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The Transformation and Negotiation of the Civic Habitus of Chinese Immigrants in the United States

By

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Introduction

Instead of perceiving immigrants as being "uprooted" from their place of origin and "transplanted" to the host country, scholarship on migration increasingly adopts a transnational perspective to examine the experience of immigrants (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). The ongoing technological advancements have facilitated migrants' cross-border travel and communication and enabled them to lead a transnational life that straddles multiple sites and crosses national borders (Guarnizo 1997; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). Instead of being either "here" or "there", migrants actively construct social fields that bridge the sending and receiving countries where the multi-directional flows of capital, information, and values happen and consequently modify and transform migrants' habitus. Recent research has applied Bourdieu's theory of habitus to examine the convertibility of different forms of capital across national borders and migrants' strategic adaption to the socio-economic environment of the receiving country (Gu and Lee 2020; Jung et al. 2017; Nowicka 2015; Kelly and Lusis 2006). However, little attention has been paid to the mechanisms of habitus transformation and how this process is conditioned by the specific position migrants occupy in the social structure.

Applying the concept of "hysteresis of habitus", which refers to the mismatch between habitus and field, this paper focuses on the transnational experience of middle-class Chinese immigrants in the US and explores how the experience of hysteresis triggers changes in actors' habitus. Drawing from 10 semi-structured in-depth interviews, it pinpoints the moments of hysteresis where Chinese migrants' original habitus is challenged and reevaluated in their socio-cultural and civic transition to the US. Specifically, this paper focuses on Chinese immigrants' understanding and practice of *guanxi*, or building and sustaining interpersonal relationships, in three social scenarios: social trust in strangers, problem solving through personal connections,

and social networking in upward mobility to examine their habitus transformation in the transnational context.

The next section provides a review of Bourdieu's theory of *habitus*, *field*, and *capital* and its application to transnational migration studies. Central concepts are defined and clarified in this section. Next, recent literature on habitus transformation in the transnational context is reviewed and the gap in the current research is identified. Here, the mechanism of habitus transformation is derived from existing research. The paper then offers an examination of the sample population's "middling" position in the social structure and power relations and how it is related to actors' habitus. A brief account of the study's methods, operationalization of hysteresis, and coding strategy are subsequently provided. In the next section, qualitative findings are presented in three parts: The first part of the data analysis discusses Chinese immigrants' transition from a society filled with vigilance toward strangers to a society of social trust and analyzes the "push and pull" forces in habitus transformation. The second part examines how the immigrants' habitual resort to *guanxi* or personal connections to get around formal rules in problem solving has been challenged in a society that emphasizes the rule of law. At the same time, how habitus is toned down and reactivated is examined in the transitional context. In the last part, how the association of *guanxi* with upward social mobility is contested in the transnational context and how the relative social position of the social actors in the field affects habitus transformation is examined. The paper's concluding section discusses this study's contribution to the existing scholarship on transnational habitus and theorizes the mechanisms of habitus transformation. It argues that habitus transformation is a process closely intertwined with not only the shift in the field but also the position of the actors in the field in the transnational process. This paper ends with a brief discussion of the limitation of the study and implications

for research on transnational social remittances and the political conservatism of migrants in the US.

Habitus and Migration Studies

In Bourdieu's conceptualization, habitus refers to "a socially and culturally conditioned set of durable dispositions or propensities for certain kinds of social action. This set or repertoire is internalized by individuals in the course of their life experience and in relation to their social positions" (Vertovec 2009, 66). In this sense, habitus is closely related to the concept of field where actors unconsciously internalized the existing social structure through daily practices bounded within that specific social field.

According to Bourdieu, a field is "a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 97). A field can be understood as "a game" where it follows rules or regularities that "are not explicit and codified" (ibid, 98), and practices and beliefs are "the product[s] of a dialectical relationship between a situation and a habitus" (Bourdieu 1977, 261). Instead of understanding social practices and beliefs as fully determined by specific social conditions in the field, or, from a constructivist perspective, seeing social situations as actively constructed by the actors (Wacquant 2016), the concept of habitus transcends the structure-agency dichotomy and takes both the conditioning effect of social structure and the constructive individual agency into account (Radogna 2019). The "dialectical relationship between the situation and the habitus" determines that the dynamic between the field and habitus is never one-directional. Habitus is at the same time, a "structured structure" as the result of previous upbringing or an "internalization of externality", and a "structuring structure" which gives rise to a new set of practices, beliefs, and perceptions that have the potential to

shape the field (Carlson and Schneickert 2021; Bourdieu 1992). This requires research to examine habitus as both conditioned by social situations and having the potential to be adapted to new environments. This paper, thus, examines both how the practices and beliefs derived from the civic habitus of Chinese immigrants are conditioned by the specific socio-cultural environment they are in and how their old habitus, as a result of the socialization in China, is contested and transformed upon their entering a new field after migration to the US.

As the product of a specific social space, habitus was originally conceptualized as bounded within particular social containers such as nation-states. In recent years, habitus has been adopted by migration researchers to examine migrants' transnational experiences. In the transnational context, the interplay between field and habitus is manifested as a "cultural lag" where individuals evaluate their situation in the receiving society by the standard they borrowed from the country they left behind, as a modification of the original habitus in the process of transnationalization, and as the creation of a transnational habitus in the transnational field (Guarnizo 1997; Kelly and Lusis 2006; Darvin and Norton 2014; Shan 2014; Jung et al. 2017; Soong et al. 2018).

As the first researcher to apply Bourdieu's concept of habitus to migration research, Guarnizo defines transnational habitus as "a particular set of dualist dispositions that inclines migrants to act and react to specific situations in a manner that can be but is not always, calculated, and that is not simply a question of conscious acceptance of specific behavioral or sociocultural rules" (Guarnizo 1997, 311). By constant going back and forth between the sending and receiving countries, both physically and conceptually, migrants adopt "a dual frame of reference" and constantly compare and contrast their situations at home and abroad, constructing a "transnational space" (or transnational field) that spreads people's lives across national borders

(ibid; Carlson and Schneickert 2021). In his study on the return migration of Dominicans in the US, Guarnizo (1997) challenges the bipolar model of "abroad" and "home", the dichotomy of assimilation into the host country and retention of the culture of origin. Instead, he finds that "the conceptual distinction between home and abroad, between sending and receiving communities, and between emigrating and returning becomes less than obvious" (Guarnizo 1997, 308).

The conceptualization of transnational habitus enables the researcher to go beyond the traditional split in migration studies of either focusing on the sending country or the receiving side. It characterizes the migration experience not as divided into "past" and "now", "here" and "there", but as a holistic and cumulative process of gradual transition and transformation. Instead of focusing on the traditional dichotomous variables of "assimilation into the host society" and "attachment to the home country", transnational habitus perceives migrants' experience as a dynamic, processual, and ongoing negotiation between the two places. It is not a sudden and total abandonment of the past and adoption of the new, nor an enduring and unchangeable adherence to the place of origin, but it is a process that is filled with constant comparisons and negotiations between now and then, here and there, a gradual change that builds on the existing experiences, and an exercise of individual agency within established structures. Carrying the "individual and group history sedimented in the body" (Wacquant 2016, 66) to the new country, the study of migrants' habitus requires research to consider both dynamics of the country of origin and those of the host country (Radogna 2019). Thus, this paper focuses on both the domestic social field in China that cultivated Chinese migrants' habitual practice and beliefs of *guanxi* as well as the new social field in the US that challenged this old habitus and gave rise to a new set of negotiated understandings and practices of Chinese *guanxi* in the transnational process.

In Bourdieu's analytical toolkit, the concepts of *field*, *habitus*, and *capital* are closely interrelated. Capitals, for Bourdieu, are plural. They have three major "species": *economic capital*, *social capital*, and *cultural capital* (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). *Economic capital* refers to the assets and financial worth of the individual (Kelly and Lusis 2006); *social capital* refers to "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (ibid, 199); and *cultural capital* refers to the symbolic assets the individual possesses, which comes in three forms: *embodied cultural capital*, which refers to "long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body" such as accents and race (Bourdieu 1986, 243); *objectified cultural capital*, which refers to the cultural assets in the material form such as artwork; and *institutionalized cultural capital* such as education and professional qualifications (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Kelly and Lusis 2006). For Bourdieu, capital means power in a field. "A capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 99) and

> It confers a power over the field, over the materialized or embodied instruments of production or reproduction whose distribution constitutes the very structure of the field, and over the regularities and the rules which define the ordinary functioning of the field, and thereby over the profits engendered in it (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 101).

The value and meaning of certain kinds of capital are determined by specific field. The kind of capital that is valued in one field is not necessarily equally valued in another. As a result, the capital possessed by individuals in one context may have a very different purchasing power in another (Kelly and Lusis 2006).

In transnational context, much research on migrants' habitus has been focusing on the conversion of different forms of capital and how they are valued across borders (Kelly and Lusis 2006; Darvin and Norton 2014; Xu 2018; Gu & Lee 2020). This could be manifested most obviously in the exchange rate of different currencies (economic capital), the migrants' ability to mobilize or transform the existing social connections and networks to the new environment (social capital), and the validation of acquired educational and professional qualifications across the national borders (institutionalized cultural capital) (Kelly and Lusis 2006; Shan 2014; Jung et al. 2017; Soong et al. 2018; Gu and Lee 2020). This line of research highlights the depreciation of the value of different forms of capital in the transnational process, especially in the context of migration between unevenly developed societies (Xu 2018). It thus sheds light on the power relation in the global hierarchy, with those on the higher end of the hierarchy able to determine what is valued and what is not valued in the transnational context. Instead of examining the "exchange rate" of different capitals across the borders, this paper focuses on the depreciation of capitals in relation to migrants' changing positions in the social structure in the transnational process and how it subsequently leads to the modification of their old habitus.

Moments of Hysteresis and Habitus Transformation

Once applied to research on social reproduction, habitus exhibits its potential for research on change in recent years. Rich fruits have been derived from studies on drastic social and political transitions such as that in post-communist societies (e.g. Ivanou and Flores 2018), vertical social mobility (e.g. Friedman 2016), and domestic and transnational migrations (e.g. Xu 2018; Jung et al. 2017). As the product of social conditioning, a change in the field is bound to incite transformation in habitus (Nowicka 2015; Bourdieu 1994). Although described as

"durable", habitus is not "static" or "eternal" (Wacquant 2016). As Bourdieu (2000, 85) points out: "habitus change constantly in response to new experiences."

However, the transformation of habitus is not always a seamless process. The "built-in inertia" makes habitus continue to produce practices patterned after the social structures that generated them (Wacquant 2016). When changes take place in the field, habitus tends to "lag" behind and leads to a "hysteresis of habitus", that is, a mismatch between habitus and field. This encounter of old habitus with the new social setting may sometimes generate a feeling of discomfort or a sense of being "out of sync" with the surrounding environment. Bourdieu points out that the hysteresis effect happens in long-range social mobility, especially when "individual trajectories provoke abrupt rather than gradual transformation of habitus" (Friedman 2016, 131). The "long-range social mobility" here refers to both in terms of mobility in geographical space and social space. Hysteresis happens when the new field is "too distant from that in which [the original habitus] are objectively fitted" (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Based on this understanding, studies on hysteresis have been focusing on abrupt upward social mobility and drastic social change, highlighting individuals' experience of discomfort (Friedman 2016), disillusion, and disorientation (Ivanou and Flores 2018). However, the concept of hysteresis has rarely been applied to research on migration, which is another profound yet common form of drastic field change. According to Radogna (2019), it is at the moments of hysteresis when the respective social conditions that constitute the habitus are highlighted. It is at "the moments of hysteresis" when the original habitus is questioned and re-evaluated and the potential mechanisms of habitus change are revealed. Thus, this paper focuses on the moments of hysteresis in the migration process to examine how Chinese migrants' original civic habitus is

challenged in the US and explores the mechanisms that facilitate their subsequent habitus transformation.

Current research on habitus in the context of migration has found that migrants tend to experience "disjuncture" in the transnational process. Habitus as the product of a specific cultural and socio-historical field in the sending country is "displaced" in an unfamiliar field in the receiving country. Previous research on transnational habitus has found that migrants tend to approach new situations with the old habitus and they will continue to understand their circumstances according to the "rules of the game" of their place of origin (Kelly and Lusis 2006; Radogna 2019; Guarnizo 1997). Shan's research (2014) on the professional Chinese woman migrants in Canada finds that these women quickly learned to disassociate education with upward mobility—a habitus which they were socialized into through the competitive educational system in China—because of the devaluation of their professional qualifications in the transnational process. The previously understood "rules of the game" in the sending society become "dysfunctional" in the receiving society and subsequently lead to the transformation of habitus. As indicated by Bourdieu, when habitus becomes dysfunctional in a field, it will "waste away or weaken through lack of use" (Bourdieu 2000, 160). This suggests a mechanism of habitus transformation: the experience of "disjuncture" is fundamental in facilitating modifications in habitus. As actors who are not just passive receivers of social influences, this paper hypothesizes that migrants will actively transform and reconstruct their old habitus when it becomes dysfunctional in the new field.

On the other hand, habitus transformation could also be a result of negative social sanctions migrants received in the host country. Jung et al. (2017) examine the onward migration of North Korean refugees from South Korea to Australia and find that the negative social image

and stereotypes associated with North Korean identity prompt refugees to discard their past habitus and go on to pursue a cosmopolitan habitus in Australia. Striving to change the stereotypes of North Koreans as "cold-blooded communists … unfeminine women workers, and …starving and helpless refugees" (Choo 2006, 590, quoted in Jung et al. 2017, 7), they remove noticeable North Korean distinctions by changing their accents and way of fashion and consuming high-end brand items. In this case, the migrants' North Korean habitus serves as a source of discrimination and isolation in the receiving country, thus facilitating the readjustment and change in this habitus. This suggests a second mechanism for habitus transformation. This paper hypothesizes that social discrimination, exclusion, and other forms of negative social sanctions propel migrants to discard and modify the habitus that is directly associated with these negative experiences.

In sum, existing research suggests two mechanisms are at work in habitus transformation: the dysfunction of the original habitus in the new environment and the negative social sanctions received as a result of habitus inertia. Both mechanisms manifest themselves at the moments of hysteresis. It is the encounter of the unfamiliar and experience of disjuncture that propel habitus transformation and reconstruction. Thus, this paper focuses on the moments of hysteresis to reveal the underlying mechanisms of habitus transformation in the transnational process. In addition, using middle-class Chinese immigrants in the US as a case, this paper aims to shed light on the intertwined relationships between field, actors' position in the field, and habitus transformation.

Middle-Class Chinese Migrants: The Two-Fold "Middling" Position

The middle-class migrant is a unique case for studying habitus transformation because the transnational experience of this population is conditioned by their specific state of in-betweenness. Recent literature uses the term "middling migrants" to describe this population: they are advantaged compared to low-wage workers due to the economic, social, and cultural capitals they owned, yet, at the same time, they enjoy fewer privileges than the global elites who occupy the summit of the globalized social hierarchy (Scott 2019; Jaskulowski 2020; Soong et al. 2018; Jaskułowski 2017; Colic-Peisker and Deng 2019). Their "middling" position in the field of power makes them simultaneously the "dominant" and the "dominated." Focusing on the transformation of Chinese *guanxi*, or the perception, construction, and mobilization of interpersonal relationships in the transnational context, this middle-class sample provides an interesting case for the examination of the in-betweenness in the power relations and how this specific position in the social structure shapes the migrants' transnational experience and subsequently affects their habitus negotiation and transformation.

On the other hand, as migrants coming from China, a developing country rising to become an important power in the global arena, their transnational experience is deeply shaped by the relative position of their sending country in the global hierarchy. China is neither the "dominant" nor the "dominated". It is a country powerful enough to play an important role in the globalized economy and international affairs, but it's also a country with little power in setting the rule of the game in the international field. As observed by previous research on transnational Chinese migrants (Shan 2015; Shan 2016; Colic-Peisker and Deng 2019), migrants generally experience a devaluation of their capital in the transnational process. This shed light on China's relative lower position in the global hierarchy where the value of the capitals Chinese migrants possessed is determined by the "rule of the game" in the destination country—usually a

"Western" country. The depreciation of capital across borders happens often in the context of migration between unevenly developed societies (Xu 2018). The power relation in the transnational field is further revealed by the fact that "Western (especially Anglo-Saxon) cultural capital tends to be more universalized and easily validated [across national borders]" while the valuation of capitals of other origins is filled with more uncertainties (Gu and Lee 2020, 1848). As Kelly and Lusis (2006, 837) observe that by valuing certain kinds of capital, "a habitus creates and reproduces a structure of domination and power" in the transnational context.

Chinese migrants, thus, provide an interesting case to study the interplay between their social position as middle class and their position as an ethnic minority from a developing country in a developed, Western country, and how this two-fold "middling" position together shapes their transnational experiences and subsequently affects the transformation and modification of their habitus.

Methods and Analysis

Drawing from 10 semi-structured in-depth interviews with 9 middle-class professionals who migrated from mainland China to the United States, this paper examines the transformation of the civic habitus of Chinese immigrants in the transnational process. The interviews were conducted between April and June 2022. Informants were recruited through personal connections and snowball sampling. The interviews lasted from one to two and a half hours. Two informants did not consent to be recorded but allowed notetaking during the interview. Nine interviews were conducted through Zoom and one was conducted face-to-face in Chicago. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin, transcribed, and translated into English.

Informed by literature on transnationalism that migrants are engaged in fields that cross nation-state borders (Nowicka 2015) and that research should move beyond examination of solely the receiving context to overcome methodological nationalism (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007), I crafted an interview guide that includes migrants' experience and their evaluation on situations in both countries. Instead of perceiving homeland experience as providing simply background information for migrants' integration into the host country (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007), I gave equal weight to their pre- and post-migration experiences in both data collection and data analysis. Researchers have proposed multi-sited and cosmopolitan ethnographies to capture the multi-directional flows between "here" and "there" and the dynamic construction of the transnational field (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007; Burawoy 2003; Fitzgerald 2006; Marcus 1995; Mazzucato 2007b; Appadurai 1996). In this research, investigating both the sending and receiving sides allows my informants to elaborate on a transnational perspective that constitutes frames of reference across nation-state borders that encompasses their everyday life.

The interviews investigated the migration trajectories of the informants and their experience of the socio-cultural and political transition from China to the US. According to Bourdieu (1986), drastic transition in the field leads to the experience of hysteresis. Previous research on hysteresis in abrupt upward social mobility has identified such moments as an experience of "split self", an experience that is discomforting and sometimes painful (Friedman 2016). Starting from the definition of hysteresis as a "mismatch between field and habitus", I operationalize hysteresis as moments when the once naturalized practices and beliefs are questioned and challenged in the transnational process. Hysteresis thus can manifest itself not only as experiences with negative emotional reactions, but can also be moments of surprise, curiosity, and other neutral to positive psychological reactions.

Specifically, the versus coding method is applied to the analysis of hysteresis in this research. According to Saldana (2015, 137), "versus codes identify in dichotomous or binary terms the individuals, groups, social systems, organizations, phenomena, processes, concepts, etc. in direct conflicts with each other." This coding method is useful for analyzing cross-cultural and intercultural conflict and opposing norms and values systems (ibid, 137). It is helpful for identifying the moments of hysteresis by revealing migrants' conflicting inclinations and orientations between now and then, here and there. Versus coding also facilitates the examination of the dual reference my informants adopted in their evaluations of their situation and how they construct the transnational field through constant comparisons and contrasts between the sending and receiving countries. It is a method that could reveal the macro power hierarchy embodied at the micro-level (ibid). By applying versus coding, we could shed light on the power relations in the global hierarchy that shape the individuals' experience and understanding of their own situations in the transnational context.

Demographic Profiles and Transnational Migration

All my informants could be classified as Chinese intellectuals, a respected segment of the middle class in China, referring to those who are well-educated and engage in "mental labor", occupying positions requiring specialized knowledge (Shan et al. 2016; Scott 2019; Jaskulowski 2020). Two informants were born in the 1950s (Ben and James), one in the 1960s (Max), three in the 1970s (Linda, Frank, and Mathew), two in the 1980s (John and Lang), and one in the 1990s (Danny). Most of them graduated from prestigious universities in China and held (sometimes multiple) master's or PhD degrees from universities in the United States. Despite holding education degrees in varying fields, six of them (Frank, Ben, Danny, Max, Lang, James) found

their careers in the information technology industry. Most of them except Linda and John had a few years of working experience in China before coming to the United States.

Table 1: Demographic Profiles

Name	Degrees gained in China	Degrees gained in the US	Occupation	Generation
Linda	BA	MA in accounting; MA in economy	accountant	1970s
John	BS	MS	manager	1980s
Frank	MS in electrical engineering	MS in electrical engineering	programmer	1970s
Ben	MS in electrical engineering	MS in computer science	programmer	1950s
Danny	BS in packaging engineering	Planning for MS in computer science	programmer	1990s
Max	MS in engineering mechanics	PhD in computer science	programmer	1960s
Lang	BS in electrical engineering	MS in computer science	programmer	1980s
James	MS in remote sensing	MS in remote sensing and computer mapping	programmer	1950s
Mathew	BA	PhD in naval architecture and marine engineering; MS in mechanics	insurance agent	1970s

All except Danny had lived in the US for over eleven years, but only Ben took American citizenship right away when he became eligible for citizenship application because he wanted to help his extended family migrate to the US. Four of them were naturalized only in the past six years, and three of them including Danny said they have no plans for naturalization. Unlike the global elites who are characterized as hyper-mobile members, middle-class migrants are more constrained by national bureaucracies (Scott 2019; Jaskułowski 2017). As China does not grant dual citizenship, Chinese immigrants have to choose between Chinese and American citizenship. Although my informants became naturalized in the US for various reasons, the reason for maintaining the green card status had been the same for all: it is more convenient to travel

between China and America with a Chinese passport and an American green card. The conversation about naturalization in the interviews was invariably about visas, American green cards, Chinese and American passports, and their pros and cons for cross-border travel. Unlike the elites who are able to travel across the national borders more freely, middle-class migrants negotiate with the changing border policies and optimize their strategies to ensure their transnational mobility.

This mobility as well as their close social connections with friends and family on the other side facilitate their active engagement in the two different fields. Constantly referring to China as "the domestic (*guonei*)" and talking about events happening on the other side, my informants were never absent in Chinese life despite their physical presence in America. Four of them have or had plans to migrate back to China in the uncertain future for work and family reunions. Mathew talked about his plan to start his own business in China but eventually gave it up because he had started his own family in the US. This echoes with the literature that middling migrants' experiences are characterized as fluid and possible for further mobility (Yang 2022). As the literature on transnationalism points out, migration is never an event that is completed when migrants cross the national border; instead, it is a process that continues on the other side of the border.

The Consciousness of the "West"

As observed by Fong (2011) and Soong (2016), the consciousness of the "West" plays an important role in shaping Chinese migrants' perception of the world hierarchy and their place in the world. For Chinese migrants, the "West" is "a conceptual space [that represents the First World countries, peoples, cultures as leading one history and story" (Soong 2016, 34). Depicting

the West as "existing in the present" while China as "existing in the past" (Fong 2011, 41), Chinese people tend to perceive the West as "a system of reference, an object from which to learn, a point of measurement, a goal to catch up with" (Chen 2010, 216, quoted in Soong 2016, 34). This consciousness manifested itself repeatedly in the interviews and undergirded my informants' understanding of their transnational experiences, affecting their migration decisions and trajectories, their negotiation between "here" and "there", and their transformation and modification of habitus.

Very few of them had a clear idea of migration when they left China, except James, who expressed a firm determination for migration because of the persecution his family suffered in mainland China due to his parents' affiliation with Kuomintang during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Most others, however, especially those who went abroad during the expatriation wave in the 1980s and the 1990s, expressed a wish for gaining cosmopolitan capital through overseas experiences. As the first ones in China to go abroad after the reform and opening-up in 1979, they were eager to be integrated into the world and pursue cosmopolitan capital through oversea experiences. Hannerz (2000, 103) defines cosmopolitanism as "an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other. It entails an intellectual and aesthetic openness toward divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity." "I wanted to go out and see the world" was the most heard reason for their initial decision to go abroad in the interviews. Frank told me: "I hope to change an environment, a way of life. I want to experience the world that is different from China and broaden my horizons. On one hand, coming here [America] for school is a challenge for myself; on the other hand, yeah, coming to learn something more is great."

However, for middle-class Chinese, cosmopolitanism refers not simply to engagement with a general "Other", but specifically to the experiences in the "Western world". Most of them

said America was their first if not the only destination they had ever considered. When asked why choosing to come to the US rather than other countries, none of them mentioned countries other than those considered as part of the "West". The negotiation happened within the range of Western countries. The value of the overseas experience, or cosmopolitan capital, was ranked according to the "imagined global hierarchy", which further influenced their choice of the destination country for studying abroad. Fong (2011) points out that Chinese citizens tend to place the US on the top of this hierarchy, followed by Canada, Britain, and other "developed" Western countries. Indeed, in my interviews, America is described as the most economically, politically, socially, educationally, and technologically developed country in the world. As most of these Chinese students did not plan to permanently stay in the US initially, they showed more preference for countries whose education diploma, or institutionalized cultural capital, could be translated into higher value in China. Lang said that education experience in countries other than America is perceived as "gold plating (*dujin*)" instead of "real gold", an alternative for those who are not able to go to the US because of its stricter college admission requirements.

The relative power relation between the sending and receiving countries not only decides the value of the capital migrants carry from their home country but also influences the valuation of the cultural capital migrants carried back from the host country. The opportunity to study and live in the US usually draws envious eyes from fellow Chinese. America's position as the most powerful country in the world is the most effective endorsement for the value of the capital that draws from the overseas experience in the US. As Mathew said, "Chinese generally adore the US. They think the US is quite good. It's the world's first power…. No matter whether it is the common people or the Chinese upper class, they all send their children to the US. This is indicative of something."

Tales of opportunity, wealth, democracy, and freedom were told by family and friends overseas, attracting these Chinese intellectuals to travel abroad. If the pursuit of cultural capital and upward mobility is the motivation for their traveling abroad in the first place, the perceived developmental gap between American and Chinese societies contributed to their eventual stay in the US. For the generation that was born before the opening up, the contrast between the scarcity in China and the material abundance in the US was more striking when they first came to the US. Frank said (italics are originally said in English):

> It felt like a whole other world when we came out, right? …You know, for example, when we were in China at that time, the simplest example was the big supermarkets, like *Walmart* that kind of *groceries*, we didn't have that. You know what? When you go shopping you went to those very small stores. We don't even have much concept of supermarket…. And when you came here you went to these supermarkets, wow, you could just take what you want yourself, and then you *check out* when you go out…We came out when the concept [of supermarket] just emerged, but here, the concept has existed, probably almost 100 years.

Their pre-existing perception of the US as a more "developed" and "advanced" society was constantly confirmed by their experience in the US. They told the stories of how they, as "ordinary foreigners", were received in the country as valued individuals with various entitlements. James told me the story of one of his friends whose parents came to visit him in the US but one of them was struck by a cerebral hemorrhage. Despite knowing the fact that the family could not afford the treatment, the hospital received the patient and eventually waived the medical bills for them. "This is impossible in China," he said, "in China, if you don't have money they will stop your medicine, stop your treatment. It was such a great difference." Ben

was also surprised that, when he was still a visiting scholar with his family in the US, his daughter could go to elementary school for free like other American citizens. He was deeply impressed by the Western idea that "every child of school age has the right to education". Before coming to the US, he never saw it as an entitlement. He said:

> I don't want to say that the system in China is bad. I just want to say that when society develops to a certain level of civilization, it becomes more inclusive for the poor, and the disadvantaged. Not just the government, but the whole social institution is more inclusive—because of the advanced level of civilization…so you see, there is still a big gap between China and America in the level of civilization.

This perception of America and the West as not only more "advanced" but also more "civilized" is prevalent among Chinese liberal intellectuals. Chinese immigrants, especially the older generation who were born before the reform and opening-up, have a strong inclination to perceive China as "backward" and the West as "advanced". As indicated by Lin (2021), there is a fixation among Chinese liberal intellectuals on "advanced Western civilization (*xianjin Xifang wenming*)" which he termed as "beaconism"—a complex that perceives the West, especially the United States, as the "beacon" of the world. The developmental gap between China and the West has been explained in terms of essentialist "national characteristics (*guominxing*)", attributing China's "backwardness" to the lack of Westernization. It has been ingrained in Chinese liberal discourse to associate "civilization" with the "universalist values" and "Western political institutions and norms" (Lin 2021, 97). This inclination has underpinned many of our conversations about Chinese immigrants' first encounters with the new social norms and practices in the US. The awareness of the relative positions of China and the US in the global hierarchy plays an important role in the transformation and negotiation of their original habitus.

"Simple and Nice" Americans vs. "Cunning and Treacherous" Chinese

When I asked my informants about the most impressive things about America when they first arrived, seven out of nine told me: "Americans are so kind!" Every one of them had their own stories of their first encounters with "the good Americans". They were surprised at many daily etiquettes such as holding doors for others and saying sorry when bumping into others. Max said, "in China when you bump into someone or somebody steps on your foot, you will shout 'don't you have eyes?'" Many others told the stories about how Americans are "genuine and simple" and are generous in offering help:

> It was North Carolina I went. The people there were very genuine, very nice, and very simple (*chunpu*). We were new students there and they had this local community to take care of us. They would invite us to many activities like [going to] churches and going to their homes for dinner. They offered a lot of help.

The word "simple (*chunpu*)" they used to describe Americans is very curious. Without an exact corresponding translation in English, the word *chunpu* in Chinese means simple, honest, and unsophisticated. In many cases, this word is used to describe villagers who lead a simple life in isolated countryside that is free from the worldliness and crookedness of the outside world. As interviews went on, the use of the word *chunpu* revealed itself as a state of mind that exhibits no interpersonal wariness (*jiexin*):

> Interpersonally, I think Americans, especially Canadians … are very *chunpu*. Some people say that Canada is the countryside of America. Indeed, when I was in Canada, the Canadians have no wariness toward you. When you ask for directions, they almost hate to be unable to send you [to your destination]. Some even drive you there. Americans

> generally won't let you hitchhike. But they are all passionate and honest, both Americans and Canadians. They are all particularly *chunpu* and honest. They have no wariness to people.

Coming from China, many of them felt the necessity to be wary of people, especially strangers. "Chinese cheat," Mathew said, "Some [Americans] tell lies as well…because people are all selfish and greedy. But I think, in general, Americans are better than Chinese in terms of integrity." My informants frequently referred to the phenomenon in China that people pretend to be hit by a car and extort the helpers for medical compensation. Stories about helpers being incriminated for the damage caused or becoming the victims of criminals who pretend to be people in need are prevalent in China. It has been ingrained in Chinese immigrants' minds that helping strangers in the street is a risky act and it is common in China to ignore strangers who are asking for help in the street.

On the other hand, Chinese people tend to differentiate social relationships into affective relationships and instrumental relationships (Chen et al. 2013). These social relationships are termed as "*guanxi*" in Chinese. According to Qiao (1982), *guanxi* is the foundation of the structure of Chinese society. Chinese treat people differently according to the differentiated interpersonal relationships (Zhang 1999), perceiving family and acquaintances as "one of us" and strangers as "outside others" (Yang 1993). Chinese act accordingly in different relationships and also expect others to follow the same inexplicit rules.

In the transnational context, out of habitual inertia, Chinese immigrants tend to perceive their relationship with the "nice Americans" as an instrumental relationship instead of an affective relationship, expecting an exchange between favors and returns. Many of them express

the surprise that “Americans are so selfless and altruistic” and “they do not ask for returns”. Frank told the story about how he and his family wrote to a congressman for help when his parents’ visa to America was unexpectedly delayed. His wife gave birth to their child and his parents were coming to the US to help them, but the delay disrupted all their plans for life and work. They did not expect the congressman to help because

> for them, we didn’t even have a vote. We were not American citizens yet at that time, you know. They are just so selfless. This kind of thing is hard to think of in China…. Because for them, they spend time and effort but they gained no actual benefit from this. They just helped.

This understanding of interpersonal relationships based on Chinese *guanxi* failed in the US context, indicating the dysfunction of the old habitus. Their consciousness lagged behind when they migrated to the US. This inertia also induced the moment of hysteresis and was sometimes greeted with embarrassment and experienced as social clumsiness:

> I stopped and got out of my car. There was an old lady walking on the curb. I mean, there were no others in the street. She saw me and stopped. I didn’t know what she was doing so I just ignored her. So I went to the back seat to get my bag, and she said, ‘oh I thought you stopped for me!’ She thought I was going to ask her for directions or something. I said, ‘no, no.’ It was so awkward…. I mean, it’s so different in the US. They come to you to help. In China, nobody cares.

But more often, this failure of old habitus in the new environment was embraced with a sense of appreciation. The experience of hysteresis induced self-analysis and reflections on the past habitus. Frank said:

In China we often say, 'every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost'[1]…. People are so indifferent to each other that people may die in the street without anyone caring about it…. But when you came here, you found out that it is not like that. [laugh] This society is very warm, right? It is actually in totalitarian countries where lofty things like collectivity are emphasized that the care for the individual is not adequate. When something happens to you—unless it's your family or the people around you—most of the time people are indifferent. Do you understand this kind of attitude? Nobody actually cares about anyone.

Interestingly, many of them attributed this interpersonal trust in the US to the belief in Christianity. The difference between China and the US is perceived as the difference between a country without faith and a country with Christian virtues. Despite that only Mathew converted to Christianity after coming to the US and the rest remained atheists, five of them expressed a sense of affinity with Christianity and four of them believed that Christianity is fundamental to the social ethos and morality in the US:

Ben: In general, I could understand their [Christian] teachings very well. They are very good. They teach people to be kind, to treat people well, and to be compassionate.

Interviewer: So you think Christianity is important for America?

Ben: Yes, yes, yes. I think it is an important mainstay of American society…. They teach people to love each other. This love is the mainstay of American society.

[1] Chinese idiom translated as the English equivalent. Originally: "人不为己，天诛地灭。"

Lin (2021) finds that the Chinese discourse about Western "civilizational advancement" is often associated with racial whiteness and Christianity (Lin 2021; Pusey 1983; Keevak 2011). Indeed, when my informants talked about "Americans", they were generally referring to white Americans, understanding "white" as the default racial category in the US. When I asked for clarification of the race of the "Americans" they were referring to in the conversation, the answer was invariably "the white". When referring specifically to certain racial and ethnic minorities in the US, they would consciously differentiate them from the default "Americans", directly using terms related to their skin colors and national origins such as "blacks", "Mexicans", and "Chinese". The habitus difference has been essentialized as racial and cultural difference, and morality also has been racialized and Christianized: "People are all greedy and selfish, but Americans are not to the extent of Chinese. Not so deep and so widespread. It is related to its Christian foundation."

The perceived superiority of this social morality in the US and the re-evaluation of the past habitus as immoral have propelled Chinese immigrants to discard their past habitus. Framed in moral terms, new habitus is adopted as a more "modernized" way of life. Some of them perceived social morality as conditioned by the level of social and economic development. As James said: "This is the direction of social development. When the country becomes wealthy it will come to this path. China will, too." Mathew reflected on his past habitus as "very self-centered" and "selfish". He admitted that he was not willing to help others in the past, but after coming to the US, he "lowered the defense": "in America, you don't need so much defense…. People here are very kind. I became more willing to help others. [I] genuinely want to help others and see others' happiness. I became more relaxed."

In sum, habitus transformation is a result of both "push" and "pull": the dysfunction of the old habitus and the acceptance of the new habitus. In Friedman's research (2016) on the abrupt upward social mobility of individuals from working-class families, adopting the new upper- and middle-class habitus makes the individuals feel "guilty" because they are abandoning the "real authentic" self. Without whole-hearted recognition of the new habitus, the experience of field transition results in a "cleft habitus", or a "habitus clivé", which is defined as a state of being "torn by contradiction and internal division" and constant oscillation between the two worlds (Bourdieu 2000; Friedman 2016). On the other hand, in the case of Chinese immigrants, their positive evaluation and acceptance of the new habitus have enabled them to escape the state of cleft habitus, facilitating their smooth habitus transformation.

Rule of Law vs Rule of Man

My informants generally described government departments and officials in the US as more "rule-abiding" while the ones in China as more "flexible". Max said: "Chinese officials have more autonomy…. In the US, the job [of the departments] is very basic and simple and doesn't require much ability. How to do and what to do have clear rules. They just need to follow the due process and rules." It has been ingrained in Chinese people's minds to resort to personal connections to solve problems and to get around rules and laws. Mobilizing their own *guanxi*, or social connections, to get things done and to turn things in a more favorable direction, this understanding of the "implicit rule of society" has been the "street smarts" that help people navigate life in China, especially when it involves interactions with the authorities:

> In the US, they [government officials and employees] do the things they should do, and for the things they shouldn't do, they will follow the laws. Unlike China. In China, you

need *guanxi*. If you have *guanxi,* you can do almost everything; if you don't have *guanxi,* you couldn't even get them to do the things they should do. That's the situation.

Some Chinese immigrants carried this "social savvy" to the US but faced severe legal consequences. Mathew told anecdotal stories about how some Chinese parents tried to bribe American law enforcement to release their delinquent children. "It wasn't a big deal at first, but when they bribed, it became a serious crime…. In China, bribery is the norm…. Bribing the guards, bribing the superiors, and bribing for promotions. In America, bribery is a big crime," Mathew said.

As a way of understanding the "rule of the society", this savvy for problem solving is not restricted to the practice of bribery. Instead of monetary exchange, it is more often manifested in the form of an exchange of "favor" based on an instrumental relationship. However, similarly, this habitual practice of "flexibility" to get around rules and due process was obstructed in the new social environment. Ben told me a story about how he wanted to help his neighbor's brother apply for a visa to America. He asked one of his professors at the university to provide proof of a scholarship. "I told her that he [the neighbor's brother] is a very good student and asked her if she is willing to provide a proof so that he could get the visa. She said, 'no, I don't have the right to do so.'" These moments of hysteresis and incidents of failure gradually informed Chinese immigrants about the dysfunction of their old habitus and the rules of the new social field. Mathew said in China when a car accident happens, Chinese will "talk through" the matter of liability. "I myself do the same…. Americans will definitely follow the rules to exchange their insurance information. And if someone calls the police you have to 'do official business according to the official principles (*gongshi gongban*)'. Chinese like to solve problems privately."

However, the dysfunction did not made Chinese immigrants fully discard their inclination to resort to personal connections and to get around rules. Despite the fact that they no longer applied their Chinese way of problem solving in the American context, they kept this "savvy" for handling the issues when they went back to China. James told me how he went back to China to renew his passport. His sister is a doctor in China and one of her patients is a government official. With this *guanxi,* he managed to greatly simplify the procedure of passport renewal. "You see, this is the difference between China and America," James said. He is fully aware of the different social contexts in the two countries and is fluent in the different rules and their applicability. He has two different sets of understandings and practices to navigate his life in both China and America, but it does not necessarily mean that he is experiencing a state of cleft habitus. Instead, he knows to follow the rules in the US and also knows that the "American way" would be too naïve in Chinese society. His old habitus is only reactivated when he goes back to China. As Carlson and Schneickert (2021) point out, some dispositions are not "wasted away" but "toned down" in the new field. These dispositions may become "dormant" in the migration process but will be "reactivated" in the field that has cultivated the dispositions. As shown by the transformation of the Chinese's utilization of *guanxi* in the transnational context, the dysfunction of *guanxi* in the US context has toned down this disposition. However, *guanxi* did not vanish but it becomes dormant, and when Chinese immigrants return to the Chinese context, the habitual utilization of *guanxi* will be reactivated to navigate Chinese immigrants' life in China.

Merits vs. *Guanxi*

It was prevalent among my informants to perceive America as a more "equal" country than China. They understood "equality" as the neoliberal "equal opportunities for upward social mobility" instead of "equal social outcomes". They had explicitly spoken against the Democratic

Party's policies that aim more at achieving equal outcomes such as affirmative action and the law in California which reclassified thefts under $950 as misdemeanors instead of felony offenses[2]. For them, equality means individuals can achieve success through their own efforts with equal social chances, and justice means individuals are in their "right places" in the social hierarchy according to their capability. Ben said: "We start at the same starting point, and if we pay different efforts, we might have different outcomes. We need to allow this difference." This understanding of equality is directly associated with their perception of inequality in China:

> America is relatively more equal, right? In China, you rely on *guanxi*, right? You see, if you have good *guanxi* then you could get a good job; or if you are not a capable person, you could get into university through *guanxi* and rob people who get higher scores [in the college entrance exam] than you of the opportunity…. It is related to power. Just think of the red families[3]. They don't need any effort. They could solve many problems and accumulate wealth through *guanxi.* Children from poor families might spend their whole life 'facing the earth and back to the sky'[4], no matter how talented they are.

Guanxi centers the conversations on the inequalities in China. Inequality happens when individuals rely on their social capital or *guanxi* rather than their own ability to get access to better education chances and to get promotions and so forth. Individuals with *guanxi* are able to get around the established reward system to reap illegitimate benefits. On the other hand, America is perceived to be a place where individuals are evaluated based solely on their ability and efforts, which makes it a fairer system:

[2] Referring to California's Proposition 47
[3] Referring to the political families in China.
[4] Chinese proverb "面朝黄土背朝天", referring to the laborious work of farming.

> [In the US] you don't need to consider interpersonal relationships. You just need to do your job well. In China, if you want a promotion or something, you need to obtain good *guanxi* with your boss, with your colleagues. If you can't handle the *guanxi* well you will be at a disadvantage.

Many of them associated the system of meritocracy with the concept of "democracy", perceiving meritocracy as the superiority of the democratic system:

> Democracy means that everyone has equal chances and everyone could achieve their dream through their own efforts right? If you are capable then you could achieve your dream; if you are not or if you don't work hard then you won't…. So democracy means providing each with the same rights and chances.

As the middle class in China who graduated from the top universities in the US, they have been struggling with the deft handling of *guanxi* in China. The successful translation of the institutionalized cultural capital (education diplomas) they owned into economic capital has been obstructed by their lack of *guanxi* when they were in China:

> I could hardly find a job, even if I was graduated from [a top university in China]. It's certainly not the best…but it's not bad for sure. But if you don't have the social background, you could hardly find a job. This is a very sad thing, isn't it?

Many of them were tired of *guanxi* in China because of their relatively lower positions in the power relations of *guanxi*. Being the middle class in China, some of them possessed adequate *guanxi*, or social capital, which provided them with the opportunity to garner benefits from their social connections with people in power. However, their "middling" position in China also

determined that they would be excluded from the dominant class—that is, the class of "red families"—who enjoys extensive privileges derived from political power. To gain themselves a chance to play with people with privileges on a level field, middle-class Chinese took pains managing their *guanxi* with individuals on the higher end of the power relation. James cited one of his friends who is also a migrant from China as an example to illustrate the stress caused by *guanxi*:

> He said in China, he could not sleep at night thinking about how to build and maintain *guanxi* with the superiors, how to send them gifts and how to pull strings with these *guanxi*.

My informants described the environment in the US as more "relaxed" and "simple" because of the absence of *guanxi.* The cultural capital they gained through education could be smoothly translated into economical capital in the US without interference from *guanxi.* They believed that as long as one is willing to work hard, everyone is able to achieve their own happiness in the US and that no one will be unjustly rewarded because of a lack of *guanxi.* Their effort and ability will be evaluated accordingly in the system of meritocracy.

However, this idealized perception of America as the perfect meritocracy is far from accurate. The dysfunction of Chinese *guanxi* in the American context had induced them to downplay the function of social capital in the US, which is similar, but not equivalent to Chinese *guanxi*. *Guanxi* involves an exchange of favor or *renqing* in Chinese, and it is obligatory reciprocity that gives rise to the sense of debt and the need to reciprocate (Qi 2013). On the other hand, Bourdieu (1986) describes social capital as a "collectivity-owned capital". The absence of the reciprocity of favor and the explicit exchange of gifts in dyadic relationships in the US had

facilitated Chinese immigrants to deny the function of social networking and dissociate it with upward mobility in the US context. This denial had been manifested as an emphasis on meritocracy:

> There is inequality [in the US] right? Anyway, we are excluded from the circle of the very top of the hierarchy. But in general, if you pay your effort and you are not stupid, then you could lead a good life in this country. It won't be affected by the lack of *guanxi* or your ethnicity. Even if you are being victimized because of your ethnicity—but you see, there are still many minority groups that are excellent: Vietnamese, Chinese, and Koreans. All of them are excellent—as long as you are willing to work hard and be clever, generally, you are able to lead a good life.

The habitus of *guanxi* has been contested and complicated by the race and ethnicity of Chinese immigrants in the transnational process. Perceiving themselves as the "model minority" in the US, Chinese immigrants took themselves as the evidence and the justification for meritocracy in the US. Despite that many of them had realized that there is a ceiling for them in the US and they frequently attribute the failure of further upward mobility to their exclusion from the "social circles of Americans", they kept emphasizing the importance of personal merits over social networking for upward mobility:

> Foreigners [referring to Americans] tend to get together more. As Chinese, you are not in that group. But it doesn't mean you don't have the chance…In the workplace, you could rely on your own ability to achieve.

All of my informants found it difficult to get into the circle of white Americans but they denied being racially discriminated against individually. Without perceiving social exclusion or non-

integration as a form of racial discrimination, they tend to attribute this experience to "cultural differences":

> Asians and whites don't blend together. It's purely a matter of culture…I don't think it's a kind of discrimination. After all, different people have different interests and hobbies…That's the most fundamental. It is not because they are discriminating against you… For example, they [Americans] love sports games very much…They would get really excited but I'm not so excited about it. Yes, different cultures. When they start to talk about basketball and football I usually don't speak anymore.

As we could see, their ability to conduct successful social networking was restricted by their ethnic identity. The dysfunction of interpersonal relationships in social mobility is decided by Chinese's racially marginalized status in the US. As Qi (2013) points out, despite containing some cultural characteristics, Chinese *guanxi* shares the same social function as Bourdieu's social capital. It is not that the social function of *guanxi* has failed in social mobility in the US context, but Chinese immigrants' ability to harvest fruits from social relationships had greatly diminished by social exclusion and marginalization due to their middling racial position in the US. As observed by Kim (1999) that while Chinese immigrants are often valorized as the "model minority" relative to "the most denigrated blacks", they are also constructed as "immutably foreign" and "unassimilable". Asian immigrants, who are perceived as both "unfit for and uninterested in the American way of life" (ibid, 112), are often excluded from mainstream society. Consequently, the habitual association between upward mobility and social connections had been greatly downplayed in the US context. Among all informants, only Lang admitted the importance of social connections in the US. Termed as "social ability", he differentiated it from the ability to build and sustain *guanxi* in the Chinese context:

> It seemed to us that American society does not value *guanxi* as much as we do in China. But in fact, …when you get to a managerial position, the required worldly wisdom [*renqingshigu*] is similar…Social ability is indispensable.

However, realizing that they would be excluded from "the circle" despite their efforts of integration, some of them significantly downplayed their life expectation and their will to be integrated. Max said:

> When I was in San Francisco, the workplace was full of whites. There was only one Chinese besides me…I never managed to be integrated into American society, and I don't feel that I have to be integrated through painstaking efforts. But not integrating into the Americans' circle also causes problems. When there is a chance of promotion, they will promote the ones whom they have good relationships with, and I was not considered. I don't think it matters a lot. I'm not very demanding.

Max was in a state of conflict where he realized that social exclusion is problematic but simultaneous thought it didn't matter a lot. The denial of the effectiveness of social networking in the US context thus could be understood as a result of their lowered life expectation which makes "painstaking efforts" for social networking unnecessary.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper examines how middle-class Chinese immigrants experience the moments of hysteresis and how they transform and modify their civic habitus in their migration process from mainland China to the US. It examines the hysteresis and transformation of the civic habitus with Chinese immigrants' understanding and practice of *guanxi* in three social scenarios: social trust

in strangers, problem solving through personal connections, and social networking in upward mobility.

In the case of social trust, Chinese immigrants' habitual social vigilance lags behind in the transnational process. The first encounters with Americans have surprised them as their customary expectation of strangers as indifferent and their perception of the social relationship with strangers as more instrumental than affective have failed in the American context. The rule of "favor" and "return" in the exchange relationship with the not-well-acquainted has been challenged. The encounter of their old habitus with the new social field has triggered self-analysis and self-reflection. They reevaluated their past habitus as immoral and evaluated the "Western" style of interpersonal trust as more "advanced" and "civilized" due to its perceived association with a higher level of social development and the Christian spirit. In this case, the abandonment of the past habitus is the result of both the "push" of the dysfunction of the habitus in the new field and the "pull" of the acceptance of and the preference for the new habitus. With this "push and pull", Chinese immigrants smoothly transformed their habitus in the new environment without experiencing a state of "cleft habitus".

In the second scenario, Chinese immigrants' habitual "rule-bending" way of problem solving clashed with the rule of law in the US society. Facing not only negative social sanctions but also severe legal consequences, Chinese immigrants quickly learned from the continuing practice of "flexibility" in the US that "Chinese ways do not work here". Understanding the principle of American society as the "rule of law" and the principle of Chinese society as the "rule of man", Chinese immigrants developed two sets of social practices and understandings to navigate their civic life in the two different social fields. The two sets of dispositions did not contradict each other and evolved into the state of cleft habitus. Instead, the application of each is

kept within the border of nation-states, and the immigrants are able to flexibly switch between the two sets of practices in their transnational travels. It is understood that the dysfunctional habitus does not necessarily "waste away" due to lack of use in the new social field. Instead, the dysfunctional habitus is toned down in the mismatched field but can be reactivated when the actors return to the old field in which the habitus was cultivated.

In the last scenario, the accustomed mobilization of social connections for upward social mobility has been suppressed by the emphasis on meritocracy. The old habitus does not become dysfunctional in the new social field, yet it has been downplayed by Chinese immigrants in the transnational process. Despite that the habitus is largely transferrable from the original field to the new field, the efficacy of the habitus has been greatly diminished in the transnational process. Chinese immigrants' ability to reap benefits from social connections in upward social mobility has been restricted by the type of cultural capital they owned such as their racial identity and hobbies and the valuation of their cultural capital in the US context. This finding confirms the conclusion of Gu and Lee (2020) that the transferability of capitals in the transnational context affects the recalibration of habitus. It also reveals that not only the function but also the efficacy of habitus in the new field affects the transformation and modification of habitus.

In sum, this study comes to three conclusions: first, the abandonment of old habitus and adoption of new habitus is not only the result of the pushing force of habitus dysfunction in the new environment but also involves the pulling force of appreciation and active acceptance of the new habitus. Second, the dysfunction of the old habitus in the new environment does not necessarily lead to rejection of the old habitus; instead, the habitus could become dormant when it does not match with the field but become reactivated in the field that fits. Third, the efficacy of transferrable habitus in the new field is conditioned by the relative status of the actors in the new

field. The diminished efficacy of the habitus rather than the dysfunction of the habitus could be the trigger of the weakening of habitus in the new field.

This study is not free of limitations. Using a sample of middle-class Chinese migrants who are well-educated professionals in the US, the specific social position of this sample makes the conclusion not generalizable to a broader migrant population. Future research can be conducted with migrant samples with more diverse socio-economic backgrounds to examine how different social positions might mediate the process of habitus transformation in the transnational context.

Though beyond the central scope of the current study, findings of middle-class Chinese immigrants' emphasis on meritocracy and depoliticization of racial discrimination may draw interesting implications on the political conservatism of this population. Aside from their well-known opposition to affirmative action, this population's conservative leaning is also deeply affected by their understanding of social justice which places meritocracy in the center. Tired of the Chinese way of upward mobility which emphasizes more the building, sustaining, and mobilizing of *guanxi* with individuals on the higher end of power relations rather than an emphasis on personal ability and qualifications, they came to the US in seek of a fairer game to play. They tend to perceive America as a perfect meritocracy that assigns individuals to the place they deserved in the social hierarchy based on their ability. This not only provides justification for their denial of the general social injustice derived from inequality but also leads to the depoliticization of the racial discrimination they have experienced themselves. Social exclusion is explained not in terms of "racism" of the white but is attributed to their own failure of further assimilation into the mainstream culture and sometimes the "inferior national characteristics" which are rooted in Chinese nationality. The political conservatism of middle-class Chinese

migrants is thus a complicated entanglement of their belief in meritocracy, their habitual perception of the West which is characterized as white and protestant as the superior, and their own middling position as the better-off model minority in the US.

Lastly, as the transnational migrants who have active engagement in both China and the US, they are the actors involved in the cross-border exchange of information, practices, and ideas. Habitus transformation not only affects migrants, but it also asserts an impact on the home society through migrants in the form of social remittances. The concept of social remittances aims to capture the notion that, "in addition to money, migration also entails the circulation of ideas, practices, skills, identities, and social capital…between sending and receiving communities" (Larcoix et al. 2016, 1). As transnational actors, migrants who live their lives straddling multiple places also "translate and diffuse ideas and perception from one context to another" (ibid, 2). Although beyond the scope of the current study, future research could explore how the cross-border transmission of social remittances is conditioned by the habitus of the migrants who work as the medium and mediator in this process and how the habitus transformation of the migrants can subsequently intrigue ripple effect across the social networks of the migrants in their home country.

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