In contrast to those motivated by a sense of belonging, adolescents who felt a responsibility to learn Chinese were more focused on avoiding negative outcomes, such as disappointing their parents or failing to meet external expectations, than on seeking positive emotions or self-fulfilment (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). Within Chinese heritage families where one or even both parents could not speak English, the dominant language in their host country, adolescents inevitably took up the duty to learn Chinese language varieties in order to translate for their parents and thus ensure their parents' survival in England (Beiser et al., 2006; Little, 2020; Little et al., 2024). This

motivation was more pronounced where both parents could not speak English. However, if adolescents could communicate with one parent in English, they tended to feel less motivated to learn Chinese for the sake of the other parent (Lanza, 2007) and to feel frustrated in relation to communication with that parent (who cannot speak English) (Little, et al., 2024; Sevinç, 2018, 2020). Some adolescents' motivation for learning Chinese appeared to be linked to a desire to avoid disappointing family members, including their parents and extended family members, particularly grandparents (Fuligni et al., 2004; Mengwei et al., 2020). Additionally, some adolescents expressed anxieties or fears about disappointing parents or teachers, which may be influenced by the “model minority” ideology (Y. Zhou et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, adolescents' desires and motivations were also contested by others, including their peers, teachers and parents. Some adolescents felt they were being forced by their parents to learn Chinese (Weger-Guntharp, 2006; K. F. Wong et al., 2010), reflecting an imbalance or disparity between their own desires concerning languages and their parents' expectations of them. As a result, these adolescents frequently reported negative emotions related to various aspects of their Chinese HL learning, as well as strained parent-child (Little, 2020) or teacher-student relationships (Gregersen et al., 2014).

Across the analysis of the learners' motivations, most adolescents in this study were motivated by both *Ideal Self* and *Ought-to Self*, echoing the dynamic between these two factors found in studies of second language learners' Motivational Self (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). Adolescents who were predominantly guided by their *Ideal Self* generally experienced more positive emotional engagement with Chinese HL learning. Influential factors shaping adolescents' motivational selves include the linguistic environments of both school and home, teaching methods, teacher-student relationships (Greenhalgh, 2002; Gregersen et al., 2014), family dynamics (Little, 2023) and the emotions experienced through these interactions. Compared to the motivational selves of second language learners in Dörnyei's research (2005, 2009), HL learners' motivational selves were more significantly oriented to families, including extended families back in the heritage countries. Furthermore, the shifts in teaching methods and family dynamics precipitated by the Covid-19 pandemic were also highlighted in this study as factors that influenced the learners' motivational selves. (Dewaele et al., 2020; L. E. Kim et al., 2024).

On the other hand, adolescents who were initially motivated by a stronger *Ought-to Self* were sometimes able to develop a stronger *Ideal Self* if they began to experience positive emotions associated with Chinese learning (Dewaele et al., 2014; Sevinç et al., 2023). Moreover,

adolescents in this study also reported experiencing more positive emotions related to their Chinese HL learning and abilities as they grew older (Caldas et al., 2002; Caldas, 2008; Little et al., 2024).

RQ3: How do adolescent Chinese HL learners negotiate their identities in the context of their languages and language varieties?

Section 4.4 investigated how adolescent Chinese HL learners negotiated their identities in relation to the various languages and language varieties they learn across different settings, including home, mainstream schools, Chinese complementary classrooms/schools, and other social backdrops. The understanding of identity in this study is grounded in both Social Identity Theory and the social constructionism approach (as discussed in Section 2.4). Parents' perspectives were also considered, as they may contest or confirm adolescents' identities. The adolescents also reported that their identities were negotiated and (re)constructed through interactions with various factors: they drew on their linguistic repertoires, encounters with the cultures of both their heritage and host country, and interactions with others in various settings, particularly their families and extended families.

Analysis of adolescents' subjective interpretations of their identities revealed the complex, multiple, dynamic, and sometimes contradictory nature of an individual's identity. This finding resonates with existing studies on identity (Ganassin, 2020; S. Hall, 2002; Holiday, 2010, 2021; Holmes, 2015; Little, 2020, 2024; Peirce Norton, 1995). Similar to Chinese HL learners in previous research (e.g., Ganassin, 2020; Little et al., 2024), many adolescents in this study embraced the fluidity in their language practices and identities.

On the other hand, some adolescents viewed language as an identity marker (W. Li et al., 2011) but also embraced an essentialist understanding of identity, linking it solely to one's place of birth or one's parents' ethnicity (Y. Zhou et al., 2023). Additionally, if adolescents had limited encounters with their Chinese HL, for example if they lacked opportunities to visit heritage countries, had little exposure to Chinese culture, or lacked environments where they could use the Chinese language varieties, they might exclude Chinese from their linguistic repertoires or identities. However, they still identified as Chinese due to their parents' ethnicity. This situation was particularly noted in the case of one adolescent from a Cantonese-speaking family (Flora), highlighting the hierarchy between Mandarin Chinese and other Chinese language varieties (Ganassin, 2020). Interestingly, another participant from a Cantonese-speaking family (Opal)

did not express the same understanding of identity and language. These examples may reflect the limitations of this study and suggest directions for future research on Chinese language varieties other than Mandarin. This is further discussed in Sections 5.3 and 5.4.

Adolescent participants also reported that their identities were contested by strangers, such as people they encountered on social media or visiting tourists from Mainland China. Although these experiences conveyed negative perceptions about overseas Chinese from other Chinese people (Ganassin, 2020; S. Hall, 2015; Machat-From, 2017), learning Chinese helped the participants to reclaim their agency and ownership in the construction and development of their identities (Little et al., 2024).

The study found that adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities were also contested by microaggressions and racism they witnessed or experienced in England, from peers, teachers, or strangers. However, younger adolescents may not yet have acquired the vocabulary to fully articulate these experiences and label them as racism and prejudice (Little et al., 2025). This finding is particularly concerning for me, as a Chinese researcher in education living in England, given the unfriendly school environment for language diversity in England, as discussed in Section 4.2. In Section 5.4, I address this finding again with regard to future research directions.

Turning to the parental perspective, in this study the adolescents' identities were both confirmed and contested by parents. Some parents linked their children's Chinese HL language proficiency and Chinese identity with their own satisfaction and well-being (Little, 2020). These parents might be clinging to the idea of the authenticity of a Chinese identity (Ganassin, 2020; Y. Zhou et al., 2023) and struggle with their children's differences from them, particularly regarding proficiency in Chinese. When their children rejected identification with Chinese language or culture, some parents adopted assertive or even aggressive approaches (Y. Wang, 2023) to override their children's preferences in language learning and practices. Still, some other parents in this study expressed understanding of the dynamic and fluid nature of adolescent Chinese HL learners' identities, which typically led to more harmonious parent-child relationships (Little, 2023). This challenges the essentialist understanding of language and identity observed in overseas Chinese parents in previous studies (Abdi, 2011; W. Li et al., 2010; Mau, 2013). Although more recent studies have also detected an essentialist understanding of Chinese language and identity (Ganassin, 2020; Little et al., 2024; Y. Zhou et al., 2023), these studies and the present study also found that more and more parents and Chinese HL speakers hold more positive attitudes to identity, recognising its fluidity and

multiplicity, which may signal greater harmony in intergenerational relationships in Chinese heritage families in England in the future.

5.2 Contributions and recommendations

This section discusses the various contributions of this study from theoretical, methodological, and practice perspectives. Key contributions identified in this study and the structure of this section are presented in the figure below:

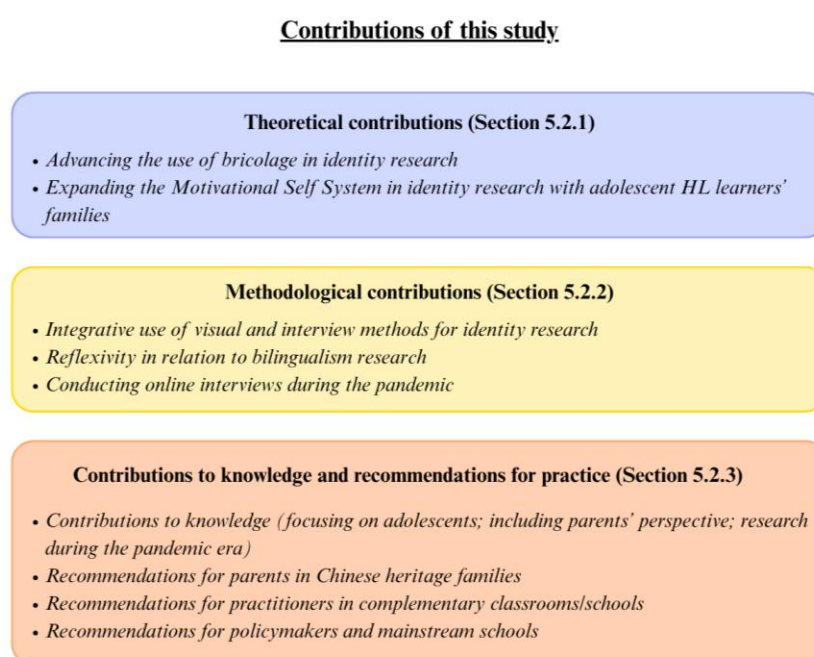


Figure 12 Contributions identified in this study

Alongside these contributions, I also offer recommendations aimed at key stakeholders including parents in Chinese heritage families, Chinese HL teachers and schools, and policymakers in England.

5.2.1 Theoretical contributions

As discussed in Section 2.5, this study adopts a *bricolage* approach (Denzin et al., 1999; 2023) to interweave a range of concepts and theoretical frameworks. While the bricolage approach has been applied in research on immigrant youth in education settings (Ganassin, 2020; Lashua, 2006; McLean, 2008), this study extends its application to the context of Chinese heritage families. In doing so, it contributes theoretically by adapting this flexible, interdisciplinary approach to a family-based research context. The research brings together multiple concepts and theories: *language ideologies*, *Social Identity Theory* (Tajfel et al., 1979), and the *social*

constructionist approach to identity (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), proposing an integrated framework for understanding the language learning and identities of adolescent Chinese HL learners (see Figure 1 in Chapter 2, Section 2.5). This synthesis offers a more comprehensive lens for analysing how language learning, identity, and social context intersect. Moreover, it expands the role of reflexivity (Denzin et al., 1999, 2023) in identity and language research by highlighting the influence of the researcher's own linguistic repertoire and positionality, which is a dimension that is particularly important when working with multilingual and multicultural participants (Ganassin, 2020).

The study adopts Dörnyei's *Motivational Self System* (2005, 2009) to examine the motivations of adolescent Chinese HL learners. While this theoretical model has recently been used in research on Chinese HL learners (see Little et al., 2024), it is still more commonly applied in the field of second language acquisition. By using it to study heritage language learning among adolescents, this research demonstrates the adaptability and relevance of the model to HL research, thereby expanding its methodological reach.

Next, these two key areas of theoretical contribution are discussed in more detail.

5.2.1.1 Advancing the use of bricolage in identity research

As illustrated in Section 2.5, this study employs a bricolage approach that integrates disparate concepts and theories into a theoretical framework that can be brought into a productive lens for identity research (see Figure 1).

The interfacing of concepts such as *linguistic repertoires* and *language ideologies* with identities supports a greater understanding of the dynamics between adolescent Chinese HL learners' languages and language varieties, and the dynamics between adolescents and their parents in relation to their Chinese HL learning and maintenance.

A bricolage approach also allows this study to contribute to re-theorisations of HL learners' motivations and identities. The motivations of adolescent Chinese HL learners are theorised using both the *Motivational Self System* (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009) and *Investment Theory* (Norton, 2013). The approach to identity uses both Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel et al., 1979; Hogg, 2016) and social constructionism (Berger et al., 1966). However, by tracing the fragmented, fluid, and sometimes contradictory ways that adolescents negotiate their identities, the study offers a more complex and comprehensive model of HL learners' identities – one that

is sensitive to emotional tensions, motivation development, and power relations, and avoids the essentialist view of their identities.

Through this theoretical framework, the study not only responded to the multifaceted nature of the research context, but also modelled a theoretically informed, yet grounded, approach for future qualitative inquiry in similar domains. It highlights how a bricolage framework can accommodate complexity without sacrificing analytical coherence, and it offers a practical contribution to researchers grappling with the intersections of language, culture, emotion, motivation, ideology and identity in multilingual and heritage contexts.

5.2.1.2 Expanding the Motivational Self System in identity research with adolescent HL learners' families

While *Motivational Self System* theory has traditionally been applied to research on second/foreign language learning (see Dörnyei, 2005, 2009; Dörnyei et al., 2016; Ushioda, 2011; 2017; You et al., 2016), few studies have applied the model to HL learners' aspirations for future selves. Also, existing studies on language learners, even HL learners, that have drawn on the *Motivational Self System* (e.g., Little et al., 2024) have not explored parents' perspectives nor considered how the imbalance in parent-child relationships may influence HL learners' motivations.

By adopting the Motivational Self System and integrating insights from family language policies (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013, 2020; Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2023; Little, 2020), this study offers a more nuanced understanding of how adolescent Chinese HL learners' motivations are shaped by their experiences within their immediate families and extended families. The findings reveal that HL learners are also motivated by images of future selves, although their families' influence on them is very significant, compared to second language learners' experiences.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the literature on HL learners' motivations in three keyways. First, it extends existing models of the *Motivational Self System* by showing its applicability in the context of Chinese heritage families in England. Second, it highlights the importance of familial relationships, specifically parent-child relationships, which has been underexplored in prior work. Third, it offers a potential model specifically for the HL Motivational Self System, which could be expanded by future HL studies adopting this theory.

5.2.2 Methodological contributions

This research has made specific methodological contributions to the relevant fields: the combined use of visual methods and semi-structured interviews for adolescent identity research in Chinese heritage families; reflexivity related to bilingualism research; and insights from research adaptations during the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.2.2.1 Integrative use of visual and interview methods for identity research

A key methodological contribution of this study lies in the combined use of semi-structured interviews and visual methods, specifically *language portraits*. While both methods are well-established in qualitative research, their integrated application in a family-based, cross-generational setting involving adolescents is underexplored (see Romanowski & Wąsikiewicz-Firlej, 2024). Various studies have employed language portraits primarily in classroom-based research (Carbonara, 2023; Coffey, 2015; Ganassin, 2020; Soare et al., 2020). In contrast, this study applied them within the home environment, engaging both parents and children in the drawing process, which facilitated rich, intergenerational interactions and conversations within Chinese heritage families.

Language portraits were used as an icebreaker activity at the beginning of the first interview, when rapport between participants and the researcher had only been minimally established through informal introductions. The drawing process proved effective in initiating conversations, including on sensitive issues (Cohen et al., 2018). Throughout Chapter 4, the quotes from participants' interpretations of their language portraits provided important insights into their emotions, language ideologies, and identities. While explaining their portraits, participants tended to transition readily into sharing their inner thoughts and reflections.

Notably, the use of the language portraits method enabled participants to coherently and creatively express their multilingualism (Krumm, 2011), particularly those who felt uncertain about their verbal expression skills. Importantly, the drawing activity also generated spontaneous family conversations. When adolescents explained their portraits, several parents were surprised by the depth and creativity of their children's reflections. This underscores the potential of language portraits to stimulate intra-family dialogue and mutual understanding, while also prompting self-reflection.

The study demonstrates the value of language portraits more specifically as a means for children to reflect on their "self-perception as multilingual selves" (Melo-Pfeifer, 2015, p. 197).

The creative process allowed participants to connect their linguistic repertoires with the concept of self, opening the way to insights into participants' emotions and ideologies in relation to their languages and language varieties. In addition, the language portraits helped inform and tailor the subsequent interview questions in ways that were appropriate and meaningful for each family's context.

Overall, this study highlights the utility of language portraits as an inclusive research tool, particularly within family and heritage language contexts, which empowers participants to express themselves. The capacity of language portraits to evoke emotional, reflective, and collaborative responses makes them especially valuable in qualitative, cross-generational research on language, identity, and multilingualism.

In the research design, the language portrait activity took place in an interview context. There were four interviews per family, involving both parents and children. This layered data collection approach supported a nuanced understanding of Chinese HL learners' language learning and identity development, including the intergenerational dynamics involved (Johnson et al., 2020). It also allowed the researcher to build rapport gradually, which was crucial given the sensitivity of the topics and the emotional dimensions of the participants' narratives. This approach contributes to a replicable model for future studies involving HLs and families.

5.2.2.2 Reflexivity in relation to bilingualism research

As stated above, a bricolage approach emphasises researchers' reflexivity (Denzin et al., 1999, 2023). The rich account of researcher reflexivity in this study, especially concerning insider-outsider dynamics shaped by the languages and language varieties used, includes critical engagement with positionality, accent and/or language variety prestige, and perceptions of authority and power relations. The account contributes to methodological transparency and provides guidance for researchers working with culturally and linguistically similar but diverse populations.

The study highlights the benefits of translanguaging in interviews with bilingual participants, especially with young people. Although studies of heritage language learning emerged 60 years ago (see Fishman, 1964), the strategy of translanguaging during interviews with HL learners has become increasingly common in recent years (see W. Li, 2011; Ganassin, 2020). Adolescent participants in this study clearly expressed their preference for translanguaging in interviews as it makes them feel more comfortable and confident. Researchers who work with

multilingual speakers should consider adopting translanguaging in their interviews, if the researchers themselves are also multilingual.

The value of translanguaging also lies in the tackling of perceived power imbalance. I was aware that parents and adolescents in Chinese heritage families may have perceived me, a native speaker of Mandarin Chinese from Mainland China, as an authority figure. This perception may stem from widely held notions of *authenticity* in Chinese language varieties, and the higher prestige often accorded to Mandarin Chinese compared to other varieties (Ganassin, 2020; W. Li et al., 2011; Y. Zhou et al., 2023). To address this dynamic, I consistently offered translanguaging options to adolescent participants and intentionally engaged in open and friendly conversations with parents about accents and diverse dialects. In these efforts I aimed to foster a more inclusive research environment for participants from various dialectical backgrounds.

Finally, researcher reflexivity was also embedded in my approach to transcribing and translating the interview data. By maintaining transcripts in the original languages used during the interviews, I sought to minimise researcher interference during the translation process, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of the data analysis (Al-Amer et al., 2016). Furthermore, translated quotes were returned to participants for verification, reflecting ethical considerations in bilingual research, particularly bearing in mind that most of the participants were under age. This verification practice not only upholds transparency and participant agency but also ensures that the participants' intended meanings are accurately represented in the research output.

For future research involving heritage families or HL learners, particularly if conducted by native speakers of Mandarin Chinese, it is essential to acknowledge the potential power imbalances between participants and researchers that may arise from the hierarchies embedded in Chinese language varieties. Researchers should remain critically reflexive and try to cultivate open, respectful, and dialogic relationships with participants across different linguistic backgrounds, in order to reduce any unintended imbalances in authority or perceived authenticity.

5.2.2.3 Conducting online interviews during the pandemic

Due to travel restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic, all interviews in this study were conducted via Google Meet. Beyond its synchronous communication functionality, Google Meet offers several advantages over other video-conferencing tools. As a free platform that

operates directly within a browser without requiring software installation (e.g., Skype), it reduced both technological and financial barriers to participation (Ironsi, 2022). This accessibility also minimised the time and effort required to provide technical guidance to participants. Furthermore, because users who are external to an institution must be granted permission to join a Google Meet session, the platform can enhance information security during online interviews.

This study also highlights the broader potential of online platforms to extend research reach across geographically dispersed populations (Bolin et al., 2023; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2021), which is particularly relevant to the residential patterns of the Chinese population in England (UK Government, 2020). Additionally, Google Meet supported participants' emotional safety when discussing sensitive topics such as identity, belonging, and racialised experiences (Bolin et al., 2023). These findings contribute to emerging discussions on the legitimacy, ethical considerations, and methodological value of digital fieldwork in post-pandemic research contexts (e.g., Engward et al., 2022).

5.2.3 Contributions to knowledge and recommendations for practice

This study makes a significant contribution by generating situated and specific knowledge about the identities of Chinese HL learners in England, particularly adolescents aged 12 to 16 years. Based on these contributions, this study proposes recommendations for practice, including practices of parents in heritage families, educators, and policymakers, aiming to support the development and maintenance of Chinese HL learning in England and similar sociolinguistic settings.

5.2.3.1 Contributions to knowledge

Informed by a social constructionist paradigm, the study explores how adolescent participants make sense of their language learning experiences across three interrelated domains: mainstream schooling, heritage language learning, and the family, in relation to their identities.

Unlike studies that isolate one context or rely solely on learner narratives, this research adopts a holistic and multivocal design by integrating parental perspectives. This model allows for a richer understanding of how family dynamics, educational systems, and heritage converge and sometimes conflict in shaping multilingual adolescents' identities. Furthermore, the empirical data were collected during the Covid-19 pandemic, a temporally significant moment that intensified home-school dynamics, disrupted formal learning environments, and altered

linguistic routines. In doing so, the study provides timely insights into how multilingual practices and identities are negotiated in times of uncertainty and social disruption. Findings shed light on Chinese heritage families' emotional and practical responses to disruptions in HL maintenance and limited connections with extended family members and heritage countries, as well as their responses to the racial bias in society that increased during this time period (Little et al., 2025). This unique context affords insight that may inform future research on heritage language practices in migrant families in the post-pandemic era.

5.2.3.2 Recommendations for parents in Chinese heritage families

Given that this study of young heritage language learners was situated in the context of Chinese heritage families in England, a series of recommendations is offered for parents living in similar sociolinguistic contexts.

First, parents are encouraged to cultivate open and supportive parent-child conversations that address emotional experiences associated with HL learning and maintenance. Previous research has underscored the value of such conversations in fostering harmonious intergenerational relationships (Little et al., 2023). Consistent with that message, this study reveals that families in which parents acknowledged adolescents' challenges and responded with empathy tended to demonstrate more emotionally supportive dynamics. When parents adopt an encouraging rather than pressurising approach, adolescents are more inclined to engage with HL learning, particularly when they feel affirmed and accepted in relation to their heritage language and cultural background.

Second, parents may benefit from adopting more flexible family language policies. Specifically, incorporating translanguaging practices, where adolescents are allowed to shift fluidly between languages without fear of correction, should enhance learners' linguistic confidence and emotional wellbeing. As demonstrated in this study, such flexibility facilitates a more positive and inclusive language learning environment at home.

Finally, where feasible, parents should aim to create or support opportunities for adolescents to use their HL in meaningful, real-life contexts. Participants who engaged in communicative practices such as conversations with extended family members or giving assistance to Mandarin-speaking tourists all reported increased motivation for HL learning, alongside a stronger sense of belonging to the Chinese-speaking community.

5.2.3.3 Recommendations for practitioners in complementary classrooms/schools

Although this study did not include the perspectives of practitioners working in complementary classrooms or schools (as discussed further in Section 5.3 on limitations), both parents and adolescents reflected on their experiences and interactions with such practitioners. Informed by these reflections, the study proposes several recommendations for educators operating in these settings.

First, the findings highlight a mismatch between the cultural content typically selected by practitioners and the cultural interests of adolescent Chinese HL learners (Archer et al., 2010; Ganassin, 2020; Smith et al., 2020). To bridge this gap, it is recommended that practitioners incorporate more diverse and youth-relevant representations of Chinese culture (e.g., trending themes and topics in digital media and social media) into the HL curriculum. This would support better alignment of teaching materials with adolescents' lived experiences and contemporary cultural engagement.

Second, this study highlights the emotional dimensions of HL learning and their impact on learners' identities. Practitioners are urged to reflect critically on their teaching styles and language ideologies, as these may affect learners' emotions and engagement. Teacher-student relationships (Gregersen et al., 2014), peer dynamics within the classroom (Y. Pan et al., 2020), and family expectations (Gruszczyńska-Thompson, 2024) all play a role in shaping adolescents' motivation and emotional responses to HL learning. In recognition of the fluid and dynamic nature of Chinese HL learners' identities (Ganassin, 2020; S. Hall, 2015; W. Li et al., 2011; Little et al., 2024), practitioners should also foster inclusive pedagogies that embrace translanguaging practices. These approaches can positively contribute to learners' motivation, identity development, and sense of belonging.

Finally, this study calls into question traditional approaches to teaching Chinese character writing. While some practitioners and parents continue to value manual character writing (Ganassin, 2020), many of the adolescents and parents in this study expressed doubts about its relevance in the digital age. With the rise of voice-to-text technologies, the functional use of pinyin may grow increasingly more prominent than handwriting skills. Additionally, some parents may choose to deprioritise children's character handwriting skills as a pragmatic compromise (Curd-Christiansen et al., 2023), for example in the face of heavier academic demands in secondary school. Therefore, it is recommended that practitioners engage in open

dialogue with parents to negotiate expectations regarding character writing. Such discussions can help tailor instruction in a way that respects both pedagogical values and the evolving practical needs of learners and their families.

5.2.3.4 Recommendations for policymakers and mainstream schools

At an institutional level, this study offers several recommendations for policymakers and mainstream schools in England, with the broader aim of informing other sociocultural contexts where educational systems strive to promote multiculturalism and multilingualism.

First, mainstream education policies in England require urgent reform to actively support HL maintenance. This should include implementing more inclusive curriculum designs and diversifying language curriculum options beyond the Big 3, which are French, Spanish, and German (Collen, 2023). Schools should be encouraged, and financially supported, to recruit and train teachers capable of offering a wider range of language lessons that reflects the linguistic backgrounds of their student populations.

Second, there is a pressing need for increased investment in teacher training programmes to address cultural and linguistic diversity. Such training would equip practitioners with the understanding and tools to foster more inclusive, affirming, and linguistically sensitive classroom environments, even beyond language classrooms in mainstream schools. Given that 21.4% of pupils in England speak a language other than English (DfE, 2025), and this number continues to rise, the necessity of recognising and valuing multilingualism in educational settings is ever more apparent. Specific attention must also be paid to the prevention of language-based microaggressions found in this study (also see Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2023; Little et al., 2025) and the promotion of positive attitudes toward linguistic diversity among both staff and students.

Finally, a national policy framework is needed to address the broader issue of the linguistic environment in England. As English continues to dominate public, educational, and social spheres (Fashanu et al., 2020), efforts should be made to raise the visibility of other languages. Promoting linguistic diversity and multiculturalism in wider society can positively influence both HL learners' motivation and their sense of belonging, eventually leading to a more equal, diverse and inclusive society.

Overall, this study underscores that heritage language maintenance and the identity development of adolescent HL learners are not merely individual pursuits. Rather, they are shaped by a complex interplay of emotional connections, familial expectations, institutional structures, and broader experiences of recognition or marginalisation. By offering targeted recommendations to key stakeholders within this ecosystem, this study contributes to the vision of a more equitable and supportive environment for HL families and learners in the future.

5.3 Limitations

This study is not without limitations. Firstly, the sample consisted of Chinese heritage language learners and one parent from each family. The absence of input from teaching practitioners means that the perspectives of those responsible for delivering Chinese language lessons in complementary or mainstream schools remain underexplored (e.g., Ganassin, 2020). Additionally, by interviewing only one parent per household, the study may have failed to capture the full complexity of family language ideologies, particularly in cases where the other parent was less actively involved or held differing views.

Secondly, due to the restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted online. While this enabled access to geographically dispersed families, it may have reduced the depth of interpersonal engagement typically afforded by in-person interviews. Furthermore, the reliance on digital platforms may have unintentionally excluded families with limited internet access or digital literacy, thus narrowing the range of socio-economic backgrounds represented (Malkowski et al., 2024).

Thirdly, as a qualitative inquiry, this study does not seek to generalise its findings but instead aims to offer in-depth insights into the lived experiences of a small, purposively selected group. The data were collected over a certain period of time but do not account for potential longitudinal developments in participants' attitudes, identities, and family practices, or for the potential influence of participating in these interviews, especially given that identities of HL learners are constantly evolving (Little et al., 2024).

Fourthly, given the rich diversity of Chinese language varieties (W. Li et al., 2011), this study was limited in its ability to recruit participants from families where Chinese varieties other than Mandarin Chinese were preferred. While this participant distribution reflects the prevailing prestige of Mandarin Chinese within and beyond the overseas Chinese community, it also presents a limitation. Specifically, the underrepresentation of other Chinese language varieties

restricts opportunities to examine how adolescent Chinese heritage language learners negotiate, compare, or contest their identities across different Chinese language varieties.

Finally, the researcher's position as an insider-outsider may have influenced both the interview dynamics and the interpretive process. While reflexivity was embedded throughout the research design and analysis, the influence of the researcher's own cultural background, assumptions, and emotional investments cannot be entirely ruled out (BERA, 2018).

In response to these limitations and the key findings that merit further attention, I discuss potential directions for future research in the next section.

5.4 Directions for future research

As this chapter concludes, it opens multiple pathways for future research that may enrich and extend our understanding of Chinese HL learning in diasporic contexts. Firstly, more attention should be paid to the role of dialects in Chinese HL maintenance, as dialectal diversity reflects the heterogeneity of the overseas Chinese community and adds complexity to language transmission across generations.

Additionally, more classroom-based empirical research is needed to evaluate and innovate HL teaching methods, particularly in complementary schools and other community-based settings. Comparative studies across different societal contexts, such as between the United States and the UK, would also provide valuable insights into how sociopolitical, cultural, and educational structures shape HL development.

Furthermore, the role of digital technologies in facilitating HL learning calls for further exploration – for example, the increase in online teaching and learning during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the use of technologies in traditional in-person HL classrooms.

Several other themes also emerged from this study that deserve further attention. For instance, the unique environment of boarding schools with a high proportion of Chinese international students presents a distinctive sociolinguistic context that may shape adolescents' language identities. Moreover, the issue of racial bias and injustice raised in interviews highlights the need for critical inquiry into the racialised experiences of Chinese adolescents in English schools and their responses to bias. The contrasting attitudes between parents and children regarding heritage food and cultural values suggest an intergenerational tension that could be

explored in relation to food culture and belonging. Additionally, the gender divide among mothers and fathers in Chinese heritage families, specifically the negative emotions that may be felt by parents, call for more research as well. Lastly, given the temporal significance of the Covid-19 pandemic, further research should investigate the long-term impact of this global event on the identity development of adolescent Chinese heritage language learners in the post-pandemic era.

5.5 Final thoughts as a researcher

Conducting this research has significantly strengthened my qualitative research skills, particularly in engaging with multilingual young people and families from migration backgrounds. I have learned to navigate the ethical and emotional complexities of working with participants whose stories often reflect broader experiences of marginalisation, belonging, and identity negotiation. Tools such as visual language portraits, coupled with reflexive interviewing, taught me to listen with curiosity and care rather than assumption.

Aside from the development of my methodological skills, this project has reaffirmed my passion for socially engaged research that supports global majority communities, beyond the Chinese community. As someone who straddles cultures and languages myself, I became more aware of how academic research can either reproduce or resist dominant narratives. This awareness has motivated me to contribute to more projects and practices that honour diversity and intergenerational dialogue.

My interest in the field of heritage languages and adolescent identities, although long embedded in my personal life trajectory, was intensified during the Covid-19 pandemic. While restrictions on conducting fieldwork have since been lifted, tensions surrounding language and identity continue to persist, particularly in the current sociopolitical climate. In light of rising concerns about migration policies in the UK, this study brings to the fore not only questions about individuals' sense of belonging, but also broader issues concerning how power dynamics shape and influence these enduring conversations around identity, language, and inclusion. Looking ahead, I aim to pursue new inquiries sparked by this study, while continuing to refine the techniques, ethics, and sensitivities cultivated during this doctoral journey. Overall, I have come to see research not only as a tool for knowledge production, but also as a relational act grounded in empathy, accountability, and hope.

Appendix A: Recruitment poster



Participants Needed for PhD Study (In England)



👉 Are you a parent/carer of a child
aged 12 to 16?

👉 Are you and/or your partner Chinese?

👉 Is your child learning Chinese?
(At home/schools/complementary schools...
you name it!)

👉 Are you and your children
interested in sharing your experiences
in learning different languages?



👉 Interested?
Questions?
Contact me:

kli56@sheffield.ac.uk

Thanks 😊😊



博士课题诚招在英志愿者

👉 您是12岁到16岁孩子的家长吗？

👉 您和（或）您的伴侣是中国人吗？

👉 您的孩子在学习中文吗？

（在家/学校/兴趣班/周末学校.....都可以！）

👉 您和您的孩子是否有兴趣分享学习中文的动机，学习中文的感受，学习过程中的难忘经历，对中国文化的情感倾向等等？

（最终的论文中不会出现您的个人信息）



👉 如有任何问题咨询或
有兴趣参加，
请联系：

kli56@sheffield.ac.uk

微信：curly_kl备注课题

Appendix B: Consent form for parents



The influence of language learning experiences on identities of young Chinese heritage language learners in England

Consent Form

<i>Please tick the appropriate boxes</i>	Yes	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated 14/07/2022 or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question, please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	☐	☐
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	☐	☐
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include being interviewed and being audio recorded.	☐	☐
I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield.	☐	☐
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study before the deadline, which will be one week after my last interview; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	☐	☐
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, address and family situation etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that my drawings made during the interview may be presented in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	☐	☐

Name of participant [printed]

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher [printed]

Signature

Date

Project contact details for further information:

Ke Li, University of Sheffield, kli56@sheffield.ac.uk;

Dr Sabine Little (supervisor), University of Sheffield, s.little@sheffield.ac.uk.



语言学习经历对英国年轻的中文继承语学习者身份认同的影响

(2022 年 7 月 14 日版)

知情同意书

请勾选相应的方框	是	否
参加该项目		
我已经阅读并理解了 2022 年 7 月 14 日版的参与者信息表，或者已经有人向我充分解释了该信息表的内容。(如果您对这个问题的回答是 "否"，请不要继续填写本同意书，直到您完全理解该项目的目的与内容)。	☐	☐
我已经有机会提出关于项目的任何问题。	☐	☐
我同意参加该项目。我理解，参加该项目将包括接受采访并被录音。	☐	☐
我明白，我是以志愿者身份参与这项研究，并不构成具有法律约束力的协议，也不会与谢菲尔德大学建立任何雇佣关系。	☐	☐
我明白，我的参与是自愿的。我可以在截止日期前选择退出研究，截止日期是我最后一次采访后的第 7 天。我不需要给出任何理由说明我为什么不再想参与。如果我选择退出，也不会产生任何不良后果。	☐	☐
我的信息将在项目期间和之后将被如何使用		
我明白我的个人资料，如姓名、地址和家庭情况等，不会被透露给项目以外的人。	☐	☐
我理解并同意在出版物、报告、网页和其他形式的研究成果中可以引用我的观点。我知道，除非我特别要求，否则我的姓名不会在这些成果中被提及。	☐	☐
我理解并同意在出版物、报告、网页和其他形式的研究成果中可以引用我在画图活动中的作品。我知道，除非我特别要求，否则我的姓名不会在这些成果中被提及。	☐	☐
我理解并同意，其他被授权的研究人员只有在同意按照本表的要求对信息进行保密的情况下，才能接触到这些数据。	☐	☐
我理解并同意，其他被授权的研究人员可以在出版物、报告、网页和其他研究成果中使用我的数据，但他们必须同意按照本表的要求对我的个人信息进行保密。	☐	☐
以便您提供的信息能够被研究人员合法地使用		
我同意将我在本项目中产生的任何数据、文本等的版权授予给谢菲尔德大学。	☐	☐

参与者姓名[打印姓名]: 签名: 日期

研究人员姓名[打印姓名]: 签名: 日期

获取更多信息，请联系:

李可，谢菲尔德大学，kli56@sheffield.ac.uk。

Sabine Little 博士（项目导师），谢菲尔德大学，s.little@sheffield.ac.uk。

Appendix C: Information sheets for parents

Participant Information Sheet (Parents/Legal guardians' version)

– 14 July, 2022

(N.B.: This document will be translated into Chinese after I get the ethical approval and be reviewed by my colleagues and/or researchers, who are native speakers of Chinese)

1. Research Project Title

The influence of language learning experiences on identities of young (12-16-year-old) Chinese heritage language learners in England.

“Identity” in this research is defined as “who they think they are and who they wish to become”. The term “heritage languages learners” refers to people who are from a family with a Chinese origin and are learning Chinese (including all dialects).

This research aims to understand how language learning experiences (both Chinese and English, including other languages if they are learning it) influence people’s attitudes, motivations and emotions towards languages they are learning and the culture represented by those languages. This research also aims to explore how people think about themselves, and how their thoughts are influenced by their language learning experiences.

2. Invitation paragraph

You and your children are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether or not to participate, it is important for you to understand why this research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

3. What is the project’s purpose?

In the current globalised world, immigration is increasing, and questions over how to raise bilingual (or even multilingual) children arise. This research aims to help young Chinese heritage language learners understand their inner thoughts about learning multiple languages and living as a heritage language learner in an English-domain country. It also aims to help young Chinese heritage language learners and their families to understand each other’s inner emotions and thoughts in a better way.

In addition, studies show that there is limited support for minority students' learning their heritage languages from English government. Hopefully, this research will draw attention to developing the current educational system to meet multicultural families' needs in England.

I am not grading young learners' abilities in Chinese or judging you in any way. Instead, I am here to listen to your thoughts about your motivations for your children' language learning, as well as how these languages influence you and them.

4. Why have I been chosen?

I am looking for participants whose family has a Chinese origin, along with their parents/legal guardians.

Participants (the young heritage language learner) should be able to speak or at least understand Chinese (could Mandarin Chinese or any dialect).

Participants (the young heritage language learner) should have been learning Chinese (no matter if is Mandarin Chinese or a dialect) for at least 2 years. They could be learning it from their parents, relatives, lessons online, complementary schools or any other method.

Participants (the young heritage language learner) should be aged 12 to 16, because they will have more diverse language learning experiences, and I will ask about the impact of English and other foreign languages they may have learned as well.

5. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep. In addition, you will be asked to sign a consent form, which will ensure you are aware of the purpose, potential risks and benefits and other basic information of this research. However, you can still change your mind and withdraw without any negative consequences. You do not have to give a reason and all your information will be erased from this research. If you wish to withdraw from this research, you can do so at any time before the withdrawal deadline, which will be 7 days after your last interview is conducted. To withdraw, please contact me (kli56@sheffield.ac.uk). **For parents or legal guardians**, please note that by choosing to participate in this research, this will not create a legally binding agreement, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship between you and the University of Sheffield.'

6. What will happen to me if I take part? What do I have to do?

Both young heritage language learners and their parents/legal guardians will be interviewed face to face. You could choose to be interviewed in either English or Chinese. The data collection will last 8

months. During this time, I plan to conduct four interviews with every family, and every interview should last no longer than 90 minutes. For the first interview, I will interview both you and your children together. A drawing activity called “language portrait” will be conducted at the beginning of the first interview to explore your attitudes towards languages and culture in your daily life without sensitive conversations. For the second interview, I will interview parents/legal guardians only. For the other 2 interviews, I will interview your children only, but parents/legal guardians will be present during interviews for safety reasons. However, I request that you do not attempt to influence your children’s answers.

During the interviews, I would like to ask about some basic information about your family, your motivations for your children’s heritage language learning, various ways you have conducted to support your children’s language learning, and how your children’s learning experiences influence their thoughts about themselves.

7. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

Yes, you will be audio-recorded in interviews. This is to ensure I can have an interactive conversation with you and capture your thoughts efficiently at the same time. However, if you want to talk about anything without being recorded, I can stop the recording at any time.

After data collection, I will transcribe (and translate, if necessary) all recordings via software. Transcriptions will cover all words and sounds in interviews, including pauses, self-corrections, tones and emphasis, and you will be pseudonymised. You can choose your own pseudonym

Original transcriptions will only be accessible for me, the researcher. No other people will read them before the data are pseudonymised. What you mentioned off the recordings will not be showed in the transcription, unless you want to!

The audio recordings of the interviews made during this research will be used only for analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. After the publications, all original recordings will be destroyed.

8. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

I am looking for your and your children’s honest thoughts and experiences. But some of your experiences could be tough for you to talk about, and it might make you feel sad or angry to share. In addition, conversations about identity and language may bring back negative emotions or memories, and these emotions or memories may be related to families or extend family, which may lead to conflicts. Therefore, if there is anything you would rather not talk about, you don’t have to! In the process of interviews, If I notice you might have any physical or psychological problems, which may

influence you in the future, I will contact my supervisor first to inform her the situation and ask for advice. If the problem is beyond our ability to solve, the UREC's Secretary will be contacted for advice.

9. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

I hope this research can help young heritage language learners and their parents to open up and share their feelings and thoughts, which may lead to a closer intergenerational relationship.

I also hope to share the findings with a wider audience in the future, possibly via a publication. These findings may help other people who share similar feelings, emotions and problems with you.

10. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that I collect about you and your children in this research will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible to me. Only I get access to the raw data. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications unless you wish to be, and have given your explicit consent for this.

I will encrypt collected data by using file passwords in my devices, so I can protect them from being read or used by those who are not entitled to do so.

I will protect digital devices with strong passwords as well, since I need to use them to process collected data. If I print any data out, I will store it in locked cupboards in my own apartment to protect them from being misused or being stolen. In addition, I will never leave devices or sensitive documents unattended in public locations.

All audio recordings, will be destroyed 3 years after publication, while pseudonymised data will be stored on ORDA (the University of Sheffield's data repository) for 10 years. During this period, the University of Sheffield will be responsible for the data security.

Devices that were used for processing and storing recordings or any other personal information of you will be securely erased to ensure that their previous contents cannot be recovered and misused.

Paper documents (if I print out any) containing your personal information will be shredded rather than dumped into trash or recycling bins.

11. What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to data protection legislation, I am required to inform you that the legal basis I am applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

As I will be collecting some data that is defined in the legislation as more sensitive (information about your ethnicity and race), I also need to let you know that I am applying the following condition in law: that the use of your data is necessary 'for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific research purposes or statistical purposes' (9(2)(j)).

This means I will process your data in order to help more people who share similar experiences, feelings and problems with you in the future.

12. What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

Only the researcher, Ke Li, will have access to the interview recordings. You will be pseudonymised in transcriptions. I look forward to publish this research in an academic journal in the future.

13. Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is not funded.

14. Who is the Data Controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

15. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by School of Education.

16. What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research or report a concern or incident?

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the research and wish to make a complaint, please contact (Dr Sabine Little: s.little@sheffield.ac.uk) in the first instance. If you feel your complaint has not been handled in a satisfactory way you can contact the Head of the School of Education (Professor Rebecca Lawthom: edu-hos@sheffield.ac.uk). If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

If you wish to make a report of a concern or incident relating to potential exploitation, abuse or harm resulting from your involvement in this project, please contact the project's Designated Safeguarding Contact (Dr Sabine Little: s.little@sheffield.ac.uk). If the concern or incident relates to the Designated Safeguarding Contact, or if you feel a report you have made to this Contact has not been handled in a satisfactory way, please contact the Head of the School of Education (Professor Rebecca Lawthom: edu-hos@sheffield.ac.uk) and/or the University's Research Ethics & Integrity Manager (Lindsay Unwin; l.v.unwin@sheffield.ac.uk).

17. Contact for further information

For further information or any questions, you can contact me (kli56@sheffield.ac.uk), I usually respond between 9 am to 5 pm Monday to Friday.

If I'm not available, you can also contact my supervisor, Dr Sabine Little, University of Sheffield (s.little@sheffield.ac.uk).

Thanks for taking part in my project!

参与者信息表

（家长/法定监护人版本）

研究项目的名称——语言学习经历对英国 12 到 16 岁的中文继承语学习者的身份认同的影响。

本研究中的身份认同指的是“他们（受访者们）认为自己是谁，以及他们希望自己将来成为谁”。继承语学习者则是指“来自与中文或者中国文化有渊源的家庭，并且正在学习中文（包括所有中文方言）的人”。

本研究旨在了解语言学习经历（包括中文和英文，以及其他任何继承语学习者正在学习的语言）如何影响人们学习语言的动机，以及他们对所学的语言和这些语言所代表的文化的态度、看法以及情感倾向。本研究还旨在探讨人们如何看待作为语言学习者的自己，以及语言学习经验如何塑造他们对自己的想法。

尊敬的家长/法定监护人：

您好！我在此诚挚邀请您和您的孩子参加我的研究项目。在您决定是否参加之前，您需要了解这项研究的目的与内容。请您花时间仔细阅读以下内容，如需要，您也可以与其他人讨论。如果您有什么不清楚的地方，或者您想了解更多信息，请向我们咨询。请在妥善思考后再决定您是否愿意参加本项研究。

感谢您于百忙之中抽出时间阅读此文。

1. 本项研究的目的是什么？

在当前全球化趋势盛行的世界里，移民现象越来越普遍，如何培养双语（甚至多语）儿童的难题也由此应运而生。本研究旨在帮助中文继承语学习者理解他们在学习不同语言期间的内心想法，以及作为继承语学习者，在英语作为主要用语的国家生活的感受。本项研究也希望能够帮助年轻的中文继承语学习者和他们的家人更好地理解对方的情绪和内心想法。

此外，研究表明，英国政府对少数族裔的学生学习其继承语的支持非常有限。本项研究希望能引起人们对此领域的关注，促进现行教育制度的发展，以满足在英国生活的多元文化家庭的需求。

本项研究并不意在为学习者的中文能力打分，也不是在以任何方式评判您或您孩子的行为或选择。相反，研究者只是希望能够倾听您与您孩子的想法，了解您让孩子学习各种语言的动机，以及这些语言如何影响了您和您的孩子的内心想法。

2. 为什么我被选中参加本项研究？

本研究正在招募来自有中国语言或文化背景的家庭的受访者，以及他们的父母或法定监护人。

受访者（中文继承语学习者）应该能说或至少能理解中文（可以是普通话或方言）。

受访者（中文继承语学习者）应该已经学习中文（无论是普通话还是方言）至少 2 年。他们的学习方式可以是，向父母或亲戚学习，在线课程，周日学校或任何其他方。

受访者（中文继承语学习者）的年龄应该在 12 到 16 岁之间，因为这一年龄段的青少年会有较为丰富的语言学习经历。

3. 我必须参加吗？

是否参加本研究取决于您的意愿。如果您决定参加，请您妥善保存这份信息表。此外，您将被要求签署一份知情同意书，以确保您了解这项研究的目的、潜在风险和益处以及其他基本信息。

然而，您仍然可以改变主意并退出本项研究。退出本项研究不会对您和您的孩子产生任何负面影响。如果您想要退出本项研究，您不需要告知研究员理由，所有关于您和您孩子的信息都将从这项研究中删除。如果您想退出本项研究，您可以在不晚于您的家庭的最后一次采访后的 7 天之内通知研究员，联系邮箱：kli56@sheffield.ac.uk。

对于父母或法定监护人，请注意，选择参与这项研究，不会产生具有法律约束力的协议，您和谢菲尔德大学也不会建立雇佣关系。

4. 如果我参加了，会发生什么？我必须做什么？

您和您的孩子都将参与采访。您可以选择使用英语或中文接受采访。我计划与每个家庭进行四次采访，每次采访的时间不超过 90 分钟。第一次采访时，我将同时采访您和您的孩子。首次采访开始时，我将进行一项名为“语言自画像”的绘画活动，以探索您对日常生活中的语言和文化态度，本次采访不会涉及敏感话题。第二次采访，我将仅采访父母/法定监护人进行。在另外两次采访中，我将仅采访您的孩子，但出于安全考虑，父母/法定监护人需要在采访中出席。不过我希望您不要试图影响您孩子的回答。

在访谈中，我想了解一些关于您家庭的基本信息，您支持孩子学习传承语言的动机，您为支持孩子的语言学习所采取的各种方式，以及您孩子的学习经历如何影响他们对自己的看法。

5. 我的采访是否会被录制，录制的影像/音像将被如何使用？

是的，您在采访中会被录音。这是为了确保我在与您进行互动的同时，也能够有效地如实记录您的想法。然而，如果您想在没有录音的情况下谈论任何事情，我可以在任何时候停止录音。

在数据采集结束后，我将通过软件转录并翻译（如有必要）所有录音。转录内容将涵盖采访中的所有话语和声音，包括停顿、自我更正、语调等。

在最终的论文中，我将使用化名而非您的真实信息。如有偏好，您可以选择自己的化名。原始录音与转录文本只对我，研究者，可见。在我采用化名将您的真实信息隐去之前，没有其他人员会阅读与采访相关的内容。您在录音停止时所谈论的内容不会在转录文本中显示出来，除非您希望它们被纳入本研究之中。

采访期间的原始录音将只用于分析。在没有您的书面许可时，它们不会另作他用，除研究员以外的人也不允许获得原始录音。在我的论文发表后，所有原始录音将被销毁。

6. 参加本项研究可能有哪些不利因素和风险？

我希望倾听您和您的孩子的真实想法和经历。但有些经历对您来说可能是难以启齿的，分享这些经历可能会让您感到悲伤或愤怒。此外，关于身份认同和语言的讨论可能会唤起负面的情绪或记忆，这些情绪或记忆可能与家庭或延伸家庭有关，并引起冲突。因此，如果有什么您不愿意谈论的事情，您也可以拒绝讨论。

在采访过程中，如果我发现您或您的孩子可能有任何生理或心理问题，并且这些问题可能会影响到您或您的孩子今后的生活，我会先将情况告知我的导师，征求她的意见。如果问题超出了我们的解决能力，我们则会联系谢菲尔德大学伦理审查委员会征求意见。

7. 参加本项研究可能有什么益处？

我希望这项研究能够帮助年轻的继承语言学习者和他们的父母敞开心扉，分享他们的感受和想法，以促进更紧密的代际关系。

我也希望将来能通过发表论文与更多的人分享本研究的成果。本研究的发现成果可能会帮助其他与您和您的孩子有类似感受、情绪和问题的人。

8. 我的个人信息是否会被保密？

我在这项研究中收集到的关于您和您的孩子的所有信息将被严格保密。只有我可以获取原始数据。在将来任何可能的报告或出版物中，您的个人信息将被隐去，除非您希望注明自己的真实身份，并且给予我书面同意。

我将在我的电子设备中使用文件密码对收集的原始数据进行加密，以保护它们不被他人阅读或使用。

我也会用强密码保护我用来处理数据的电子设备。如果我打印了任何数据，我将把这些文件存放在位于我的公寓的上锁柜子里，以保护它们不被滥用或被盗。此外，我永远不会把电子设备或打印的敏感文件放在无人看管的公共场所。

所有的原始录音，将在论文发表后 3 年内销毁，而处理后的数据将在 ORDA（谢菲尔德大学的数据存储库）中存储 10 年。在此期间，谢菲尔德大学将负责保证数据的安全性。

同时，存于电子设备上的任何关于您个人信息的记录的将被规范删除，以确保这些数据不能被恢复和误用。

任何含有您个人信息的纸质文件将被粉碎处理，而不是直接丢弃或回收。

9. 处理我的个人数据的法律依据是什么？

根据数据保护法，我必须告知您，我处理您的个人信息相关的数据所适用的法律依据是“为进行为公共利益相关的项目而必须处理”（第 6（1）（e）条）。更多信息请见谢菲尔德大学的相关网页：

<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>。

由于本项研究将收集一些在立法中被定义为较敏感的数据（例如：关于您的民族和种族的信息），您需要了解，本项研究在法律上适用以下条件：使用与您个人信息相关的数据是“基于为了公共利益进行归档、科学研究或者统计”（第 9(2)(j) 条）。这意味着本研究处理与您个人信息相关的数据，是为了在未来帮助更多与您有类似经历、感受和困扰的人。

10. 所收集的数据和研究项目的结果将如何处理？

只有研究者（李可）能接触到采访的原始录音。转录文本将采用化名。我希望将来能在学术期刊上发表与这项研究相关的论文。

11. 谁在组织和资助这项研究？

这项研究没有得到资助。

12. 谁是数据的管理员？

谢菲尔德大学将作为这项研究的数据管理员。这意味着谢菲尔德大学负责管理本项研究中您的相关信息并确保他们被正确使用。

13. 谁对该项目进行了道德审查？

该项目已通过谢菲尔德大学教育学院伦理审查委员会的伦理审查程序并获得伦理批准。

14. 如果我想对此项研究中出现的问题进行投诉或报告，我该怎么办？

如果您对研究的任何方面不满意并希望进行投诉，请首先联系（Sabine Little 博士：s.little@sheffield.ac.uk）。如果您觉得您的投诉没有得到满意的处理，您可以联系教育学院的院长（Rebecca Lawthom 教授：edu-hos@sheffield.ac.uk）。如果您的投诉涉及到本项研究对您的个人隐私信息的处理方式，您可以在谢菲尔德大学的网页中了解关于如何提出投诉：<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>。

如果您想报告与参与本项目有关的潜在剥削、虐待或伤害的问题或事件，请联系本项目的指定安全保护联系人（Sabine Little 博士：s.little@sheffield.ac.uk）。如果您的投诉与指定的安全保护联系人有关，或者如您觉得您向该联系人提出的投诉没有得到满意的处理，请联系教育学院院长（Rebecca Lawthom 教授：edu-hos@sheffield.ac.uk）和/或谢菲尔德大学的研究伦理与诚信管理员（Lindsay Unwin；l.v.unwin@sheffield.ac.uk）。

15. 更多信息请联系

如您需要进一步了解情况或有任何问题，可以与我联系（kli56@sheffield.ac.uk），我通常在周一至周五上午 9 点至下午 5 点之间回复。

如果您无法联系到我，您也可以联系我的导师，谢菲尔德大学的 Sabine Little 博士（s.little@sheffield.ac.uk）。

谢谢您参加我的项目！

Appendix D: Information sheet and consent form for children

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM AND INFORMATION SHEET **FOR CHILDREN**

To be provided to all participants and shown/read by teacher/researcher if required

Study title

The influence of language learning experiences on identities of young (12-16-year-old) Chinese heritage language learners in England.

1. Why is this project being done?

I want to try and find out how do you think about all the languages you are learning in your daily life and how learning these languages change the way you think about yourself. I am undertaking this project as part of my **studies at the University of Sheffield** (this is called the “legal basis” for collecting information from you).

2. Why me?

You have been chosen because:

- (1) At least one of your families is Chinese.
- (2) You can speak or at least understand Chinese.
- (3) You have been learning Chinese for at least 2 years. You could be learning it from your parents, relatives, lessons online, complementary schools or any other method.
- (4) You can help me find some answers that will help other young people who are learning Chinese as well.

3. What does the project involve?

I will interview both you and your parents/legal guardians 4 times in total, every interview will last no longer than 90 minutes. For the first interview, I will interview both you and your parents/legal guardians together. A drawing activity called “language portrait” will be conducted at the beginning of the first interview to explore your attitudes towards languages and culture in your daily life without sensitive conversations. For the second interview, I will interview your parents/legal guardians only. And I will interview you for the other 2 interviews. However, your parents/legal guardians will be there for every interview to ensure your safety, so don’t worry! During interviews, I will ask you questions about your language learning experiences, which may not be pleasant all the time. If you choose not to talk about anything, you don’t have to.

I might use your drawing and some of your words when I write up my report or other forms of publications but I will not use your name or identify who you are.

4. Will my answers be kept secret?

Anything you write or say will be kept secret **except** if the researcher is made aware of criminal activity or risks to your safety or the safety of others. If the researcher has any concerns like this, then they are legally required to pass this information on to my supervisor or my university. They will provide professional advice to help you.

5. What will happen to my information?

I will use your information to write my research report. I will keep your information in a single, safe place until the end of my project (26/10/2024) when it will be completely deleted. Nobody else will have access to your information except for the reasons given on the last section.

6. Do I have to take part?

No, you do not! It is up to you. We would like you to read this information and talk to your parents/legal guardians before you make up your mind. You can still change your mind later – just tell your parents/legal guardians and they will let me know.

If you don't want to take part, just say no!

7. Giving permission to take part

Please tick the box if you are happy to take part in this research ☐

Print name: _____

Sign: _____

Date: _____

8. Where can I get more information?

Please ask me any questions you have about the project. Your teacher has also been provided with all the details about my research.

If you, or your parent/guardian would like to learn more about my project, I can be contacted at kli56@sheffield.ac.uk

Thank You!

参与者同意书和信息表

未成年人版本

将提供给所有参与者，如有需要，将由老师或研究人员展示以及解释问题

研究题目

语言学习经历对英国年轻（12-16岁）的中国传统语言学习者身份认同的影响。

1. 为什么要做这个项目？

我想尝试理解你如何看待你在日常生活中学习的所有语言，以及学习这些语言如何影响了你对自己的看法。这个研究是我在谢菲尔德大学学习过程的一部分（这是我能否向你收集信息的“法律依据”）。

2. 为什么是我？

你被选中是因为：

- (1) 你的家人中至少有一个人是中国人。
- (2) 你能说或至少能理解中文。
- (3) 你已经学习了至少两年的中文。你可以从你的父母、亲戚、网上课程、中文学校或任何其他渠道学习。
- (4) 你可以帮助我找到一些答案，对其他学习中文的年轻人也有帮助。

3. 该项目涉及什么？

我对你和你的父母/法定监护人总进行4次采访，每次采访时间不超过90分钟。在第一次采访中，我将同时采访你和你父母/法定监护人。在第一次采访的开头，我们将会进行一项名叫“语言自画像”的活动。在不探讨敏感话题的前提下探索你对不同的语言和文化的态度。第二次采访时，我将只采访你的父母/法定监护人。而在其余的两次采访中，我将与你面对面交谈。然而，你的父母/法定监护人将出席每一次采访，以确保你的安全，所以不要担心！在采访中，我会问你一些关于你的语言学习经历的问题，这些问题可能并不总是令人愉快。如果你不想谈论任何不愉快的事情，你可以直接拒绝。在我写博士论文或其他形式的出版物时，我将可能引用你的回答和画作，但我不会泄露你的个人信息。

4. 我的答案是否会被保密？

你所写的或说的任何内容都将被保密，除非研究人员在采访过程中发现有犯罪活动或任何威胁到你或其他人的人身安全的情况。如果我在采访过程中发现任何类似的情况，那么我在法律上有义务将这些信息告知我的导师或大学。他们会提供专业建议来帮助你。

5. 我的信息将被如何利用？

我将使用你的信息来写我的研究报告。我会将信息保存在一个安全的地方，直到我的项目结束（预计为2024年10月26日），届时这些信息将被全部删除。除非出现上一节所述的情况，其他人不会接触到你的信息。

6. 我必须参加吗？

不，你不需要！是否参加完全取决于你的个人意愿。

我希望你在决定是否参与本项目之前能够仔细阅读这些信息，并与你的父母或法定监护人讨论。

不过，你仍然可以随时改变主意——只要告诉你的父母或法定监护人，他们会告诉我。

如果你不想参加，只要说不就可以了！

7. 允许参加

如果您愿意参加这项研究，请在方框内打勾。 ☐

打印姓名: _____

签名: _____

签名日期: _____

8. 我在哪里可以获得更多信息？

你可以向我提出关于这个项目的任何问题。你们的父母也已经了解了关于我的研究的所有细节。

如果你或你的父母/监护人想了解更多关于本项目的信息，可以通过以下方式联系我：

kli56@sheffield.ac.uk

谢谢你！

Appendix E: Interview protocol

First Interview

Name

Children & Parent(s)

- (1) May I have your name please?
- (2) Do you have more than one name?
- (3) (If they have more than one name) Is there a connection between your names? Would you like to talk about the story behind your names?
- (4) Which name do you prefer? Why?
- (5) I will use a pseudonym for you in my reports. Do you want to choose your own pseudonym? (If they do) Is there any story behind your pseudonym?
- (6) Language portrait

Family situation

Parent(s):

- (1) What languages and dialects do you speak at home? Who can speak the dialect?
- (2) Do you have more than one child? Are all your children learning Chinese?
- (3) Do you have any other relatives living in England? (If they do) Do you talk to each other often? Do you visit them often? Which language do you usually use with your children when you are visiting relatives in England?
- (4) Do you have any other relatives in China? (If they do) Do you visit them often before the pandemic? How often do you visit? Which language do you usually use with your children when you are visiting relatives in China?
- (5) Do you talk to the relatives in China online? (If they do) Which application or software do you usually use? Do you prefer audio calls or video calls? Why? How often do you call each other? Did the number increase during the pandemic?

Children:

- (1) Where were you born? Where were you raised?

- (2) (If they speak different languages at home) What's it like using different languages at home? How does it work? How does it make you feel?
- (3) (If they visit China regularly) Do you enjoy your visits to China? What do you usually do when you visit China? Which part do you enjoy? Why? Is there any part you dislike? Why?
- (4) (If they don't visit China regularly) Do you want to visit China in the future? Where do you want to visit? Why?

Chinese Heritage language learning

Parent(s):

- (1) How does your child learn Chinese? How long have you learned Chinese? **(Both informal and formal)**
- (2) **(If they only study at home)** What textbook(s) do you use for Chinese learning? Why did you choose this one?
- (3) **(If they don't only study at home)** What textbook(s) do your children use for Chinese learning? Could you show me the textbook?
- (4) **(If they take complementary lessons)** Besides the textbook, does the teacher of complementary schools/classes suggest any extra books for your children to read? If so, what are they?

Children:

- (1) What is your motivation for learning Chinese?
- (2) What do you think about learning Chinese?
- (3) How do you feel about yourself when you are using Chinese?

Language choice

Children:

- (1) **(If they have any sibling)** What language do you use when you talk to your siblings? Why?
- (2) What language do you use when you talk to your friends? What if they speak Chinese as well?
- (3) Do you speak only Chinese when you are having your Chinese lessons? Why or why not?

not?

- (4) What language you use when you are thinking?

Attitudes/emotions towards heritage language and heritage culture

Children:

- (1) What do you think of your ability in using Chinese? Do you mind talking to me in Chinese for 2 minutes? Feel free to say anything you want.
- (2) When you are reading/surfing on the internet/watching movies/listening to music/..., which language do you prefer? Why?
- (3) What are your hobbies? Is any of them related to Chinese culture? Why do you like it?
- (4) Do you know anything about Chinese pop culture? How do you access to them? What do you think about them?
- (5) How do you feel about being able to speak/understand Chinese?
- (6) Has learning Chinese ever made you feel special or different? Under what kind of circumstance? Could you tell me more details about that?

English learning

Parent(s):

- (1) How did your children learn English? At home or until they started school?
- (2) Has Chinese learning ever influenced your children's English learning and English proficiency?

Children:

- (1) Under what circumstance would you prefer using English over Chinese?
- (2) How do you feel about being able to speak English?
- (3) Do you follow pop culture in England?
- (4) When you speak of mother tongue, which language or languages are you thinking about? Why? What's your understanding for mother tongue? Is this the language you feel stronger emotional attachment to?

Other language learning experiences

Children:

- (1) Have you learned other languages? If so, what are they? How did you learn them? How long did you learn them? Why did you choose to learn them? Did you enjoy learning them? Why or why not?

Second Interview

Parents' background

- (1) Where are you and your partner born and raised?
- (2) When and why did you move to England?
- (3) What's your educational background? (General information would be fine)
- (4) What's your job in China and England? (General information would be fine)
- (5) Do you mainly use Chinese or English at your current work?
- (6)

Chinese Heritage language learning

- (1) What language do you speak to your children when they are babies? Has that changed? Why?
- (2) What is your motivation for your children's heritage language learning? Have you ever told them your motivations?
- (3) Have your children ever refused to learn or use Chinese? Could you tell me more details? (Why? What did they say? How did you work it out?)
- (4) Have you ever noticed that your children's motivation towards Chinese learning increased? Could you tell me more details?
- (5) Do you have any expectations for your children's proficiency in Chinese? (If you do) Have you told them about your expectations? How do they respond to it?
- (6) Which method do you take to support your children's heritage language learning at home? Could you tell me more details (such as frequency, for how many years etc.)?
- (7) Do you think support for your children's Chinese learning is enough (at home/mainstream school) Why or why not? If not, what extra support do you need?
- (8) Do you think mainstream schools in England can reach your expectations for your children's language learning? (Tell them more about language trend in the UK)
- (9) (If they are teaching children at home) Do you teach your children any dialect as well? Why or why not?

- (10) Do you do anything to encourage your children speak Chinese at home? If so, how?
- (11) Do you take any extra measures to support your children's HL learning, such as online lessons, complementary schools etc.? (How long for each? **If they switched the method, why?**) Why or why not?
- (12) **(If they do not teach children HL at home)** Why do you prefer using other ways to support your children's learning? (How long for each? If they switched the method, why?)
- (13) Besides teaching, do you ask your children read stories in Chinese? Do you read stories in Chinese or related to Chinese history/culture to your children? If you do, what are these stories? Why did you choose these stories specifically?
- (14) Do you take your children to other events to show them Chinese culture in holidays or just on weekends? Could you tell me more details?
- (15) Do you have a Chinese parent group or did you join any kind of Chinese community? If you do, how do you meet? Do you communicate with each other often? How? Do you organise parent-child events, or maybe parents-only events? Are these events related to Chinese culture?
- (16) **(If their partners are not Chinese)** What is your partner's attitude towards your children's HL learning? What does your partner do to support your children's learning?
- (17) **(If their partners are not Chinese nor English)** Do your children learn both heritage languages? Do you think they has a preference? What do you do to support the other HL learning? (If it's different from Chinese HL learning, ask why)
- (18) Do you do anything to support you children's English learning?
- (19) Do you do anything to support you children learning other languages? Why or why not?
- (20) **(If their children only speak Chinese before they start to go to school)** Did you wish there were support from schools for your children when they were not fluent in English? If so, what kind?

Mixing of languages

- (1) When did you start to notice that your children are mixing languages?
- (2) How often do your children mix languages?
- (3) Why do you think they mixing languages?

- (4) What do you do when they mix languages? Why?

Third interview

Language proficiency

- (1) Do you mind talk to me in Chinese for 2 mins? You can pick any topic you like. Or maybe I can pick one if you do not have any preference.
- (2) Can you read in Chinese? What do you read in Chinese?
- (3) Can you understand Chinese TV shows?

Chinese Heritage language learning

- (1) What is your motivation for Chinese HL learning? Has it ever changed? Have you and your parents ever talked about your motivation?
- (2) Do you think it's important to your parents that you learn Chinese? Why? Why is it important to them? What makes you think that?
- (3) Do you think you have to learn Chinese? Why or why not?
- (4) What do you think about Chinese before you go to complementary schools/start online learning/etc.? Have your thoughts changed? Why or why not?
- (5) Is there any impressive or interesting experiences related to your Chinese HL learning then change your thoughts or attitudes towards Chinese learning? How? Could you tell me more details about it?
- (6) Do you do anything in the Chinese complementary classrooms that different from activities in mainstream schools? Or verse versa?
- (7) What do you think about your textbook? Is there anything specific in your textbook that you enjoy the most? Why?
- (8) Is there a text from your text book (or story if they are only taught by parents only) about China that you like the most or you think it's most impressive? What are they? Why do you choose this one? (Why is it special? Why is it different from other texts/stories?)

- (9) Is there anything in Chinese cultural you find most interesting/attractive?
- (10) Do you have special trick to help yourself learn Chinese?
- (11) Have you ever felt it's difficult to learn Chinese? Why or why not? If yes, could you tell me more details? Will that stop you from further learning?
- (12) Have you ever considered about stop learning Chinese? If yes, when and why?
- (13) What's your plan for learning Chinese in the future? (Would you stop learning at a certain age or learn further about it?)

Language choice

- (1) What language do you talk to your parents at home? Outside home? (If they speak different language in different occasions) What do you think about that?
- (2) (If they have any sibling) What language do you use when you talk to your siblings? Why?
- (3) What language do you use when you talk to your friends? Why? What about friends who can also speak Chinese? Do you only use one language or both when you talk to each other? Why?
- (4) (If they learn Chinese from families) Do you only talk to your families in Chinese during learning or all the time? Why? What do you feel about it?
- (5) (If they take any complementary lessons) Tell me more about your lessons. Do you only speak in Chinese when you are in class? What about after classes or between classes?
- (6) (If they are learning in various ways) Do you feel any difference among various learning methods?
- (7) When you are thinking, which language do you prefer to use?
- (8) When you are reading/surfing on the internet/watching movies/listening to music/..., do you pay attention to anything related to Chinese culture? If so, what are they? Why do you find them interesting?

English learning

- (1) Do you think your become a different person when you are using different languages?
- (2) Do you think learning Chinese influences on your ability of English? If yes, how do you feel about it?

- (3) Do you think learning English change your feelings about learning Chinese? If so, how?

Other language learning experiences

- (1) I know secondary school students need to learn a foreign language at school, could you tell me which one you chose? Why did you choose this one? Did you have other languages as options at school? Did you switch it/drop it when you started key stage 3? Why or why not?
- (2) When you are learning other languages, did you pause your Chinese HL learning? Why or why not?
- (3) Do you think learning other languages change your feelings about learning Chinese? If so, how?

Dialects and Mandarin (optional)

- (1) What do you think about dialects?
- (2) (If they only learn Mandarin Chinese) Are you interested in learning dialects in the future?
- (3) When you say “Chinese”, do you think about your dialect or Mandarin Chinese?
- (4) (If they learn both dialect and Mandarin Chinese) Which language do you prefer to use when you talk to your parents/relatives/...?
- (5) Do you think your personality is different when you are speaking in dialects, comparing to speaking in Mandarin Chinese?
- (6) For you, what is the biggest difference between dialect and Mandarin Chinese?

Fourth interview

Attitudes/emotions towards heritage language and heritage culture

- (1) What do you feel about learning Chinese? Do you have any fun memories about learning Chinese? What about anything that are not very pleasant?
- (2) Do you think it's important for you to learn Chinese? Why or why not?
- (3) What do you think of your ability in using Chinese? Feel free to say anything you want,

I won't judge. Do you want to improve it in the future? Why or why not? (If your parents have any expectations in your Chinese proficiency) Do you think you have met your parents' expectations?

- (4) What do you know about China? (History, climate, customs...?) Where did you get these ideas?
- (5) If you need to introduce China and Chinese culture to British, what do you want them to know? Where did you get these ideas?
- (6) Do you know anything about Chinese pop culture? How do you access to them? What do you think about them?
- (7) Do you think learning Chinese and being able to speak Chinese ever benefit you? In what way? Can you think of an example when... (it felt good/bad being multilingual, you got praised for your Chinese language skills...?)
- (8) Do you think learning Chinese and speaking Chinese will benefit you in the future? How?
- (9) Do British ask you questions about China? Such as your ethnicity? How do you feel when people ask you that? Do you think learning Chinese influence on your answer to this question? If so, how?
- (10) What do you think "being Chinese" mean to you? Have your thoughts ever changed? How and why?
- (11) How do you feel about being able to speak/understand Chinese?
- (12) Has being able to understand/speak Chinese ever made you feel special or different? Under what kind of circumstance? Could you tell me more details about that?
- (13) Is there anything you think only Chinese will do? If yes, could you tell me more about it?
- (14) Do you think any language in your life is more formal than the others?

Language shift/Code-switch

- (1) Have you ever struggled to remember a certain word in Chinese and you can only remember it in English? Or vice versa? If you do, how do you feel about it?
- (2) Do you realise you ever used both Chinese and English in one sentence/conversation? If you do, how do you feel about it?
- (3) Could you tell me how your mind works when you are using two languages in one sentence/conversation?

- (4) Why do you think you are combining different languages in one sentence/conversation?
- (5) Do you want to change your combination of two languages? If yes, how?

Future self

- (1) Do you have a role model? If yes, is this role model related to Chinese culture from any perspective?
- (2) What kind of person do you think you are?
- (3) Have you ever thought about the question “who am I”? If so, could you tell me about your thoughts?
- (4) How do you feel about thinking of this question?
- (5) Have you ever thought about the question “who I want to be in the future”? If so, could you tell me about your thoughts?
- (6) How do you feel about thinking of this question?
- (7) Do you think your imagination for the future self ever been influenced by Chinese language/culture? If so, how?

Thanks so much for accepting all interviews! Please remember that you can still withdraw from this study within the next 7 days. If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know. I may contact you again during data analysis regarding translation issues. Have a good day!

Appendix F: An example of data analysis

Original transcript	Code for 1 st time	Code for 2 nd time	Subtheme	Final theme	English translation
但是实在打不了【拼音】的时候，她是用语音输入。	Parents' solution for children's lower skills in writing Chinese characters	Parents value pinyin over handwriting skills due to speech-to-text technology	Technology development brings a new turn for writing in Chinese	Reconsidering Chinese character writing skills	<i>If she doesn't know [the pinyin], she can also use speech input.</i>

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