

Leiden University

# Parents' Expectations

Reactions Among Second Generation Mainland Chinese  
Immigrants in Brussels

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## Introduction

Cultural assimilation and socialization are processes by which immigrants go through when settling down in a host country. However, the degree of cultural assimilation and socialization varies within generations of immigrants, with second generations (the children) being culturally assimilated quicker than the first (the parents). Indeed, children are much more in contact and aware of other spheres of influence outside their family circle, such as school, media, and peer groups. The community of Chinese immigrants is no exception. While first generations of Chinese immigrants tend to retain their traditional values and lifestyle while living in the host country, second generations adopt the country's cultural and behavioural habits (Benton, 2011; Chuang, 2011). Researchers have suggested that because of cultural assimilation and socialization, Chinese immigrant children redefine their perceptions of their parents' traditional values and lifestyle, leading to an intergenerational conflict in terms of value transmission and parents' expectations (Chuang, 2011; Chung 2016; Hynie, 2006).

This intergenerational conflict itself is a recurrent and relevant topic as it has been depicted in many known media. Just to give a few examples, the movie "The Farewell" is about a family throwing a fake wedding in China in order to say farewell to their grandmother who was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer, but does not know about it. We follow Billi, a second generation Chinese immigrant living in the United States, who is having conflicted thoughts over her family's cultural beliefs that it is best not to tell the elder about her illness in order for her to pass away peacefully. This movie discusses the issues of cultural assimilation as well as the views of second generation Chinese immigrants on familial and cultural expectations. Another example would be the famous movie "Crazy Rich Asians" – nominated for Best Motion Picture at the 76<sup>th</sup> Golden Globe Awards – which takes place in New York and Singapore (where Chinese are the largest ethnic group). This movie clearly illustrates the internal conflict in terms of mate preference and transmission of values as well as the importance of saving the face of the family.

In addition to the media, the topics of cultural assimilation and socialization are frequently studied within the academic literature. Most of the research handling these topics among the Chinese immigrant community focus on the United States (Chao, 2013; Chen, 2014; Chung, 2016; Garey, 2015; Gibson, 2001; Guo, 2014; Hynie, 2006; Kim, 2013; Mao, 2018; Zhang, 2010) or other English-speaking countries such as Canada (Chow, 2007; Jun, 2001) or the United Kingdom (Guo, 2014). However, I have come to the realization that very little attention has been given to the situation of second generation of Chinese immigrants in Brussels, Belgium. Brussels is *de facto* the capital of Europe with all of the administrative centre of the EU, and is therefore highly multicultural, and shapes a one-of-a-kind growing environment for second generation immigrants, making it unique compared to other cities. This is why I have decided to conduct my research in Brussels. This research answers the following questions: How do second generations view their parents' expectations? How did the second generation's life experiences and cultural beliefs shape their opinions on those expectations?

This study's findings contribute to existing research by going beyond the parents' point of view and focusing more on the second generation's experiences of cultural assimilation and socialization in a foreign country and how it affected their opinion towards their parents'

expectations. Indeed, academic research has so far mainly focused on the first generation of immigrants living in the United States. Since this study will take place in a different country, similarities and differences are expected to be found between the community of Chinese immigrants in the United States and the one living in Brussels.

After this introduction, I shall first review the existing literature on cultural assimilation as well as parents' expectations and filial piety, and socialization among Chinese immigrants. I will then move on to the methodology section where I explain the method used to conduct my research and I discuss the criteria based on which I have selected my interviewees. In the end, I have selected ten interviewees from the same background: they had to be second generation of Mainland Chinese immigrants living in Brussels. Then, the background information section will provide the readers the basic background knowledge that they might lack to understand the analysis such as the context behind Chinese immigration to Europe and behind the phenomenon of immigration in Belgium. Indeed, since my study takes place in Brussels and I am researching the topics of socialization and cultural assimilation of the Chinese immigrants community, background information is needed for the reader and future research to understand how Brussels is similar or different from other cities and countries in shaping this community. Following this section, I will then analyse the data based on my interviews and connect it to the existing academic research. The data analysis chapter will be divided into three sections: parents' expectations, children's reactions to those expectations and finally I will go beyond those reactions by discussing the next generations. The first section is about parents' expectations as the interviewees understood it from their life experience. The main expectations covered by interviewees were parents and family care, jobs and studies, and finally dating and marrying expectations. The second section will discuss the interviewees' thoughts on their parents' expectations in order to analyse whether or not their reactions towards those expectations have been redefined by cultural assimilation and socialization. In other words, I want to find out if the interviewees agree or not with their parents' expectations and if, to some extent, the environment they grew up in have influenced their opinions in any way. The third and final section of the analysis chapter is about the interviewees thinking beyond their own generation. This section discusses whether or not the interviewees will be applying their parents' expectations to the next generation and why. Indeed, even though second generations were opposed to some of their parents' expectations (such as towards studies and dating), they also agreed with a few of them, like the expectations towards grades, family and parents care, for example. In the conclusion, I argue that, similarly to the case of the United States which has been much focused on by the existing literature, the second generation Chinese immigrants living in Brussels have a different opinion on expectations than the first generation. I observe that the community in Brussels have undergone a process of cultural assimilation and socialization which have influenced their opinion when it comes to their parents' expectations. However, while they tend to disagree to most of their parents' expectations, they also believe that some of them are important enough to be transmitted to next generations. Finally, the conclusion will also discuss suggestions for future research.

## Literature Review

Cultural assimilation and intergenerational relationship are recurrent topics that have been studied by many researchers. *Cultural assimilation* is the process in which the immigrant's culture changes and adaptations unfold when individuals of different cultures come together (Gibson, 2001), and it is a process that every group of immigrants go through. *Intergenerational relationship* refers to parents-child relationship in this study. While some of the articles reviewed differ from each other in terms of main subjects – some studies focused on education (Chow, 2007; Chung, 2016; Gans et al., 2012; Li, 2001), mate preference (Hynie, 2006), second language acquisition (Chen, 2014; Gans et al., 2012; Zhang, 2010) or even on elderly health care (Garey, 2015; Lam, 2006) – all of them mention and link their topic to the theme of expectations and filial piety. This literature review discusses the matters of cultural assimilation, intergenerational relationship as well as the practice of filial piety among second generation Chinese immigrants living in various regions of the world.

### Cultural Assimilation

The theory of cultural assimilation is central when it comes to migration studies. It has been applied to different situations and has often been connected to parents-child relationships. Studies so far have been mainly conducted in the United States (Chao, 2013; Chen, 2014; Chung, 2016; Garey, 2015; Gibson, 2001; Guo, 2014; Hynie, 2006; Kim, 2013; Mao, 2018; Zhang, 2010). The United States is a good example of cultural assimilation because many living in the U.S. embraced multiculturalism as a response to the diverse immigration phenomenon those countries faced starting the latter half of the twentieth century (Gans et al.; 2012). Indeed, the United States has a long history of assimilating or integrating a wide variety of immigrants. But each new coming wave of immigrants ends up generating a dilemma for the American society. The dilemma is to either fully integrate these immigrants into the society (this can be referred to the metaphor of the “melting pot” where every community becomes indistinguishable from the larger society) or let them keep their distinctive characteristics (the “salad bowl”, where society becomes a diverse whole).

While immigrant Chinese first generation communities are mostly found to retain their traditional values, lifestyles and native languages while living in the United States, their children tend to absorb the host country's cultural beliefs and behavioural habits at a faster rate (Benton, 2011; Chuang, 2011). Children are indeed considered as an important factor in immigrant families' experience of cultural assimilation since they participate in the process of adaptation – translating administration papers, buying groceries or just by being autonomous while their parents work (Chung, 2016; Foner, 1997). The difference in terms of the pace of cultural assimilation leads, however, to a substantial generation gap as first-generation immigrants are often satisfied of their new situation as it is considerably better than when they were in their homeland while the second or third generation of immigrants have higher expectations when it comes to their own living conditions (Gans et al., 2012). This quote from Susan Chuang's “Immigrant children: Change, adaptation, cultural transformation” (2011) is a good illustration of the generation gap: “Parents think that their children are too Americanized, whereas children think that their parents are too Asian” and is also backed up by this quote from Gans et al.'s “Cultural assimilation” (2012). “Assimilation can also strain relationships across generations among family members”.

Cultural assimilation lead to a generation gap but can also regulate the associations between peer experiences and social behaviours in immigrant children, which is deemed important since social groups have been crucial to human survival for centuries (Gans et al., 2012). While most of children of immigrants go through a smooth process of cultural assimilation between the different cultures and beliefs of family, school and peer groups, some situations require the children to choose between ethnic values and receiving culture, especially in the context of their private life at home. Indeed, studies have suggested that when parents are faced by multiple challenges in their process of adaptation after migration, such as having a lower status occupation than the non-immigrant population, regardless their educational background back in their origin country or lack of acculturation such as in terms of English language ability (Faulkner, 2011), they often tend to feel powerless when it comes to helping with their children's studies, thus forcing the children to be independent starting from a young age as a mean to satisfy their parents' expectations (Chung, 2016; Qin et al., 2014).

However, parents are not the only ones setting expectations for the children: society also puts pressure on the Chinese ethnic minority in general. For example, in Qin's research (2014) conducted in the United States, American society stereotypes Chinese American children as "model students", which led to the belief that Chinese American parents are the "model parents" as well, due to their children's exceptional educational achievement. Nevertheless, this model was deemed inaccurate by some researchers who found out that unlike popular assumption, Chinese parents were not as involved in their children's schooling as it seemed (Qin et al., 2014). Indeed, studies have highlighted the role of Chinese parents in the educational success of their children, for example via investments in their children's education of through guilt induction in regards of their own parental sacrifice and all of this without being directly involved themselves in their children's education. Benton (2011) further argues that Chinese outside China have always been subjects to ethnic stereotyping. Indeed, Chinese immigrants in general are destined and expected to do outstandingly not only at school but at work as well. In other words, the idea of a 'model minority' isolate the Chinese immigrant minority by raising them falsely above the other minorities and 'it implies career success is a Chinese propensity, and downplays the disproportionate number of Chinese in Europe who don't 'succeed' (Benton, 2011). In my research, this ethnic stereotyping has been felt by multiple interviewees who thought they were not 'successful' enough compared to others. Furthermore, the idea of a 'model minority' does not only impact adults and young workers' well-being, it also impacts children. Indeed, scholars have also argued that the "model minority" stereotypes not only caused a negative impact on the psychological well-being of less successful Chinese immigrant children but also ignored the diversity of the Asian population (Benton, 2011; Chuang, 2011). Indeed, it is argued in Chuang's article that one of the main negative impacts of this stereotype is overlooking the psychological and social maladjustment of the immigrant children. For example, Asian American students are viewed by society as adjusting quite well to the American school as they are perceived as quiet, hard-working and rarely causing trouble. Only a few studies really focused on and documented the challenges the immigrants' children faced in this process: the difficulties Chinese immigrant children have to go through in their psychological and social adjustment are still being overlooked by parents, teachers and researchers (Chuang, 2011; Jun, 2001).

Existing literature on the Chinese immigrant community mostly focuses on the United States and is mainly about parents' opinions on the phenomenon of immigration and cultural assimilation. I believe that the second generation's point of view on that matter is worth studying in order to analyse to what extent cultural assimilation has influenced their opinion towards their parents' expectations. It is interesting in those situations to explore the intergenerational transmission of values and to understand to what extent it affected the parent-child relationship by looking into the children's perspective on that matter via in-depth interviews. Most studies on this topic so far focus on the parents' point of view (the positive one) or approach this subject with a quantitative method. With this study, I address this lack of information on the children's perspective, but in a different context in terms of the region, as I will focus on second generation of Chinese immigrants living in Brussels. I expect as a result that the second generation will be more culturally assimilated to Brussels than their first generation parents. As Benton (2011) states in his article, new generations do not always follow the ancestral identities they inherit from their parents. Indeed, new generations tend to create new identities instead, which is a mix between the identity of their country of origin and the identity of their country of birth. In other words, they combine ancestral heritage with habits and cultural outlook from the country they were born in (Benton, 2011).

### **Expectations and Filial Piety**

This intergenerational transmission of values brings us to the concept of filial piety. Traditionally in the Chinese philosophy, filial piety is regarded as the Confucian virtue and it refers to certain types of behavioural recommendations such as showing respect for one's parents and ancestors, taking care of the parents and being obedient among other examples (Chow, 2007). However, the practice of the virtue itself varies within communities and is flexible within history, as different Chinese communities are undergoing industrialization and urbanization, such as the community in Brussels, which I will analyse in this research paper. Russel (2010) argues in his article that the roles of the parents and children are hierarchically defined, in Confucian notions, not only through the duty of parents in caring for their children, but also through the obligation of the children to obey and carry out their parents' expectations. He then goes on by explaining that this concept is part of a "broader concept of filial piety". However, even if children tend to maintain and value shared ethnic heritage with their parents while showing acceptance of ideas of familial loyalty and responsibility, it can be argued that the practice of filial piety is declining among the middle-class immigrant community in the United States (Cheng, 2006; Chung, 2016). Even though filial piety remains an important socialization goal in Chinese societies, social condition changes while living in a foreign country are inevitable due to the cultural assimilation and children's obligations to their parents are, as a consequence, being redefined. Indeed, the phenomenon of industrialization and urbanization brought significant changes to the structure of the family, meaning that filial piety is no longer practiced in a traditional way such as a land owned by a male household head then passed to his only sons like in a patriarchal system (Cheng, 2006). Furthermore, the concept of filial piety as such might clash with the children's belief in alternative models of family relationships and values, which are transmitted by schools, media and peers (Yau, 1996). In consequence, children may reject the practice of filial piety as transmitted by their parents and that is contradictory to what they believe to be the best alternative. In other words, in the case of this literature review where most researchers analysed the situation in the United States, the value and practice of filial piety, or obligations to parents, is adapted by the Chinese immigrant children

to the American society, as they come in contact with other spheres of influences outside of their family circle, such as school, media and peer groups (Cheng, 2006; Garey, 2015; Lam, 2006). Additionally, as fewer governmental institutions (in the United States for example) provide support such as public health care for immigrant families and immigration laws are put into place, immigrant parents often have to rely on their children's labour at work or at home, thus putting more pressure on the children's shoulders. However, it has also been observed that the elderly are capable of adapting to changes overtime and to accommodate their expectations of having their children take care of them in this period of urbanization (Cheng, 2006) but they still expect a lot from their children from a young age, especially in terms of prioritizing education as a mean to get a stable job. In this paper and in the analysis section in particular, I shall refer to filial piety as the children's duty to satisfy their parents' expectations.

### **Socialization and Parent-Child Conflicts**

The last recurring concept which bonds all of them together in the selection of studies is the concept of socialization. It is deeply connected to the phenomenon of cultural assimilation but also within the practice of filial piety and parents' expectations. Socialization is an essential tool used to find a sense of belonging to a society, as the feeling of "uncertainty of belongingness" is a challenge that all new immigrants face (Chow, 2007), but it is anticipated that a sense of belonging to the host country will be gradually developed by new immigrants, especially by children who will be more immersed into the host country's culture via the media, school and peer group. This concept of socialization can be connected to filial piety and cultural assimilation in a way that since the elderly and older immigrants face difficulties due to their degree of cultural assimilation (for example, lack of English skills and knowledge of services in the host country), they have to heavily rely on their children when it comes to healthcare, administration and socialization and, in other words, rely on some sort of intergenerational support (Kim, 2013).

Like any other migrant communities, there is often a colossal number of challenges in terms of parent-child relations in Asian immigrant families. Confrontations can particularly happened in the case of immigrant families where the host country's beliefs and practices lead to increasing conflicts and emotional division between parents and children (Chuang, 2011). While the context of the family is essential in helping children to overcome difficulties regarding barriers in the new society – such as racism, new school life or neighbourhood environments – immigration often brings changes to familial roles and tends to disturb the balance of family relations over time. Studies of Asian immigrant families in the United States have found that some of the hardest difficulties Asian American children faced included parents' high level of control, conflicts at home as well as high parental expectation in terms of academic achievements and career path (Chuang, 2011). Even if high parental expectations have been identified as one of the major contributions to Chinese immigrant children's educational achievement, researchers have argued that it was also responsible for placing a huge amount of pressure on the children, leading to conflict between parents and children. Family conflict is most of the time a consequence of different perspectives on culturally pertinent subjects, for example academic achievement, parental respect and familial obligation. The concept of socialization is important to grasp for my research because every single event and encounters shape the development of the mindset and personality of an individual, even more so when it comes to a community of immigrants whose family circle beliefs

might be slightly or completely different from what one might see and hear from their surroundings outside that family circle. It is indeed important to understand that children of Chinese immigrants might have had a different experience with the acceptance of their family values and expectations depending on various factors such as where they grew up (in my case, in Brussels), where they went to school, their group of friends, their extra-curriculum activities or even whether they had to go to Chinese classes on Saturdays, for example.

With this literature review, it can be concluded that cultural assimilation and intergenerational gap, conflicts between two different cultures, lack of communication and high parental expectations can disturb parent-child relations in immigrant families and thus redefine children's opinion on their parents' expectations. It has also come to my attention that until now, no research has been focused on the case of multidimensional intergenerational relationship among Chinese immigrants living in Brussels as most of the studies have been conducted in the United States, Canada or the United Kingdom. Furthermore, the patterns of socialization and cultural assimilation has been researched mainly among older immigrants while this research aims to discuss the point of view of second generation immigrants. This study will attempt to apply those theories found in mainly cases from the United States and look for similarities and differences between those two regions of the world by using my research question. Some similarities are expected to be found in terms of the mindset of Chinese immigrants living in Brussels and maybe some differences when it comes to the country they live in, as the social security system and immigration law are different. This study's findings will contribute to current research by going beyond the Chinese immigrant parents' point of view and focusing more on the children's experience of cultural assimilation, socialization and redefinition of parents' expectations by the children.

## Methodology

For my research, I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews among second generation Mainland China immigrants living in Brussels. The reason why I only chose immigrants from Mainland China is because studying immigrants coming from Hong Kong, Macau or Taiwan would make it too complex for a Master's thesis to analyse the differences between those communities in addition to my main topic. Additionally, since the existing academic research has been focusing so far on the Mainland Chinese immigrant community in the United States, I wanted to study the same ethnic community but within a different region. I chose to interview immigrants between 20 and 30-year-old, as I believe that immigrants in that range of age have encountered enough situations to talk about their experience with filial piety, unlike third generations or younger people who might not yet have a clear opinion on that matter. As I wanted to focus on one specific region within Belgium, I decided to narrow down my field by choosing Brussels as my case study. The interviewees were able to choose the language they preferred to be interviewed in (either Mandarin, English, French or Cantonese) as well as the way the interview would be conducted (in person or via Skype). In the end, I have conducted seven interviews via Skype, using French and three in person in Brussels, using French as well. I considered the research process as a co-constructed activity, with multiple narratives, anecdotes. The quotes used in this paper were then translated from the language they chose to English as accurately as I possibly could, and in the case of confusion or fear of misinterpretation, I reached out for the interviewees to ask for clarification and confirmation.

The questions were used to determine the views of the interviewees on their parents' expectations regarding different topics (studies, partner preference, job, parents' care and the importance of the family) and their reactions concerning those expectations. The questions ranged from their parents' highest education level – as a mean to determine the environment the interviewee grew up in – to their opinions on their parents' model of parenting (see appendix for the interview guide).

I have found the interviewees based on common friends we had and on the community from Reddit, an online network, where I asked for volunteers who met my criteria. I was able to interview ten second generation immigrants, six men (Chris, Alex, Daniel, Eric, Brian and Patrick) and four women (Lin, Chloe, Emily and Cindy), each interview lasting approximately one hour. I will be using pseudonyms to refer to them. The youngest of them was 23 at the time of the interview while the oldest was 27. Each one of them still lived with their parents and except for three interviewees who were already working (one in banking, one in insurance and the other in the pharmaceutical industry), all were still studying at university, ranging from Bachelor students to Ph.D. researchers. All of them went to Chinese school on Saturdays. When it comes to their parents supporting them financially, only three of the interviewees reported receiving financial support as the rest have full-time jobs or student jobs to sustain themselves. None of them relied on university loans. As the term 'second generation' implies, all were born and raised in Brussels and with both their parents immigrating from Mainland China to Belgium. The educational background of the parents ranged from secondary school level minimum to Ph.D. level maximum. All of the interviewees considered themselves as being part of a middle-class family and only two

were only-child, most of them had one to two siblings. Among the parents, the parents of two of the interviewees were retired by the time of the interview while the rest are still working.

While working on my thesis, I realized that I would have to face some limitations in my work. First of all, as I am a researcher from a similar cultural background and also a second generation immigrant to Brussels (but from Hong Kong), my personal cultural knowledge and cultural assimilation experience may have in some ways influenced some data interpretation where I might assume the reader's background knowledge about the Belgian system for example or during the interviews where I could have forgotten to ask for further explanations because of my cultural knowledge. However, I have tried to keep this as minimal as I could but any work is influenced in some ways from the researcher's own beliefs and experience. Since I am only interviewing second generations Chinese immigrants, I do not know their parents' opinion or version of their children's experiences. Therefore, I can only rely on the interviewees' answers to my research. Some of them had trouble answering questions about their parents as they did not accurately know the information (such as how their parents came to Belgium or their parents' educational background), therefore I suspect that the data concerning parents would not be as precise as I would have wished it to be.

## **Background Information**

To understand the expectations of Chinese immigrant parents and their children's reactions to those expectations, it is important to first contextualize their immigration experiences. Indeed, their expectations are derived and conditioned by a particular historical, cultural, social and family situations. In other terms, the process of cultural assimilation has always been a journey full of obstacles and difficulties, demanding efforts, sacrifice as well as determination (Foner, 1997; Gans et al., 2012; Jun, 2001; Russel, 2010). Therefore, it is impossible for one to fully understand the experiences of the Chinese immigrants and the following generations of immigrants without examining their immigration history first in Europe and then in Belgium.

### **Chinese Immigration to Europe**

It is only starting the late nineteenth century that the Chinese began establishing a more permanent presence in Europe. The long-term connections between France, Britain, the Netherlands and China could be described as being "religious, maritime and even semi-colonial" and later determined the relationship between the first settlements of Chinese immigrants and the European host country (Benton, 2011; Thunø, 2003). According to Benton (2011), Chinese immigration can be divided into five different waves. As mentioned above, it is only during the 19<sup>th</sup> century that Chinese started to really settle down in Europe. Chinese were recruited during the 19<sup>th</sup> century as sailors, in order to carry out unskilled tasks on board ships (Christiansen, 2005). The first group to settle were sailors who jumped ship in various port cities such as Amsterdam, Marseilles, Hamburg, Liverpool, and elsewhere, where they founded small Chinatowns (Benton, 2011; Christiansen, 2005). The second group of Chinese immigrants came by the sea or walked along the route of the Trans-Siberian Railway, from China into Western Europe. The third group arrived in Europe during the Great War, period when the demand for cheap labour was high in Europe as a result of the war. Allied Forces hired hundreds of thousands of men from all over China in order to have them dig trenches and build roads across Belgium, France and Russia. The third group stayed after the war and spread across Western and Northern Europe as contract workers (Benton 2011; Thunø, 2003). The fourth group came to Europe during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were Chinese from European Colonies. Unlike the other groups, they had citizenship in Europe, were educated, resourceful and most already knew French, English, or Dutch, making it easier for them to assimilate. Finally, the last group was made of peasants from Hong Kong's New Territories immigrating to Europe starting the 1950s.

Benton (2011) further argues that, contrary to common beliefs, those different groups were not part of one Chinese immigrant entity but that they were in fact different ones. Indeed, he states that the only element uniting different Chinese immigrant communities and groups is the Chinese ancestry. Christiansen (2005) demonstrates in his article that one of the elements dividing the Chinese immigrant community in Europe is the language. Indeed, unlike in the United States, communication overseas Chinese across borders in Europe cannot easily be done only in English. Indeed, Chinese in Europe live among multiple national languages and have to learn the country of residence's main language. Since English cannot be easily used as the language of communication between Chinese in Europe, Mandarin and Cantonese have a stronger position. Therefore, Chinese parents end up encouraging their children to learn Chinese in addition to the host country's national language and English (Christiansen, 2005). This result comes back in this

study where all of the interviewees had to go to Chinese school on Saturdays in order to learn Mandarin.

Even if in the early days, European society gave a hostile reception to Chinese immigrants and made it harder for them to pursue jobs in industries, the Chinese reacted by building their own small economy on the margins of the main economy (Benton, 2011). Nowadays, Chinese mass migration provides cheap labour for existing businesses owned by the already established Chinese communities in Western Europe, such as restaurants and shops. Furthermore, it created “a dynamism and appetite for expansion that led to the exploration of new economic niches and frontiers” across Europe (Pieke, 2004). Indeed, Pieke (2004) states that Chinese migration “has increased both in scale and degree of professionalization in the range of origins, destinations and social backgrounds of the people involved, and in the types of activities pursued in Europe”. In the case of this research, I study the Chinese immigrant community in Brussels, Belgium, which I will briefly discuss in the next section of the background information. Unfortunately, not a lot of existing literature focus on the Chinese community in Brussels or Belgium as it is not the largest group of immigrants living there.

### **Immigration in Belgium**

Belgium can be considered as one of the most multicultural and multiracial countries in the European Union since its capital is de facto the heart of Europe, with the majority of the European administration institutions having their headquarters in Brussels (Teney, 2011). Indeed, according to the World Bank data (2019), immigrants make for 12.28% of the population in Belgium in 2015, the most recent year during which that data was collected. World Bank data uses the word “immigrant” to refer to the number of people born in a country other than that in which they live – meaning first generation of immigrants – but also that this percentage is based on estimation. Belgium’s immigration rates increased from 2000 onwards, slowly at first with only a 2.05% increase in 2005, then taking a fast turn with a 20.9% increase in 2010 compared to 2005 and a spectacular 31.83% increase in 2015 compared to 2010 (World Bank, 2019). The 1980 Admission Law outlines five grounds for being admitted to and allowed to reside in Belgium which we, in practice, can categorize migration flows into categories, such as labour migration, freedom of circulation of European citizens, asylum seekers, family reunification, foreign students (Martiniello 2003; 2013). Belgium is considered a federal state composed of regions (Wallonia, Flanders and the Brussels-Capital Region) which are socio-economic entities and communities (French-speaking, Flemish and German-speaking), which are linguistic and cultural entities. The responsibility in terms of immigration and immigration matters is shared within four levels or power: the EU level; the federal, community and regional level; the provinces and finally, the communes (Martiniello, 2013).

In a more recent context, we see some diversity among the profile of immigrants. The majority of immigrants are, as before, still coming because of family reunification, but there is an increasing proportion of students, migrant workers and so-called “illegals”. Compared with the previous phases of immigration (for example, the Chinese sailors mentioned above), more highly skilled individuals, more women, and citizens of a wider variety of countries are part of this group of newcomers. In consequence, second generation immigrants are also increasing, and adopting the Belgian nationality (Timmerman, 2017).

Today, France and the Netherlands are the source countries for most migrants to Belgium. Among non-European citizens, Moroccans and Turks are the largest groups of immigrants, but almost all of the nationalities of the world are represented, including China (Martiniello, 2013). In 1974, Belgium's Council of the Ministers decided to stop any new immigration of workers, taking further measures to control clandestine immigration as well as regularizing undocumented workers. In the end, despite those decisions, the migration flows towards Belgium did not end there. Five main patterns of legal migration can be found in the post-1974 era in Belgium, leaving tourists aside. First of all, the first source of legal admission is the mobility of EU citizens since under the EU law, the mobility of EU citizens within the member states is actually promoted and facilitated (Of course, EU members mobility is differentiated from non-EU migrants). The second important source of legal admission is for family reunion, as foreigners who are legally settled in Belgium obtain the right to bring spouses and children to the host country. The third group is for foreign students, to whom the Belgian government grants temporary residence permits for the time they study on the Belgian territory. In theory, their residence permits should expire by the time they are done with their studies. In recent years there has been an increasing number of students from Mainland China applying for student visas in Belgium, compared to the 3,000 student visas from China registered in 2008 (Latham and Wu, 2013). The fourth group is for asylum applications and the fifth one is for working permits (Martiniello, 2003; 2013. Teney, 2011). In the case of the interviewees, most of them were not sure how their parents came to Europe but for three of them, they were able to tell me that their parents came to Europe with a work permit, which they then upgraded to a residence permit.

When it comes to the Chinese immigrant community in Belgium, it can actually be divided into two groups: the Cantonese/Flemish and the Mandarin/Walloon (Christiansen, 2005). Christiansen (2005) further argues that speech has directly influenced the settlement of people from different speech groups. In other words, because an existing community speaking Mandarin is already settled in Wallonia for example, other immigrants speaking Mandarin will tend to settle there too. According to Latham and Wu (2013), the number of Chinese residents in Belgium can be estimated to 45,000 and is intertwined with larger Chinese communities in neighbouring France and the Netherlands.

We can conclude from that section that Europe is one of the most popular destinations for Chinese immigrants to settle in. Most of them chose to move there because of the existing Chinese communities or because they wish to look for opportunities for their families. When it comes to Belgium, Chinese immigrants are divided into two communities divided by speech: Mandarin and Cantonese. Chinese immigrants are not the biggest immigrant community living in Brussels but they are nevertheless increasing in numbers, as they are intertwined with communities from France and the Netherlands.

## Analysis and Findings

All of my interviewees so far had at some point in their life encountered a situation related to their parents' expectations. I will divide my analysis section into three sub-sections: parents' expectations, children's opinion on those expectations, and finally going beyond those expectations by talking about the next generations.

### Parents' Expectations

To understand the context around the parents' expectations, interviewees provided me with some information concerning their parents' educational background back in China, such as how they had experienced their migration as well as what was their occupation today. The objective of those questions was to determine whether or not the interviewees were part of the same social class. Indeed, immigrants from a richer or poorer environment might have had a different experience with the immigration process and this might have influenced the expectations they might have for their children: parents living in a poorer environment might have higher expectations in terms of studies for their children in order for them to find a well-paid job, for example. In the end, the answer was the same for everyone: all of the interviewees were part of the middle-class. As I mentioned in the methodology section, the parents' educational background in China ranged from secondary school to Ph.D. researchers. Alex's parents graduated from university in China and similarly to other interviewees' parents, they faced some obstacles while finding work in Brussels after moving there and ended up having a lower status occupation regardless their educational background.

"My mum has a Ph.D. and my dad has a Bachelor's degree, they both graduated in China. Once they moved to Brussels, it was harder for them to find work that could suit their educational degree because of the language barrier. In Brussels, even if you speak English, you still have to know at least some French or Dutch to find work more easily. In the end, they opened up a restaurant like many other Chinese immigrants here I think. However, we have not really had any difficult financial situations, we lived comfortably", explained Alex.

However, following Daniel's interview, I realized that this was not the case of all Chinese immigrants in Brussels, as his parents were able to find work in a similar field as when they were in China. But as Daniel states, it might have been more of an exception since it is in the field of music. Indeed, out of all of the interviewees' parents, Daniel's parents were the only ones who were able to find a job in Brussels that fits their previous work or educational background back in China.

"My dad used to be an Opera singer in Beijing and my mum used to be a music teacher. Upon arriving to Belgium, my dad was able to find work in the same field, he works in the Opera house in Brussels. My mum first started as a Chinese teacher in a Chinese school near Gare du Midi but after a few years, she got some requests from students' parents to teach their kids music. That is basically how she became a private music teacher and it is still what she is doing full-time today. I guess that is why our family has always been surrounded by music and having both parents work in that field helps a lot."

It had come to my attention that all of the interviewees thought that their parents moving to Brussels was a sacrifice needed in order to give their families an opportunity to lead a better life. This finding is confirmed by Benton (2011)'s study, where he states that 'Each (immigrant) family

sought private salvation in hard work and, for the youngsters, study. 'Indeed, the interviewees regarded their current lifestyle and financial situation as something made possible by that sacrifice, thus owing it to their parents. Eric, 23, confirmed that there was a link between that sacrifice and the parents' high expectation in his interview.

'My mum always likes to tell the story of how she and my dad "survived" in Brussels when they first moved there. My dad was a simple barman and my mum had to fix other people's clothes to earn some extra money while she was taking care of us siblings. Life was hard but they made it through: today we live in a nice house and the fridge is always full. That is basically how she reminds me that I have to work and study hard now so that life would not be as difficult as theirs before.'

Talking about their parents' sacrifice, most of the interviewees described it as a system of exchange: the children were expected to take care of the elderly once they would retire or as soon as the children were financially capable of doing so because their own parents took care of them when they were younger. This expectation could be found within different types of demands from the parents. For example, the most common example when it came to taking care of the parents that the interviewees gave me was to help around the house. It could simply be cleaning the dishes, tidying up the house while parents are working, helping them translate administration papers, everything to lighten up the chores around the household. The most striking example I came across during my interviews was Lin(24)'s story, to only mention one:

"My parents like to joke around by saying that it would be nice if I would buy them a car for them to travel around when I get a job. To be honest, I know that they are not really joking. Maybe they are not exactly expecting a car, but at least some kind of financial support when they will retire or when I get a job. They expect me to take care of them like they took care of me when I was younger."

Parents' expectations are something the interviewees were able to give me a lot of anecdotes on. The main answers ranged from expectations of studies, jobs and partners, as well as helping their parents around, like a mentioned above. For the majority of the interviewees, their parents had expectations for their children, with the exception of a single one, Patrick. The parents of Patrick, a Ph.D. student, did not have any expectations in terms of jobs, studies, dating or even taking care of them.

"Some would say that my parents did not care enough but it is not true, we get along really well, we communicate. I think it is a question of trust and also if parents consider you responsible enough to handle yourself. Or maybe their personalities, I am not sure. But I have been hearing some awful stories from other Chinese friends, I think my parents are really an exception."

The other interviewees delivered a totally opposite story to Patrick's. The majority of them grew up with the expectation to have very good grades at school, starting primary school. But this is not something new among the Chinese immigrants community, Chinese parents' expectations towards academic achievements have been studied and researched in many papers (Chuang, 2011; Jun, 2001; Qin et al., 2014; Seginer, 2006). Some of the interviewee even had to learn the multiplication tables back in kindergarten in order to be one step ahead of their classmates when they start primary school. Emily, 23, explained that her parents have always been expecting her to get good grades at school but they had to review their expectations when Emily failed her third year during secondary school. Surprisingly, half of the interviewees had to redo a year or more at

some point during their education<sup>1</sup>, leading to the same kind of experience with their parents rethinking their expectations when it came to school grades.

'I used to stay at my parents' work place during the evening instead of home and whenever my dad wasn't busy, he would teach me the multiplication tables and make me solve problems. I managed in primary school but I started struggling in secondary school, especially during the fourth year. It was a shock when my parents realized that I would have to redo a year. I think it was a sort of reality-check, they couldn't expect their daughter to be perfect all the time. It was not realistic.'

Alex had a similar experience, his parents lowered their expectation after he failed a year.

"Of course, my parents expected me to be the top of my class, at least in the top ten. I think I crushed that dream when I failed during my third year. My parents must have had to rethink their expectations at that moment. They saw that the strict expectations did not work for my brother and I and decided to adopt of more open attitude and see if that would be better. And it was!"

Not only were the parents strict when it came to school results, but there were also expectations when it came to studies their children would have to choose for their bachelor and master studies. Eric's explanation is a good illustration of that situation. Eric was a Master student in economy at the time of the interview.

"I have always liked drawing. I dreamed of applying to some art school such as La Cambre after I was done with secondary school. My parents were against this wish, they told me that artists cannot pay their bills and end up in the streets and that they (the parents) would not be there their whole lives to take care of me. That stereotype of the Chinese parents wanting their children to be lawyers, doctors or CEO of a big company is totally true. But I know that they just do not want me to work as hard as they had to do in the past when they were raising me and my brother."

Another aspect of parents' expectations is their children's jobs. All of the interviewees had the same answer when it came to that: according to their parents, the perfect job would be a well-paid job, with normal<sup>2</sup> working hours and benefits such as a company car and life insurance. The satisfaction that came out from that job was less important compared to the salary and everything mentioned before. Daniel, who was 25 at the time of the interview, works in the bank industry and explains that he had to talk about the options with his parents before choosing where to work.

"My parents mostly want me to have a well-paid job so that they know I will be able to take care of myself and my future family. Of course, it has to be with normal working hours, 9–17, so I can spend time with them or said future family, as well as nice bonuses such as a company car and life insurance."

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<sup>1</sup> According to some interviewees, it is harder to succeed at university in Belgium since the implementation of educational reforms ("décret Paysage", also known as "décret Marcout") back in 2014–2015. Indeed, it has been reported that only 34.37% of first year students were able to complete the 60EC of their programme on the first try in 2011–2012. However, the number of students fully passing (60 credits out of 60) has been dropping ever since the reform: in 2016–2017, only 27.24% of students were able to complete their programme on their first year. (Lesoir, 2019)

<sup>2</sup> Interviewees considered normal working hours as working from 9 am to 5 pm. They also mentioned that night shifts were not considered as normal working hours.

The interviewees also mentioned their parents' hopes when it came to partners. Since more or less half of the interviewees are men and the other women, it was interesting to see if the expectations were the same or different, and in what ways they would be. As said in Chuang's article "Immigrant Children-Making a New Life" (2011), "although there are differences between immigrant males and females, there are also many similarities". It came to my attention that so far in my research, concerning expectations for jobs, studies and parents care, the results for female and male interviewees were similar but results appeared to be different regarding dating and partners expectations. When I interviewed the female interviewees, most of them happened to give me the same answer: their parents were very strict when it came to dating before University and even stricter when it came to their partner. Indeed, in their parents' mind, the partner must be a husband material even though it is only for dating. Chloe's story is a good illustration and represents well what the female interviewees have been telling me.

"In theory, I was not allowed to officially date until I graduated from University. My parents were very strict about that, they were afraid that it would take my focus away from studies or maybe that I would end up being pregnant. Of course, it did not prevent me from "dating" but my parents never considered my boyfriend as a real boyfriend, more like a male friend I liked hanging out with, I wasn't even allowed to call my boyfriend a "boyfriend" when talking about him, I had to refer to him as my "friend" only. My mum used to always tell me not to waste too much time in this relationship because he was not husband material. It just frustrates me that my parents do not take my relationship seriously because my boyfriend is not the perfect son-in-law they want."

I then asked her to explain what her parents would consider as the "perfect" son-in-law.

"He would basically have to be a good guy, obviously Chinese, with a good income, in a way that we could lead a comfortable life. He would have to come from a good family, have a nice job, have a nice car, preferably already be the owner of a house or apartment. The Chinese Prince Charming of today's society, except that there would be no white horse, but the latest Mercedes class C model instead. Yeah, that is my parents' dream.", explains Chloe.

The results of the interviews were different when it came to dating and partners expectations for males. Indeed, they were not expected to marry a rich woman who would take care of them, but instead only a "Chinese" girl from a "good" family, with good manners. The partner could be an immigrant or not, but had to come from a Chinese normal, healthy and respectable family. When it came to dating, all of the male interviewees did not have any "dating ban" of sorts, unlike female interviewees. They were, on the contrary, welcome to date anyone they wanted in order to "gain experience". However, as their son grows older, parents start setting conditions because he gets closer to an age where he could get married. Eric, who is a student in his last year of Master, explains how his parents insist that he should marry a "Chinese" girl to ensure the transmission of traditions and culture to his children.

"My parents have always been okay with me dating, even back in secondary school. I am currently dating a Caucasian girl from the same Master program. It has been a year now since we are together. My parents have already met her and invited her over for dinner several times already. Even if I know they like her because she is a good person, my mother tells me from time to time not to limit myself to one girl, that I should go for a better partner if the opportunity arises because she is worried I might end up marrying my current girlfriend who is not Chinese."

Chris, 24, had a similar answer as Eric.

“Well, to be honest, while I was growing up my parents did not have any expectations in terms of girlfriends. However, now that I am getting closer and closer to the age of getting married, they clearly made me understand that a Chinese girl from a good family, well-behaved and educated was their number one preference. (me: What is the number two then?) Number two preference would be an Asian girl, it is mostly a question of cultural clash, it is easier for an Asian family to understand our family's customs and cultural practices than a Caucasian or African family.”

I have observed from those interviews that Chinese immigrant parents have certain expectations when it comes to their children helping around, jobs, studies (grade and specialization) as well as dating and marrying. Children must help their parents with household chores as well as supporting them financially if it is within the children's capacities (but there are some exceptions for that last point), they must have good grades and follow a specialization which will ultimately lead to a well-paid job. Dating and marrying expectations are different for male and females but the common condition remains that the partner should be Chinese as well. Naturally there are always exceptions, like Patrick's parents, as well as extremes, but from what I could observe, Chinese immigrant parents always have expectations for second generation Chinese immigrants.

### **Second Generations' Opinions Towards Their Parents' Expectations**

Due to the process of cultural assimilation and socialization, children sometimes have difficulties facing their parents' expectations, leading to a clash of beliefs. Because second generations grew up in different environment than their parents, cultural assimilation and socialization makes it difficult for the children to accept certain of their parents' expectations that the host society (media, social network, school, etc.) might not consider normal (Chuang, 2011; Jun, 2001). The objective of this section is to understand the children's level of acceptance towards their parents' expectation and it varies depending on factors such as their surroundings. Most of them tended to accept their parents' demands when it came to helping around the house (such as doing the laundry, cleaning the dishes and the house, translating administrative papers) as well as taking care of their parents in time of need (financial support, spending quality time with the parents, etc.). Following her story about her parents' expectation, Lin explained her point of view on that matter.

“When I explain it to my friends who are not Chinese or Asian, they do not really understand why I plan to give money to my parents when I will have a job. “It is your money,” they say. As I said before, my parents expect me to take care of them when it will be within my capacities and when they will need it. But to be honest, even if they did not expect it, I would have done it if I can. I find it normal to take care of them as they grow older, as a sign of respect but also out of love. It is the very least I can do for my parents since they raised me and took care of me. I would for example never just put them in a retirement home and just visit once a year because it is more convenient for me.”

All of the interviewees had the same opinion when it came to parents and elderly care: it is normal for them to take care of one's parents and support them financially if needed. In Lin's case, her mindset was understandable because her parents explicitly said that her support would be expected and many of the interviewees were in the same situation as her. However, none of the interviewees' parents directly asked them for allowances. Two of the interviewees, Daniel and Patrick, told me that their parents did not expect anything from them in terms of care or financial

support and their parents never mentioned their expectations in that matter. Nonetheless, both Daniel and Patrick considered it normal for them to take care of their parents. Indeed, Daniel, who works in the banking industry, explained that even though his parents never asked for anything, he would be more than happy to help them if they ever need him.

“I know a lot of Chinese people who have to monthly transfer some money to their parents, it is a bit like allowances but for your parents, so that they can enjoy themselves when they retire. I have been working for a year now, and my parents have never asked me or my older brother for money. However, I know that the second they will need our help, we will be there to support and assist them in any way we can. We kind of owe it to them, for raising us in a foreign environment and giving us such a comfortable life. I think it is a cultural value, Chinese people would rather hire some personal nurse to take care of the elderly than put them in a retirement home and forget about them.”

This quote from Daniel shows that he understands why he should take care of his parents, that he agrees with this practice and it can be analysed from two sides. First of all, he acknowledges that his parents worked hard in Brussels and have maybe sacrificed a better career in China so that Daniel and his brother could have a better future. In other words, Daniel and his brother would not hesitate to help their parents because they deserve it and have earned it. Second of all, he also understands that taking care of his parents is a cultural value related to filial piety. Chung (2016) explains filial piety as such: children owe everything to their parents because parents gave life to children. As pointed out previously, all of the interviewees agreed with this expectation. We can observe that even though they were born and grew up in Brussels, thus being culturally assimilated similarly to the Chinese immigrant community in the United States examined in the literature review (Chuang, 2011), this expectation remains important for second generations.

When it came to parents' expectations when it came to grades, school and studies in general, interviewees had mixed opinions. Most of them they understood why their parents wanted their children to have good grades, they associated this expectation with common sense. However, Emily, who failed a year in secondary school, expressed her opinion about parents' expectations towards grades by saying that she felt pressurized not only by her parents, but also because of society's expectations. Indeed, literature has described this stereotype as the “model minority”. Studies have confirmed that this model has a negative impact on the well-being of Chinese immigrant children (Chuang, 2011; Jun, 2001; Qin et al., 2014). This model is promoted and mocked of in media, such as the popular show “Family Guy”, enough for it to be a common belief.

“Nowadays, I feel like when we see a Chinese kid, we automatically assume that he is good at maths. And if by any chance, he happens not to be good at that, then he is considered stupid. I felt the same way when I failed a year in secondary school, my parents were disappointed and ashamed because now they had to explain why I was not at university yet. But you do not see that kind of pressure on Caucasian children.”

When he failed the last year of secondary school, Daniel's parents wanted him to simply redo that year without any other complication. But Daniel reacted by going against his parents' wish and tried passing a Jury Central, which is a system that allows you to go from fifth year secondary school to 1st year university in one go, two years in one, instead of simply failing a year because he thought that is what would be best for him.

"I basically failed the last year of secondary school, so close yet so far from University. My parents were all over the place! However, I chose to take a Jury Central. It was risky and a lot of work but I decided that it would be best for me as I really wanted to go to University. My parents were really stressed and wondering it wasn't too difficult for me. In the end I made it and I now work at a good company. I think that those years really proved to my parents that I was capable of making my own decisions and they stopped being too controlling over everything. Now everything is good, they do not care what I do as long as I am healthy."

Daniel went against his parents' wish because, based on the information the Belgian education system gave him, he realized that passing the Jury Central would allow him to skip a year instead of having to redo it. It is a clear example of how socialization can influence second generation immigrants when it comes to satisfying their parents' expectations. Indeed, as observed in the existing literature, the practice of filial piety is adapted by the Chinese immigrant children when they come in contact with other spheres of influence, such as school, media and so on (Cheng, 2006; Garey, 2015; Lam, 2006). In Daniel's example, it is because he had access to that information from the government that he could adapt his opinion on his parents' expectation of simply redoing the year he failed.

Additionally, they thought that not having a lot of liberty when it came to choosing their bachelor came in conflict with their personal interest and passions. As Chung (2016) points out in her article, Western and Chinese models are different when it comes to education: Western education model tends to promote self-growth and to encourage children to pursue their passion while the Chinese education model is about discipline and achievements. However, most of the interviewees disagreed with the Chinese education model and the shaming that came with the choice of studies and found it too extreme. For example, the parents would strongly disagree if their child happened to choose a study field that did not easily lead to a well-paid job, such as designer or something in the artistic field. Chris had to study something he did not like but was able to find a well-paid job because of his degree in economics.

"I will be the first to admit that my parents were the stereotype that you can see on Internet memes. When I graduated high school, I wanted to study architecture or something that had to do with art. My parents were strongly against it, saying that once I will be done studying, I would not be able to find a job and I would end up living in the streets. I ended up studying economics but I really hated what I was doing, I failed another year at university but in the end, after graduation, I was able to find a nice job in the field of insurance, thanks to my parents' insistence."

Reactions over grades' expectations and job expectations were similar. My interviewees said that it was understandable that parents wanted their children to have a good job for their future. Chris mentioned that wanting your children to have a good job or good grades was only common sense and not only a Chinese value.

"It is normal for parents to want the best for their children. There are exceptions, of course, but in the end, I do not think it's a Chinese thing to be wanting a good job that pays well, it is just common sense to want a better job for a better life."

Interviewees were a lot more opposed to their parents' dating and marrying partner expectations. As explained above, Chinese parents prefer their children to be marrying someone from the same ethnic origin as them. However, their children do not usually agree for various reasons. One of

the reasons my interviewees gave me was that they simply wanted to marry someone they loved and not because he or she was Chinese. This result is also mentioned in Hynie (2006)'s research, where second generation immigrants tended to "emphasize the importance of an understanding and loving partner above and beyond all other characteristics" while parents considered traits associated with "traditional family structure, function, and roles" as being the most important, in opposition to their children who were born and raised in North America.

"Most of the time, I would just tell my parents that I would marry whoever I love. It could be a Chinese or not, that should not be the most important criteria if I am to spend the rest of my life with her. As long as we love each other and treat each other well, it is fine by me. Of course, the best would be for my parents to be happy with the partner I chose but I still feel like that it has to make me happy first. I am going to be the one spending every single day of my life with my wife, not my parents!", explains Daniel.

Brian had an interesting opinion about dating and marrying: he wanted to marry someone because he loved her and not because she was Chinese, but he preferred dating Asian women because of the cultural similarities.

"I am determined to marry a girl mainly because I love her and not because my parents like her origins. But from my experience, I would still stick with a girl from an Asian background at least. Sometimes, the culture clash is too great to make one another comfortable, it would be easier to understand each other if we have more or less the same traditional values."

He further explained that in his past experience, his girlfriend's family did not understand some of his values and it was getting in the way of their relationship.

"I used to date a girl a year ago. Her dad was American and her mum was French. Whenever I went to her place, her dad would make some jokes about the Chinese culture. I know he did not mean to hurt me but at the time, I found it offensive, but I do understand it is because the dad did not really have a lot of opportunities to come into contact with the Chinese culture and Americans are just open-minded to joke around like that I think. My girlfriend was great but the cultural difference with her family was too great for me to be comfortable when around them. I am now dating a girl from a Korean origin, I feel more at ease because we share the same values when it comes to family and respect."

Female interviewees have more or less reacted the same way as the male interviewees: they wanted to marry someone because they love him, Chinese or not. Cindy, 27, is engaged to a Caucasian male. Even though her parents were strongly against her relationship at the beginning, she did not flinch and kept dating him. In the end, after the parents spent some time together on various occasions, they accepted him.

"It was really tough at the beginning because my parents did not want me to keep dating him. My mum is not really fluent in French so she has trouble talking with my fiancée. But I did not give up, I just brought him with me whenever it was someone's birthday or for a celebration. Little by little, my parents got used to him. Now, my dad just translates whenever my mum has some trouble with some words, and they actually like him a lot. But I have to say, my partner is a really good person, has a well-paid job with perks and is good-looking, so I think that helps too."

To sum up, children generally agree with their parents' expectations as long as it is not extreme or does not clash with the children's own beliefs. It seemed like the practice of parents' care and financial support was deeply rooted within the interviewees' education and beliefs since even

interviewees whose parents did not expect anything from found it normal to be there for their parents. Indeed, they thought that because of their parents' sacrifice, they deserved being taken care of. Furthermore, it is also deeply rooted within the children's beliefs because of the cultural value related to filial piety. In other words, because parents gave them life, children should owe them everything. When it came to jobs and studies, interviewees understood that in the end, their parents' high expectations is because they care about their children's future as they do not want to see their children work as hard as they had to when they moved to another country. The interviewees were, however, opposed to the shaming that came with the choice of studies. Additionally, they found their parents' expectations when it came to dating and marrying conditions to be too extreme. Even though one interviewee told us he would stick with someone from an Asian background, the rest of them wanted to marry or date someone for love and not because of their origin.

### **Beyond the Expectations and Reactions**

Following the parents' expectations and their children's reactions to them, I wanted to look beyond those reactions: Do the interviewees want to apply their parents' expectations and education to the next generation? The most interesting observations to extract from the answers would be see what they would keep from the education they received and what they would change about it, for which reasons. In other words, I wanted to analyse to what extent their parents' values and expectations would be transmitted to this generation and to the next.

All of the interviewees agreed that among all of their parents' expectation, teaching the values of family to their children would be the most important one. However, those among the interviewees who were expected to financially support their parents expressed their opposition to this practice. Alex explained that, unlike his own parents, he did not want to explicitly ask his children to give him money. Instead, he wanted his children to be respectful and caring enough to do it on their own if he ever needed it.

"I want my children to support me financially because they want to, not because I have been joking about it ever since they were small, like "oh when you will grow up, it would be great if you buy dad a Lamborghini". I think that it would be a big victory as a parent if my children ever think that way. I would consider my job as a parent done from that point on, I have raised respectful and loving children, I can die in peace."

As mentioned above, most of the interviewees did not mind their parents' expectations when it came to their children studying certain topics as well as having a certain type of job. However, when I asked if they would apply those expectations to their own children, all of them were opposed to the idea. Chris and Eric were especially against the idea of shaming other bachelor subjects, since they both wanted to study something in the field of Arts to begin with, before following their parents' wishes.

'When it comes to my parents' education method, I would change one thing in particular: the "shaming" that follows when kids want to study something more creative than law or economy. I want my children to be able to develop their self-identity and personality and encourage any ambitions they might have. I feel like Chinese parents educate their children through discipline too much and do not support their children's ambitions and dreams enough compared to Western education.', added Chris.

The only aspect of his education Daniel wanted to pass on his children was the practice of a musical instrument as he believed that learning to play a musical instrument greatly improves the autonomy of a child as well as certain aspect of discipline.

“I believe that music is an important element that my children should learn. Music taught me some aspects of discipline that I think other people that do not play any instruments do not have. Even though I would probably skip the whole education method my parents applied on my brother and I because I think it is better to nurture a child’s personality, I would definitely keep the music part.”

While Chloe agreed with the importance of family values, she mentioned that she did not want to impose any hard restrictions or high expectations on her children. High expectations put pressure on the child’s shoulders as he or she is afraid to disappoint the parents. She argued that because her own parents were the stereotypes of “tiger parents” (over-controlling every aspect of her life), she felt very early on that she could not share or discuss anything with her parents because she was afraid of being scolded and disappointing them.

“I do not want my children to feel like I felt when I was younger. I want them to know that they can share and talk about anything without any negative repercussion. Of course, if the matter is serious and I need to make my point clear, then I will scold them. But because I grew up in such a strict environment, I do not think that overreacting on every matter and saying no to everything is the best option to keep your children safe from any harm.”

Emily added that it is normal for parents to expect their children to have good grades, but she didn’t want to set any restrictions when it came to studies and especially when it came to dating or marriage partners

“Children should not have to hide that they are dating from their parents because their parents have such strict rules when it comes to that. Relationships are such an important part of one’s life and I want my children to be able to talk about that openly.”

In conclusion, while most of them accepted their parents’ expectations on various matters, the interviewees themselves would not keep most of the same education methods or expectations for the next generation. While expectations for grades and jobs were considered as common sense, their parents’ expectations over dating and marrying was described as being too extreme for the second generation which grew up in Brussels. The main value all of the interviewees wanted to teach their children was the notion of family value as well as the respect of the parents, but without forcing them into giving parents some sort of allowances when they will be capable of it.

## Conclusion

This paper shows how the expectations of the first generation are perceived among second-generation of Mainland Chinese immigrants living in Brussels. Second generations have had many life experiences concerning their parents' expectations, ranging from helping their parents when it came to chores and administrative papers to expectations with jobs, studies, dating and marriage partners.

As second generation immigrants were born and grew up in Brussels, they became accustomed to the way of living in Brussels, which is different from how their parents grew up in Mainland China. It is different not only from a timeframe point of view but also from a cultural point of view. Indeed, while the parents grew up within the Chinese society and thus were exposed to the Chinese culture via media, school, and peer group, their children only experienced the Chinese culture in limited amount. The only contact with Chinese culture the interviewees ever had was within the family circle or during Chinese schools they all had to attend on Saturdays, making it minimal. The second generation has been shaped by their way of living in Brussels, ways of living that the first generation has not been as much exposed to, thus even minimal changes in behaviour and mentality have been observed with the interviews. For example, second generations are much more aware of the Belgian educational system or any other benefits Brussels has to offer.

According to the interviewees, their parents have expectations when it comes to them helping at home, but also when it comes to studies, jobs, dating and marrying. Second generations are expected to have good grades and to study a field that would lead to a well-paid job, such as economy or law, for example. Dating and marrying wise, male interviewees did not have any conditions when it came to dating but were expected to marry a "Chinese" girl from a "good" family. However, parents wanted female interviewees to date and marry a "Chinese" guy from a good family and he had to have a good income in order for their daughters to lead a comfortable life. Parents also expected their children to take care of them and to support them financially if they needed it. However, this was not required for some of the interviewees but they nevertheless considered it normal for them to do it, which brings us to second generations' reactions to their parents' expectations.

Interviewees agreed with their parents' expectations as long as it did not clash with their own beliefs. Second generations found it normal to take care of their parents, not only because they thought their parents deserved it but also because of their own cultural beliefs. They also agreed with their parents' expectations when it came to jobs and grades but they were, however, opposed to the shaming that came with the certain choices of studies. Furthermore, interviewees found it too extreme to set expectations in terms of dating and marrying as they believed that it was better to date or marry someone as long as it is for love and not for their origins.

In the end, even if the interviewees agreed with some of their parents' expectations, they all stated that they probably would not keep the same education methods or expectations for the next generations to come, especially in terms of choice of studies, dating and marrying. The only value interviewees wanted to transmit to their children was the cultural notion of family and parents

respect. Furthermore, expectations in terms of grades and jobs were considered as common sense by the second generation.

As demonstrated, with the phenomenon of socialization and cultural transmission, second generation Chinese immigrants do not always have the same opinion as their parents when it comes to education methods and expectations. They adapt their opinions towards their parents' expectations by being more in contact and aware of other circles of influence (school, media, peer groups) in Brussels. As a result, they view some of their parents' expectations as being too extreme and demanding. Parents' expectations over studies, dating and marriage partners are examples of expectations that second generations find too extreme and would not apply to the next generation. However, their own personal conception of expectations in terms of familial value and respect of the parents is something they would like to transmit to their children, as interviewees believe that this expectation is most important out of the others we have discussed.

When it comes to the existing literature, we can observe that the cultural assimilation and socialization of Chinese immigrant communities in the United States are similar in Brussels. One could take this study one step further by analysing whether or not similarities are found because the United States and Brussels are both known for embracing multiculturalism and by applying the question of cultural assimilation and socialization to a less culturally diverse country or city. Furthermore, future research could analyse first generation of Chinese immigrants' opinions on their expectations for their children since this study only focuses on the point of view of second generations. Another possibility would be to study the progression by looking into the third generation of Chinese immigrants and to observe whether or not they still feel more Chinese than Belgian. Future research could also look into the "model minority" and into how expectations from the society shape the cultural assimilation of the Chinese immigrant community in Brussels or elsewhere in the world.

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# Appendix

## Interview questions

- When and how did your parents come to Belgium?
- What are your parents' highest education level?
- What are your parents' current occupation?
- Are your parents still working?
- How often do you see your parents?
- What are your parents' expectations towards your studies?
- What are your parents' expectations towards your mate preference?
- What are your parents' expectations towards about dating?
- What are your parents' expectations towards being there for them?
- What is your attitude towards those expectations? Do you agree or disagree and why so?
- What do you actually do in reaction to those expectations? Do you "cooperate" or go against your parents' expectations anyway?
- Are you expected to help your parents (financially or administratively)?
- Did your parents explicitly ask you to support them?
- What is your opinion on having to help them as a way to pay them back for their sacrifices?
- What would you change about your parents' parenting model and why?
- Would you apply your parents' model to the future generation?