

“Are you Chinese *enough?*”: Reflections on identity and Chinese language learning among  
mixed-heritage adults in the U.S.

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**List of Abbreviations**

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
AAPI	Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders
ACTFL	American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
CAL	Center for Applied Linguistics
CHL	Chinese as a Heritage Language
CHLL	Chinese as a Heritage Language Learner
CMRS	Critical Mixed Race Studies
EAI	Expressive Autobiography Interview
HC	Heritage Community
HL	Heritage Language
HLI	Heritage Languages Initiative
HLL	Heritage Language Learner
HLM	Heritage Language Maintenance
IRB	Institutional Review Board
JHLL	Japanese as a Heritage Language Learner
LOTE	Language Other Than English
N/A	Not Applicable
NCSSFL	National Council of State Supervisors for Languages
NFLC	National Foreign Language Center
NHLRC	National Heritage Language Resource Center
OPI	Oral Proficiency Interview
RQ	Research Question
SLA	Second Language Acquisition

### Abstract

While much heritage language (HL) research has examined factors that help promote HL learning and maintenance among children of immigrants in the U.S., few studies to date have examined HL learning among *mixed-heritage* language learners, or those who have an English-speaking American parent and an HL-speaking immigrant parent. By examining the experiences of individuals who do not fit the traditional profile of heritage language learners, this study examines some of the unique challenges and considerations that individuals in mixed families face when learning a heritage language. Through in-depth, semi-structured autobiographical interviews and a Chinese proficiency survey, this study explores the background characteristics and experiences of 11 mixed-heritage adult Chinese as a heritage language (CHL) learners in terms of levels of HL proficiency, language attitudes, and motivation to learn. The interviews explored how self- and other-perceived, contested and negotiated identities (e.g., racialized, gendered) of mixed-heritage individuals relate to their HL learning and maintenance. The findings suggest that HL proficiencies and self- and other-perceived identities are varied and occasionally unpredictable. Many intersectional and contextual circumstances affected HL proficiency and HL experience, including, but not limited to: parental and familial support, HL use in the household, Chinese ethnic identity orientation, individual attitudes towards the HL, and motivation to learn the HL. The findings from this study contribute to the fields of heritage language learning, and specifically family language policy. Findings also highlight the need for more research on HL development and identity among CHL learners from mixed-heritage families.

## Introduction

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, nearly 18 percent of the U.S. population aged 5 years and over live in households where a language other than English is spoken (Shin, Bruno, & U.S. Census Bureau, 2003, p. 1). However, many heritage language learners struggle to achieve bilingualism in English and their heritage language (HL). Studies have documented “a continuing pattern of decline in the use of HL and in HL competence among language minority groups” in the U.S. (Cho, 2015, p. 30). Typically, language shift—the process whereby a speech community shifts from one language to another—occurs in three generations, wherein “while first-generation immigrants may retain their L1 in most of their daily interactions, second-generation immigrants tend to shift into the language of the country of immigration, while by the third generation HL is typically lost” (Baran, 2017, pp. 259-260). Since the 1990s, increasing attention has been given to multilingual language policies and initiatives that aim to preserve and maintain heritage languages in the U.S., offering hope for preventing language loss and “reversing language shift” (Fishman, 1991, 2001a; Hornberger & Wang, 2008). For example, in 1998, the National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) and Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) launched the Heritage Languages Initiative (HLI) with the goal of developing an infrastructure to support HL development policy and practice (Brecht et al., 2002). Yet policies alone are insufficient for heritage language maintenance (HLM), for an understanding of HL learners *themselves* is needed. What are the background characteristics and experiences of HL learners in terms of HL proficiency, HL learning and maintenance, attitudes towards the HL, motivation to learn, and their identities? In order to maintain and develop heritage languages in the U.S., a sociolinguistic understanding of the dynamic and complex relationship between heritage language learning, development, and HL learner identity in the context of a given HL is needed

among language policymakers, researchers, educators, and even families. An “understanding [of] the influences at work at the individual level” to support the maintenance and development of HLs is important, for it “may contribute to efforts to stem language shift at the community level” (Tse, 2001, p. 677).

### **Problem Statement**

In recent decades, numerous studies have examined HL learning and identity among children of immigrant parents who speak the same HL in the U.S. (e.g., Lee, 2002; Mu, 2015; Oh & Fuligni, 2010). These studies provide important insights into HL development and maintenance and suggest a connection between HL proficiency, ethnic identity, and cultural identity. For example, in a study of cultural identity and HL maintenance among 40 second-generation Korean American university students, Lee (2002) found a positive correlation between HL proficiency and strength of bicultural identification (i.e., with both Korean culture and American culture), thus supporting the view that language is an important part of culture and identity. Oh and Fuligni (2010), who examined HL proficiency, HL use, and ethnic identification among Latin American (the majority of participants were of Mexican descent) and Asian American (the majority of participants were of Chinese descent) adolescents in the U.S., found a significant positive association between HL proficiency and ethnic identity. In a meta-analysis of 18 previous studies, Mu (2015) found a statistically significant moderate positive correlation between sense of ethnic identity and HL proficiency across different ethnic groups. This meta-analysis supports the notion of a mutually constitutive relationship between ethnic identity and HL proficiency, although Mu (2015) calls for a need for future research that also takes into consideration other individual factors such as gender, age, generational status, and race.

While there has been a proliferation of HL development research on HL learning and identity among children of immigrant parents who speak the same HL, little attention has been directed towards the increasing diversity of HL learners in the U.S. As Hsieh et al. (2020) indicated, one glaring gap in the HL development literature on Asian American experiences is that “there has been little acknowledgement of HL learner diversity” in terms of differences in ethnic identity, for example (p. 573). Few studies to date have examined these issues among mixed-heritage HL learners, i.e., those who have an English-speaking American parent and an HL-speaking immigrant parent. Unlike children of immigrant parents who speak the same HL, mixed-heritage language learners have a partial connection to an HL through *one* parent. While mixed-heritage language learners may have a “strong cultural connection to a particular ethnolinguistic group,” some might not “speak or understand the [heritage] language at all” (Potowski, 2014, p. 405). More research about these learners, their HL experiences, and identities is needed to understand the complexities of HL maintenance and learning among mixed-heritage language learners.

As Shin (2010) notes, “in most cases, mixed-heritage persons are discussed in passing, as part of larger, more homogeneous heritage-language communities” and “very little discussion has focused on the specific challenges that mixed families face in maintaining heritage languages” (p. 204). What specific challenges in terms of HL development and identity formation do mixed-heritage HL learners face? To address this question, my study examined identity and HL experience among mixed-heritage adult Chinese as a heritage language (CHL) learners in the U.S.



## The Present Study

The present study examined the following research questions: What are the background characteristics and experiences of mixed-heritage Chinese as a heritage language (CHL) individuals in terms of levels of HL proficiency, language attitudes, and motivation to learn? How are self- and other-perceived, contested and negotiated identities (e.g., racialized, gendered) of mixed-heritage individuals related to their HL learning and maintenance? This study explored these questions from the learners' perspective and a sociolinguistic perspective. To address these questions, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with and distributed Chinese proficiency surveys to adults of mixed-heritage backgrounds who have a partial connection to Chinese as a heritage language through one parent. The present study uses interview questions (see Appendix A) and research questions adapted from a 2010 study by Sarah Shin on the HL experiences and perceptions of mixed-heritage adults in the U.S. Whereas Shin (2010) explored the experiences of individuals from a range of HL backgrounds (i.e., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, and Vietnamese), the present study focuses on participants with a shared HL background: adult mixed-heritage Chinese as a heritage language (CHL) learners.

The term "Chinese language" is in fact an abstraction covering many varieties of spoken Chinese, such as Mandarin, Cantonese, Teochew, Wu dialect, etc. In this study, "CHL" refers strictly to Mandarin Chinese as a heritage language and the participants of this study are learners of Mandarin Chinese as a heritage language. Mandarin Chinese, officially known as *Putonghua* in the People's Republic of China and *Guoyu* in the Republic of China, is designated as Modern Standard Chinese in Mainland China, Taiwan, and Singapore. In the U.S., Standard Chinese is becoming increasingly common due to immigration from China and is supplanting the previous widespread Cantonese and Taiwanese.

In the following section, I provide background context for the present study. I begin with an overview of interracial marriage trends in the U.S. from the mid-20th century to present day, which explains not only the increase of mixed-race individuals in recent decades but also the need to investigate their identities and HL experiences. Subsequently, I briefly describe the increase in Asian immigration to the U.S. since the late 20th century along with the recent increase in the number of Chinese language speakers in the U.S. I conclude the background context section by articulating my positionality statement.

## **Background Context**

### ***Interracial Marriage in the U.S.***

For generations, racial mixing was considered taboo—and even illegal—in the U.S. Interracial marriage was not legalized across the country until the 1967 U.S. Supreme Court ruling of *Loving v. Virginia*, under which the Court declared anti-miscegenation laws to be unconstitutional. Choosing more than one racial category to describe oneself in the U.S. Census was not even possible until 2000. Currently, multiracial Americans are “growing at a rate three times as fast as the population as a whole” (Parker et al., 2015), and demographers project that the share of multiracial babies will continue to grow in the coming decades. In fact, in 2015 (nearly 50 years after the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* case), 17% of all U.S. newlyweds were intermarried, representing a fivefold increase from 1967, when only 3% of newlyweds were intermarried (Livingston & Brown, 2017). Between 2000 and 2010, the population of multiracial adults with a white and Asian background increased by 87% (Parker et al., 2015). The participants in this study—mixed-heritage adults—represent a subset of this growing share of the population in the U.S.

This study also focuses in particular on adult CHL learners in the U.S. I chose to focus on CHL learners because Chinese Americans also represent a growing subset of the U.S. population, and varieties of Chinese language, mostly commonly Mandarin and Cantonese, are the third most-commonly spoken language in the U.S. However, the dramatic increase in the number of Asian immigrants to and number of Chinese speakers in the U.S. is a fairly recent development in U.S. history, as I describe below. This research focus is also a personal one. My own journey of learning CHL is deeply intertwined with my own lived experience as a mixed-heritage Chinese American.

### *Chinese Ethnicity and Language in the U.S.*

In 1965, the Immigration and Naturalization Act repealed national-origins quotas that had overwhelmingly favored immigrants from Europe since the 1920s. This led to a massive influx of Asian immigrants to the U.S., transforming the fabric of American society for decades to come. Since then, Chinese Americans have been one of the most rapidly growing ethnic groups in the U.S. Between 2000 to 2019, the number of Asian Americans and Americans with Chinese ancestry residing in the U.S. experienced a twofold increase (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, pp. 7-8). Out of 23 million Asian Americans in the U.S., Chinese Americans represent the largest Asian origin group, comprising 23% of the Asian population, or a total of 5.4 million people (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). As the result of increased Asian immigration, the number of Chinese language speakers in the U.S. has increased significantly over time. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of Chinese speakers in the U.S. increased from 1.2 million to 2.0 million (Shin, Bruno, & U.S. Census Bureau, 2003, p. 3). In fact, Chinese is the second most commonly spoken non-English language in the U.S., after Spanish (Shin, Bruno, & U.S. Census Bureau, 2003, p. 3).

**Author Positionality Statement**

Growing up as a half Chinese, half white female in the American South, my own identity developed in an ‘in-between’ cultural and ethnoracial space. Although my parents made efforts to teach me Mandarin Chinese, I resisted them, as I did not see the utility of learning Chinese in an English-majority environment throughout my youth and early adolescence. It was not until high school that I resumed my Chinese studies and developed a strong motivation to learn Chinese as my identity as a Chinese American evolved. I earned a degree in Chinese language in college and continued my language studies in graduate school. It is precisely because of the challenges I experienced as a CHL learner growing up mixed-race that I wanted to examine the experiences of other mixed-heritage CHL learners like myself. Conducting this research for me has been a highly personal (and empowering) endeavor and an important intellectual pursuit. Throughout the process of speaking with the study participants, I found that there were both elements of universality to our experiences, as well as significant differences. While each of their stories (and mine) is unique and multifaceted, taken altogether, these narratives highlight how mixed-heritage identities are dynamic, negotiated, contested, and asserted. Furthermore, these stories shed light on the intersectional and contextual circumstances that affect HL proficiency, HL learning, and HL maintenance for mixed-heritage language learners.

**Literature Review**

Currently, mixed-heritage heritage language learners (HLLs) represent a growing population of language learners in the U.S. Before delving into the literature on mixed-heritage identity and heritage language learning and maintenance, however, I first provide definitions for the terms “heritage language” (HL) and “heritage language learners” (HLLs). Additionally, I

provide a theoretical framework for understanding race as a social construct and briefly describe the literature on “mixed-race” identity.

### **Heritage Languages and Heritage Language Learners**

Providing a singular definition for a heritage language (HL) is a difficult, if not improbable task. The term heritage language did not originate in the U.S., but rather emerged in Canada in 1977 with the introduction of the Ontario Heritage Languages Programs (Cummins, 2005). It was not until the 1990s that the term heritage language started to gain traction in language research, policy, and practice in the U.S. (Cummins, 2005; Hornberger & Wang, 2008). However, there is no definitive consensus on what constitutes a heritage language and who heritage language learners are.

One way in which heritage languages have been conceptualized is by Fishman (2001b), who defined them “as those that (a) are LOTEs (languages other than English) and (b) have a particular family relevance to the learners” (p. 81). Fishman (2001b) also identified three major groups of languages he considers to be heritage languages in the U.S. socio-historical context: indigenous languages (i.e., Native American languages), colonial languages (e.g., French, German, Italian, Spanish), and immigrant languages (e.g., Chinese, Arabic, Japanese) (p. 81). Cho, Cho, and Tse (1997) defined the term heritage language as “the language associated with one’s cultural background,” which “may or may not be spoken in the home” (p. 106). Others have framed their definitions in both restrictive and non-restrictive terms. Polinsky and Kagan (2007) provided both a broad and a narrow definition of the term heritage language, wherein a broadly defined HL is determined by an individual’s family or cultural heritage connection, even if the individual has no functional proficiency in the language, while a narrowly defined HL is conceived as one that “was first in the order of acquisition but was not completely acquired

because of the individual's switch to another dominant language," such as English (pp. 369-370). The task of defining the term heritage language remains a matter of debate (Wiley & Valdés, 2000).

Defining heritage language learners (HLLs) adds further complexity to the picture. Deciding who does and who does not fall under the label of a heritage language learner raises important questions about identity, inclusion, and exclusion. When defining HLLs, which criteria are considered important? How important are criteria such as language proficiency in the target HL, ancestry, national origin, race, and ethnicity?

Over the years, researchers have provided different definitions for HLLs; indeed, there is no singular definition for HLLs, and the definition can vary depending on the geographic context and the language itself. One commonly accepted definition of HLLs is provided by Valdés (2001), who defines HLLs as individuals who (a) are raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, (b) speak or merely understand the HL, and (c) are to some degree bilingual in English and in the HL (Valdés, 2000a, as cited in Valdés, 2001, p. 38). Pu (2020) points out that most Chinese as a heritage language (CHL) studies use Valdés' definition to define CHL learners. However, some critique Valdés' definition as overlooking HL learners with limited to no proficiency in the target HL. For example, a proficiency-oriented definition of HLLs overlooks "CHL learners with a Chinese heritage connection who might never use Chinese with any family members, such as adoptees adopted at a very young age by an English-speaking family" as well as CHL learners from intermarried families, in which "if one parent who speaks Chinese, chooses not to use Chinese in his/her immediate family, his/her child(ren) might not understand any Chinese before taking Chinese courses" (Pu, 2020, pp. 65-66).

While Valdés' (2001) definition of an HLL considers language proficiency to be a salient component, other definitions place a greater or sole emphasis on individuals' historical or personal connection(s) to the language. Van Deusen-Scholl (2003) defined HLLs as those “who have been exposed to another language in the home and have either attained some degree of bilingual proficiency or have been raised with a strong cultural connection to a particular language through family interaction” (p. 222). In doing so, Van Deusen-Scholl (2003) signaled that HLLs may have varying abilities to speak the HL. In the CHL context, Weger-Guntharp (2006) defined a CHL learner as “an individual who has one or more parents who speak Chinese as their first language and who self-identified themselves as taking Chinese classes in part because of their ethnic heritage” (p. 31). Weger-Guntharp's (2006) framing does not place importance on the individual's ability to speak the HL. Similarly, Hornberger and Wang (2008) characterize heritage language learners as “individuals with familial or ancestral ties to a language other than English who exert their agency in determining if they are HLLs of that language” in the U.S. context (p. 6). According to Hornberger and Wang (2008), HLLs may or may not have proficiency in the HL and there is a distinction between HL *speakers* and HL *learners* who “may or may not be HL speakers” (p. 6). From this perspective, Chinese would be considered a heritage language for learners with Chinese ancestry, and learners would need not be proficient in the language to any degree to be categorized as heritage language learners.

Regardless of how one defines HL learners, it is important to “be aware of the ‘elastic’ and ‘diverse’ nature of heritage language learners (Wiley 2001) because of differences such as family history,” as well as differences in language proficiency (Pu, 2020, p. 65). For the purposes of this study, I am adopting Hornberger and Wang's (2008) definition of HLLs, which considers familial and ancestral ties—rather than language proficiency—to be the key determinant in

deciding HLL status. Their definition gives learners agency in determining whether or not they are HLLs of a particular HL. I am also using Hornberger and Wang's (2008) "ecological view of HLL identity" as a framework for understanding the diversity of HLLs and their varying degrees of proficiency in the HL. This 'ecological' framework focuses on the "identity and biliteracy development of HLLs in the ecological systems they inhabit," that is, the "social, educational, cultural, economic, and political institutions" with which they interface (Hornberger & Wang, 2008, p. 6). In other words, this perspective considers the varied, intersectional, and contextual circumstances that affect identity formation and language learning among HLLs. In the sections below, I briefly summarize the understanding of race as a social construct and recent studies on "mixed-heritage" identity.

### **Race as a Social Construct**

Many of us have been taught to believe that there are distinct biological and genetic differences between races. This biology accounts for differences we *can see* with our eyes such as skin color, hair texture, and eye shape, and traits that we *believe we can see* such as sexuality, athleticism, or mathematical ability. The idea of race as biological makes it easy to believe that many of the divisions we see in society are natural. But race, like gender, is socially constructed. The differences we *do see* with our eyes, such as hair texture and eye color, are superficial and emerged as adaptations to geography ... there really is no race under the skin. The differences we *believe* we see ... are a result of our socialization; our racial lenses. While there is no biological race as we understand it, race as a *social construction* has profound significance and impacts every aspect of our lives. (DiAngelo, 2016, pp. 97-98)

The mainstream consensus among scientists today is that race is a social construct, rather than a biological construct, but nevertheless has very real social, political, health, and economic effects. Above, DiAngelo (2016) upholds the social constructionist understanding of race. There is a rich body of scholarship that explores how race is socially constructed, both in the interdisciplinary field of Critical Mixed Race Studies (CMRS), a global canon with a focus on mixed-race experiences, and the intellectual movement Critical Race Theory, which originated in



the 1970s by scholars such as Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Richard Delgado. As DiAngelo (2016) explains, “While race has no biological meaning beyond very superficial differences in appearance, these differences have been given profound *social* meaning” (p. 102). In other words, a social constructionist understanding of race acknowledges the very real political, socioeconomic, and health consequences of “the meaning assigned to these superficial differences [in appearance]” (DiAngelo, 2016, p. 102).

One of the most influential contemporary theories on race in the social sciences is Omi and Winant’s racial formation theory, which was first described in their book, *Racial Formation in the United States* in 1986 (now in its third edition, 2014). According to Omi and Winant (2014), racial formation is “the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed” in societies such as the U.S. (p. 109). This study uses Omi and Winant’s (2014) racial formation theory as a framework through which to view race as a concept that is dynamic, negotiated, contested, and asserted in a given socio-historical context.

### **(Mixed-Heritage) Identity**

This study is concerned with the relationship between identity and language learning among mixed-heritage adult CHL learners. One of the two research questions in this study is “How are self- and other-perceived, contested and negotiated identities (e.g., racialized, gendered) of mixed-heritage individuals related to their HL learning and maintenance?” As identity is a central focus of this study, below I describe the construct of identity by referencing the literature on identity in the field of second language acquisition (SLA).

Bonny Norton (2000) uses the term ‘identity’ “to reference how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 5). In this view, identity is understood

to be dynamic, negotiated and renegotiated, constructed, and imagined. Furthermore, language is understood “as constitutive of and constituted by a language learner’s identity” (Norton, 2000, p. 5). In this line of thinking, “identity work shapes language learning, and language learning shapes identity work, both being mutually constitutive” (Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 32). Drawing on the work of feminist poststructuralist scholar Weedon (1997), Norton (2000) identified three defining characteristics of identity that are central to language learning: (a) identity as multifaceted and non-unitary, (b) identity as a site of struggle, and (c) identity as changing over time. Poststructuralism views the individual as “diverse, contradictory, dynamic, and changing over historical time and social space” (Norton & McKinney, 2011, p. 74). In this study, I am using Norton’s (2000) concept of identity to explore the relationship between identity and language learning among adult mixed-heritage CHLLs.

The participants in this study all share one key characteristic in their multifaceted identities: they are ‘mixed-heritage.’ For the purposes of this study, I am using Shin’s (2010) definition of ‘mixed-heritage individuals’ as those “with an English-speaking American parent and a first-generation immigrant parent who is a native speaker of a minority language,” with a focus on Mandarin Chinese as the minority language (p. 207).

### **Studies on HL Experience and Identity among HLLs**

What are some of the unique challenges and considerations that individuals in mixed families face when learning a heritage language? Although the number of mixed-heritage HLLs is growing in the U.S., few studies to date have examined the specific challenges that mixed families face in HL maintenance. In one of the few research studies on mixed-heritage identity, Wallace (2001) explored the mixed-heritage identity of 15 high school and university students (16-28 years of age) from a wide range of ethnoracial backgrounds (e.g., African American,

Asian American, Latino American) in the San Francisco Bay Area. Through in-depth interviews, Wallace (2001) found that the students had varying degrees of participation in their respective heritage communities, which directly impacted their ethnic identity development. Students' identities were dynamic across time and space, although one striking commonality amongst the participants was the use of "a stable, mixed heritage frame of reference" in constructing their ethnoracial identities (Wallace, 2001, p. 156). Overall, Wallace's (2001) study points to the ways in which parents and community influence identity development among mixed-heritage individuals. While Wallace (2001) focused on the role of parents and community in mixed-heritage individuals' identity development, other studies have examined the importance of *language* (i.e., HL proficiency).

In a qualitative study of heritage language learning and identity, Shin (2010) interviewed 12 adults with mixed-heritage backgrounds to explore their HL learning experiences, self-claimed HL proficiency, attitudes towards the HL, and self- and other-perceived identities. Participants each had an American English-speaking parent and an HL-speaking (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, or Vietnamese) first-generation immigrant parent. The majority of the participants were born and raised in the U.S., although three were born overseas and moved to the U.S. before school age. Their ages ranged from 24 to 35 years. Similar to Wallace's (2001) study, Shin (2010) conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants. Shin (2010) found that participants had varying self-claimed HL proficiencies that tended to correspond with the extent of their interaction in the HL. Among the participants, those with limited self-claimed HL proficiency attributed their lack of proficiency to their own and parents' reluctance to use the HL due to a desire to fit into the English-dominant mainstream. The findings from Shin's (2010) study point to the importance of knowledge of the HL in the negotiation of participants' mixed-

heritage identities. While Shin's (2010) study included participants from a wide range of mixed-heritage backgrounds (e.g., Chinese, Colombian, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese, Vietnamese, African American, and European American), the present study limited participants to those who have one Chinese-speaking first-generation immigrant parent. Shin (2010) called for a need for future research focusing on individuals from a shared mixed-heritage or HL background.

One such study by Leising (2013) focused on adult Japanese as a Heritage Language Learners (JHLLs) of mixed-heritage. Leising (2013) examined the relationship between ethnic identity, self-assessed Japanese language proficiency, and heritage language learning experiences among 17 adult mixed-heritage language learners of Japanese in the U.S., whose ages ranged from 19 to 58, with a mean age of 39. While participants with the highest self-assessed Japanese proficiency reported the strongest Japanese ethnic identity orientation overall, participants with the lowest self-assessed Japanese proficiency *also* reported strong Japanese ethnic identity orientation scores, and participants with intermediate self-assessed proficiencies had varying degrees of Japanese ethnic identity orientation. As such, Leising (2013) concluded that many factors besides Japanese ethnic identity orientation affected participants' HL proficiency, including: amount of time spent learning Japanese, parental support, and individual motivation. Leising (2013) called for a need to examine the relationship between ethnic identity and language proficiency among mixed-heritage HL learners in a shared geographic or language learning context, such as one geographic region or HL school.

Both Shin (2010) and Leising (2013) examined adult mixed-heritage language learners who have a partial connection to their HL through one HL-speaking first-generation immigrant parent. While Shin's (2010) participants came from a range of HL backgrounds (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, or Vietnamese), Leising's (2013) study focused on individuals with

one Japanese-speaking first-generation immigrant parent. Both studies explored the relationship between participants' HL proficiencies, HL learning experiences, and identities. Likewise, the methodological approaches were similar: Shin (2010) and Leising (2013) used semi-structured interviews and self-assessment language proficiency surveys. This study attempts to contribute to this nascent body of literature by examining the HL learning experiences and identities of mixed-heritage Chinese as a Heritage Language Learners. In doing so, I used a similar methodology to the two aforementioned previous studies of heritage language learning among mixed-heritage adults in the U.S. (Leising, 2013; Shin, 2010).

### **Methodology**

The present study included 11 mixed-heritage adults of Chinese descent who have had experience learning Chinese as a heritage language. Specifically, this study explored the relationship between participants' HL experiences, self-declared HL proficiencies, self- and other-perceived identities, attitudes towards the HL, and motivation to learn the HL. 11 adults, 8 female and 3 male, were recruited through a university email listserv and my personal contacts. The participants completed an online self-assessment of their Chinese proficiencies and participated in remote video conferencing interviews held via Zoom, a video conferencing platform.

In this Methodology section, I provide an overview of my research study design. First, I outline the participant selection criteria. Then, I describe the IRB review process this study underwent. Subsequently, I introduce the participants and describe the participant recruitment process, interview design, language proficiency survey design, and approach used for the data analysis.

### **Participant Selection Criteria**

This study recruited participants who met the following criteria: they were (a) adults, (b) of mixed-heritage descent, (c) who were born and raised in the U.S., and (d) have had experience learning Chinese as a heritage language. The University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board (IRB) defines adults as age 18 or older (“Social Template Protocol (HRP-580),” p. 22). I selected adults for this study in order to learn about the ways in which they reflect on their identity formation and language proficiency from adolescence to adulthood. For the purposes of this study, “mixed-heritage” individuals were defined as individuals with an English-speaking American parent and first-generation immigrant parent whose native language is Chinese. Individuals were asked to self-identify their ethnic identity. This study limited participants to those who have had at least some experience learning Chinese as a HL (not necessarily restricted to formal study). I used Hornberger and Wang’s (2008) broad definition of heritage language learners (HLLs) as “individuals who have familial or ancestral ties to a particular language that is not English and who exert their agency in determining whether or not they are HLLs (heritage language learners) of that HL (heritage language) and HC (heritage community)” (p. 27, as cited in Carreira & Kagan, 2011, p. 41). I chose this definition because it acknowledges that some HL learners may have limited to no proficiency, thereby contrasting with proficiency-oriented definitions of HLLs. As such, participants did not necessarily need to be or have been enrolled in a Chinese as a Heritage Language class in order to qualify.

### **IRB Review and Participant Recruitment**

Per university guidelines, I submitted my research study proposal to the University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board (IRB). After obtaining clearance from the University of Minnesota IRB, I disseminated a study recruitment advertisement through a university email

listserv and my personal contacts. Because of this study's focus on adults of mixed-heritage backgrounds with experience learning CHL, I limited my participant pool to individuals who met these criteria. Participants who self-identified that they met the required criteria then contacted me via email. I asked clarifying questions to confirm that all participants met the eligibility criteria before sharing the consent form. Upon receiving participants' signed consent forms, I scheduled interview times with the participants. The remote video conferencing interviews were conducted via Zoom, as in-person interviews were not possible due to public health concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic. After completing each interview, participants were sent a link to complete an online language proficiency survey.

### **Participant Overview**

A total of 14 participants were interviewed for this study. However, three were excluded from the study due to not fully meeting the required participant eligibility criteria (i.e., participants were not born and raised in the U.S., participants' parents were both first-generation immigrants). The 11 participants who were included in this study ranged from 20 to 30 years of age, with an average age of 25.2 years (see Table 1). Participants' place of birth included: California, Georgia, Minnesota, New Jersey, Washington, and Washington, D.C. All participants but two had one parent whose race is white. One participant had one Cambodian parent and one Taiwanese parent, and another participant had one Cambodian Chinese parent and one half Norwegian, half Chinese (mixed-heritage) American parent. While most of the participants' first-generation immigrant parents' dialects were Mandarin Chinese, there were three other Chinese dialects represented in the dataset: Cantonese, Taishanese, and Teochew.

<b>Table 1</b> <i>Overview of the Participants<sup>1</sup></i>							
<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Father</i>	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Place of birth</i>	<i>Sibling(s)</i>	<i>Occupation of Participant</i>
Audrey	Female	20	E <sup>2</sup> : white L1 <sup>3</sup> : English	E: Malaysian Chinese L1: Mandarin	Minnesota	2 younger sisters	Undergraduate student
Sammie	Female	22	E: white L1: English	E: Chinese L1: Cantonese	New Jersey	1 older half-brother	PhD student
Holly	Female	22	E: white L1: English	E: Chinese L1: Mandarin	Washington	1 younger brother, 1 younger sister	MA student
Erin	Female	22	E: white L1: English	E: Chinese L1: Mandarin	California	No siblings	Software engineer
Roland	Male	23	E: white L1: English	E: Taiwanese L1: Mandarin	California	1 younger sister	Public health associate
Myra	Female	25	E: white L1: English	E: Chinese L1: Mandarin	California	No siblings	PhD student
Madison	Female	26	E: white L1: English	E: Cambodian Chinese L1: Mandarin	California	3 older sisters, 1 older brother	PhD student
Frances	Female	28	E: white L1: English	E: Chinese L1: Mandarin	Georgia	No siblings	Data analyst

<sup>1</sup> All participants were given pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

<sup>2</sup> E = Ethnicity

<sup>3</sup> L1 = Native Language



David	Male	29	E: Taiwanese L1: Mandarin	E: Cambodian L1: English	Minnesota	2 older sisters	MS student
Evelyn	Female	30	E: white L1: English	E: Chinese L1: Taishanese	Washington, D.C.	1 younger brother	Post-doctoral researcher
Klaus	Male	30	E: Norwegian- Chinese L1: English	E: Cambodian Chinese L1: Teochew	California	1 younger brother, 1 younger sister	PhD student

## Interviews

To examine HL-learning experience and identity among adults of mixed-heritage backgrounds in the U.S. who have had experience learning Chinese, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the study participants. The interview questions were adapted from Shin (2010) to specifically examine the experiences of adult mixed-heritage language learners of Chinese descent (see Appendix A). To see how the interview questions address the present study's research questions, refer to Table 2.

Research question	Interview question
1) What are the background characteristics and experiences of mixed-heritage Chinese as a heritage language (CHL) individuals in terms of levels of HL proficiency, language attitudes, and motivation to learn?	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 16, 17
2) How are self- and other-perceived, contested and negotiated identities (e.g., racialized, gendered) of mixed-heritage individuals related to their HL learning and maintenance?	5, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17

*Note.* The research questions in relation to the interview questions in the present study.

During the interviews, participants were asked to share their individual narrative accounts of their HL learning experiences and self- and other-perceived identities. The duration of the interviews lasted between approximately 30 to 60 minutes. The interviews followed the Expressive Autobiography Interview (EAI) approach utilized by Wallace (2001), Shin (2010), and Leising (2013). The EAI approach elicits information about a participant's life history while using a structured expressive interview method. This semi-structured approach permits more

flexibility than a structured interview with a fixed set of questions, for the former allows the interviewer to adjust questions as needed to more fully explore personal and historical details about participants as they emerge during the interview. Every participant was informed of their right to skip a question and redact information shared during the interview. All participants signed and submitted consent forms to the researcher prior to the interviews. They were reminded of the voluntary and confidential nature of the study and that efforts would be taken to maintain their anonymity through the use of pseudonyms.

### **Language Proficiency Survey**

Along with the interviews, I distributed a language proficiency self-assessment survey to explore the relationship between HL experience, self-declared HL proficiency, self- and other-perceived identities, attitudes towards the HL, and motivation to learn the HL among participants. The survey questions were adapted from the 2017 National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL) American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Can-Do Statements, a well-known second language assessment tool (“NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements,” n.d.). Participants were asked to self-evaluate their Chinese language proficiency by selecting the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statement that best describes their self-perceived abilities across three Modes of Communication: Interpretive, Interpersonal, and Presentational (“World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages,” n.d.). For each Mode of Communication, participants selected Can-Do Statements for the four skills of reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Can-Do Statements were sourced from the following NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements Proficiency Benchmarks: Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior. Participants could also select Not Applicable (N/A) if they felt that the Can-Do Statements did not describe what they know or can do in Chinese, their heritage language.

Participants were sent a link to complete the language proficiency survey at the end of their interview (see survey questions in Appendix B). Upon completing the interview and survey, participants were finished with the study. As compensation for their participation, all participants who completed both the interview and survey received a \$20 e-gift card.

## **Data Analysis**

### ***Interviews***

The 11 in-depth, semi-structured video conferencing interviews were video and audio-recorded in Zoom and transcribed in Microsoft Word. The interview transcripts were read and re-read multiple times to identify themes, similarities, and differences within and among the participant interviews. Open coding and code mapping were utilized to analyze the qualitative data. Coding is the process of “taking raw data and raising it to a conceptual level” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 66), while open coding is defined as “breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 195). In other words, the interview data were coded by themes identified as salient by the researcher. Code mapping is the “process of identifying and “tagging” data for later retrieval and more intensive analysis” (Seidel et al., 1988, as cited in Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002, p. 33). The data were analyzed to explore the relationship between Chinese heritage language learners’ HL experience, self-declared HL proficiency, self- and other-perceived identities, and attitudes towards the HL and heritage language education. Table 3 outlines the themes that were identified from the data analysis in relation to the research questions. Table 3 is intended to provide a consolidated picture of the salient themes and take-aways from the interviews that emerged from the “process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 150, as cited in Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002, pp. 31-32).

<b>Table 3</b> <i>Code Mapping: Three Iterations of Analysis (to be read from the bottom up)</i>	
<b>Research questions (RQs)</b>	
RQ#1: What are the background characteristics and experiences of mixed-heritage Chinese as a heritage language (CHL) individuals in terms of levels of HL proficiency, language attitudes, and motivation to learn?	RQ#2: How are self- and other-perceived, contested and negotiated identities (e.g., racialized, gendered) of mixed-heritage individuals related to their HL learning and maintenance?
<b>Third iteration: Application to data set</b>	
“Are you Chinese <i>enough?</i> ”: Reflections on Identity and Chinese Language Learning among Mixed-Heritage Adults in the U.S.	
<b>Second iteration: Pattern variables</b>	
1A. Heritage Language Experience 1B. Mixed Heritage Identity and Individual Language Learning Attitudes 1C. Heritage Language Proficiency	2A. Legitimation in Question: Claiming “Chineseness” 2B. “Occupying a Third Space”: Self-Perceived Inadequacies as Mixed-Heritage HLLs 2C. Looking Ahead: HL Maintenance and Intergenerational Transmission of the HL
<b>First iteration: Initial codes/surface content analysis</b>	
1A. Family Support 1A. Formal Chinese Learning Experiences 1A. Informal Chinese Learning Experiences 1A. Chinese Use in the Household 1A. Chinese Use with Family Relatives 1A. Travel to Chinese-Speaking Regions 1A. Individual Attitudes towards HL Learning  1B. Individual Attitudes towards HL Learning 1B. Membership in HL-Speaking Communities 1B. Ethnic Identity Orientation 1B. Friends’ Racial/Ethnic Identities 1B. Motivation to Learn HL  1C. Self-Claimed HL Proficiency	2A. Legitimacy in Language Learning 2A. Friends’ Racial/Ethnic Identities 2A. Membership HL-Speaking Communities 2A. Ethnic Identity Orientation 2A. Motivation to Learn HL  2B. Self-perceived Identities 2B. Other-perceived Identities 2B. HL Learning 2B. Mixed-Heritage Identity 2B. Access to & Membership in HL-Speaking Communities  2C. Chinese Language Maintenance for Professional Reasons 2C. Chinese Language Maintenance for

1C. HL Experience 1C. Formal Chinese Learning Experiences	Communicating with Family 2C. Chinese Language Maintenance for Ethnic Identity Legitimacy 2C. HL Maintenance Plans 2C. Intergenerational Transmission Plans
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*Note.* The visualization of code mapping shown in this table was inspired by Anfara, Brown, and Mangione’s (2002) article (Brown, 1999, as cited in Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002, pp. 31-32).

In addition to open coding and code mapping, constant comparative analysis (see Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was utilized to identify patterns, code data, and categorize findings. Constant comparative analysis is the means by which “data are compared and categories and their properties emerge or are integrated together” (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002, p. 32).

As a mixed-heritage CHL learner myself, I am aware that my own identity may have influenced the epistemology of the qualitative interview process and accompanying data analysis. My interactions with the participants—both in terms of the questions I asked and the responses they gave—were shaped to an extent by our shared identities as mixed-heritage CHL learners. The participants were informed of this aspect of my identity prior to the interviews. To build rapport with participants, throughout the interviews, I periodically disclosed information about my own HL learning experiences and background that were related. This ‘alliance-building’ strategy (via displays of empathy and acts of self-disclosure) enabled me to collect more detailed narratives from the participants and create what Pezalla et al. (2012) refer to as a “unique conversational space” in the interviews, resulting in the ‘coconstruction’ of data. As Pezalla et al. (2012) note: “It is through the researcher’s facilitative interaction that a conversational space is created – that is, an arena where respondents feel safe to share stories on

their experiences and life worlds” (p. 167). Foregrounding my identity and disclosing personal details about myself during the interviews shaped the discourse to a certain degree, particularly in terms of the rapport and mutual understanding I established with the participants. In other words, the ways that participants perceived me may have influenced their willingness to divulge information during the interviews.

On a related note, in interpreting the interview data, I recognize that the information disclosed by participants during the interviews cannot and should not be perceived as “direct” lines into participants’ feelings or beliefs. As Talmy (2011) notes, interview data are not “reports of truths, facts, and/or the attitudes, beliefs, and mental states of self-disclosing respondents” (p. 27); rather, they should be viewed as “*representations or accounts* of truths, facts, attitudes, beliefs, mental states, etc.” (p. 27). It is important to be cognizant of the fact that interviews are a social presentation event or, to use Talmy’s (2011) phrasing, the nature of “the research interview as social practice” (p. 26). I took this understanding into consideration as I analyzed the data gleaned from my interviews.

### ***Language Proficiency Survey***

The responses to questions from the language proficiency survey were analyzed differently. This data was exported and collated in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Participants’ responses to the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements were assigned to their corresponding Proficiency Benchmarks: Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior. If participants listed ‘N/A’ for a question, N/A appeared in the spreadsheet. The Proficiency Benchmarks were color-coded to visually distinguish between participants’ different responses. Patterns were identified between participants, the Modes of Communication (i.e., Interpretive, Interpersonal, and Presentational), and the four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. While this

instrument provides an approximation of participants' language proficiencies, it is important to note its possible limitations as a methodological approach. Participants self-assessed their language abilities, although biases may have factored into their responses, which may have been influenced by individual perceptions of their language learning experiences. They may have also lacked familiarity with the NCSSFL-ACTFL Proficiency Benchmarks. As a result, the self-assessments may not have always accurately reflected participants' Chinese proficiencies.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The findings for this study are divided into multiple sections informed by the research questions and themes I identified from the interviews as salient to understanding participants' multifaceted and complex HL experiences and identities. These themes include: "Heritage Language Experience," "Mixed Heritage Identity and Individual Language Learning Attitudes," "Legitimation in Question: Claiming "Chineseness"," "Occupying a Third Space": Self-Perceived Inadequacies as Mixed-Heritage HLLs," "Heritage Language Proficiency," and "Looking Ahead: HL Maintenance and Intergenerational Transmission of the HL." After introducing the participants' HL experiences, I examine the interplay, harmonies, and dissonances within and among the participant narratives. Specifically, I explore the relationship between participants' HL experiences, self-declared HL proficiencies, self- and other-perceived identities, attitudes towards the HL, and motivation to learn the HL.

#### **Heritage Language Experience**

This section addresses the first research question in this study, i.e., the background characteristics and experiences of mixed-heritage Chinese as a heritage language (CHL) individuals. The extent to which participants had HL experience growing up varied widely. Among the 11 participants, six had significant HL experience growing up (Frances, Madison,



David, Roland, Holly, Audrey), while five had limited HL experience growing up (Klaus, Myra, Evelyn, Sammie, Erin). In making a distinction between “significant HL experience” and “limited HL experience,” I considered a variety of factors regarding the participants’ exposure to and experience with the HL. These factors include: parental influence (i.e., HL use in the household, parental attitudes towards HL learning) and participants’ individual exposure to and experience with the HL (i.e., formal/informal HL learning experiences, attitudes towards the HL, motivation to learn the HL). This categorization was also informed by participants’ personal viewpoints regarding the significance of their prior exposure to and experience with the HL. In addition, in describing the participants’ experiences using these two categories, I primarily considered their experiences prior to the age of 18. The categories of “significant HL experience” and “limited HL experience” were developed not only to convey the *range* of HL experiences participants had, but also to help the reader compare and contrast participants’ varied experiences.

Among the six who had significant HL experience growing up, there are several, intersecting factors that impacted the degree of participants’ HL exposure: parental HLM efforts and the linguistic, cultural, and social environments in which participants grew up. Frances, born in Atlanta, Georgia to a Chinese mother and American father, regularly heard Mandarin Chinese spoken in the household while growing up. Her parents met at work in Beijing, China, where they both were employed by the U.S. embassy. Frances describes her father, a native English speaker, as essentially fluent in Chinese. Indeed, Chinese was the primary language of communication between Frances’s father and mother while she was growing up in Atlanta, although when they spoke to Frances, they used mostly English. Frances explained that she heard a lot of Chinese spoken between her parents, her mother and friends, and her mother and

maternal relatives. Frances also acquired HL experience by attending a Chinese language school on Saturdays from ages seven to 11, taking Chinese language classes in college, and using Chinese to communicate with her relatives. Since Frances's parents remarried, Frances continues to use Chinese to communicate with her stepmother, who is ethnically Korean and fluent in Korean and Mandarin. While Frances did gain significant HL experience, she said her mother did not emphasize speaking Mandarin at home because she did not want Frances's "English speaking skills to be any lessened because she was also learning Mandarin," a common belief but unfounded in the research on multilingualism.

Like Frances, Madison often heard Mandarin Chinese in the household spoken by her mother, who is Cambodian Chinese, although her father is a monolingual native English speaker. Born and raised in California, Madison gained significant HL experience through private tutoring lessons in middle school, four years of Chinese high school classes, and approximately ten years of dance classes in a Chinese dance group (ages 8-18). Reflecting back on her Chinese dance group, Madison explained that she gained a lot of Chinese exposure through the classes:

The teacher spoke Chinese, my mom spoke Chinese, everyone's parents spoke Chinese. I mean, my friends spoke Chinese, they spoke Chinese to their parents, or whatever language - but mostly Chinese slash Taiwanese ... so I was pretty familiar with the language then.

Madison's Chinese learning experiences resulted from her parents' strong desire for her to learn the language. She explained that her Chinese learning was "very important to my parents. They really wanted me to learn Chinese." Learning Chinese was "especially" important to her mother, who Madison explained would often speak Chinese to her and say things like: "You need to learn Chinese." Whenever Madison's mother would speak Chinese to her while growing up, she would respond in English. As Madison explained, this is still the case: "When I go home to visit

my parents, my mom will often speak to me in Chinese, but most of the time I respond in English, and she doesn't really like it.”

Holly, too, grew up in a household where she frequently heard Chinese spoken, particularly from the age of eight. Holly is a 22-year-old graduate student who was born and raised in Seattle, Washington; she is still living with her parents while pursuing her graduate studies. Holly's mother, who is from Chengdu, China, speaks Mandarin Chinese as her native language and English fluently as her second language. Her father is a white, monolingual native English speaker. Holly is the oldest sibling in her family; she has one younger brother and one younger sister. When she was eight years old, her mother shifted from only speaking in English to speaking Chinese “80% of the time” to her and her younger siblings, who were ages four and one at the time. Even today, Holly's mother mostly speaks Chinese to her and her siblings, whereas “before that, it was only English.” This significant shift in Chinese language use in the household by her mother has resulted in a rich source of Chinese input for Holly. Although she acquired significant listening practice in Chinese, Holly did not frequently speak Chinese to her mother or siblings, so her production practice was more limited. Exposure to Chinese in the household was Holly's primary source of HL input while growing up, although she also gained HL input by participating in a middle school swim team for three years and communicating with her Chinese-speaking maternal grandparents during family visits to China almost every year. With her mother's encouragement, Holly joined the swim team at her middle school, which was composed of “almost entirely Chinese kids,” many of whom were her second-generation Chinese friends. The swim lessons were held entirely in Chinese and the coaches were first-generation Chinese immigrants who befriended many of the swimmers' Chinese immigrant parents. In terms of her linguistic, social, and cultural environment, Holly described the area she grew up in

as having “a pretty large Asian population,” and most of her friends were second-generation Chinese Americans who spoke Chinese at home, spoke English in school, and attended Chinese classes on weekends. Overall, Holly said that she “felt more comfortable in Chinese [peer] groups,” which she described as “mostly kids with two Chinese parents, although there were other kids like me with one Chinese parent.” Since all of Holly’s HL learning experiences to date have been informal, Holly explained that formally learning Chinese by enrolling in Chinese language classes is important to her and “on [her] list of things to do.” Holly explained that HL maintenance is also important in relation to her Chinese identity: “Since I am Chinese, I would also want to speak the language and maybe *feel* more Chinese as a result.”

Like Frances, Madison, and Holly, Roland also had significant exposure to Mandarin Chinese while growing up, beginning at the age of nine. Roland was born in California to a Taiwanese mother, whose native language is Mandarin Chinese, and a white father born and raised in the U.S. Most of Roland’s primary schooling was in the U.S., where he attended grades K-4. However, at the age of nine, Roland’s family moved to Taiwan, where he attended grades 5-12 at an “American school.” Prior to moving to Taiwan, Roland said that there was “no [Mandarin] education or usage for me in my household or outside of it.” Roland’s parents occasionally spoke to each other in Mandarin even before his family moved to Taiwan, although they used English when speaking with Roland, similar to Frances’s parents. While living in Taiwan, Roland described how his Chinese language skills developed by using the language to communicate with maternal relatives who resided there and to simply navigate his surroundings:

Most of my [Mandarin] usage came down to trying to communicate with relatives. But outside of that, when I was out and about, I had to make use of my abilities ... especially comprehension, so reading and speaking became really valuable to me just getting around the city. And so I would say that of my language abilities, those have definitely been the most important for me to learn, as opposed to writing. Writing has not been my strong suit to say the least, but at school, my [Mandarin] usage was pretty much confined to the

[Mandarin language] classroom, because my friends and everyone I was interacting with were using English. And so that was pretty much what I did in that particular bubble.

All of Roland's schooling in Taiwan was conducted in English, with the exception of Mandarin classes he took for five non-consecutive years between grades 5-11. In his family household in Taiwan, Roland recalled that his parents spoke "90% English and 10% Mandarin," despite his dad having what he describes as "fluent" Mandarin speaking skills. After graduating from high school, Roland attended college in the U.S., where he has continued living since. In college, Roland took 3 semesters of Chinese classes up to the intermediate level. Although he is not currently taking Chinese classes, Roland intends to continue improving his Chinese skills in the future.

By comparing the HL experiences of Frances, Madison, Holly, and Roland, we can see that they all had significant exposure to Mandarin while growing up, although the settings, their ages, and other variables differed. In the case of Frances and Roland, both parents had proficiency in the HL, making it possible for the participants to receive some degree of HL input in the household and with relatives. However, in Madison and Holly's cases, only their mothers spoke the HL. Frances and Madison's parents provided multiple learning opportunities for them to develop proficiency in Mandarin, such as through Chinese weekend school, private tutoring lessons, and Chinese dance lessons. In a clear effort to teach her children Chinese, Holly's mother shifted from exclusively speaking in English to speaking in Chinese "80% of the time" to her and her siblings when Holly was an eight-year-old. In contrast to Frances, Madison, and Holly, Roland's HL experience did not mainly stem from his parent's efforts to use the HL in the household or provide HL learning experiences; rather, living in a Chinese-speaking region provided Roland with significant HL input and the necessity of learning the HL. Furthermore, Madison and Holly grew up in predominantly Chinese immigrant communities and their friend

groups mostly consisted of second-generation Chinese immigrants who spoke Chinese amongst each other. Madison, Holly, and Frances heard Chinese spoken in the household by their parent(s) while growing up. Madison, Holly, and Frances's parents also sought opportunities to teach them Chinese and integrate them into Chinese-speaking communities (e.g., Chinese dance lessons, Chinese weekend schools, Chinese swim team). In contrast to Madison and Holly, Frances did not grow up in a predominantly Chinese immigrant community. For Frances, her HL experience largely stemmed from her parents' Chinese use in the household, interactions with Chinese-speaking relatives, and Chinese weekend school. Unlike Madison, Holly, and Frances, Roland spent approximately ten years in Taiwan, thus learning Chinese in a Chinese-speaking environment.

Many studies have examined the influence of parental involvement on children's heritage language maintenance among immigrant families in the U.S. Using interviews and questionnaires, Kung (2013) explored how parental attitudes, beliefs, and efforts towards children's HLM among 30 Chinese immigrant parents in New York City influenced their children's language learning and maintenance. Kung's (2013) findings revealed that "successful HLM is closely related to parental attitudes and beliefs" (p. 131). Parental methods such as regular trips to China to visit relatives, Chinese-only language policies at home, encouragement to take Chinese classes at school, and watching Chinese television programs daily were shown to be effective in promoting children's HLM and cultural identities. Studies such as this are not limited to Chinese as a heritage language. For example, Kaveh (2018) examined the role of family language policy (i.e., language practices, beliefs, and strategies) in the maintenance of Persian as a heritage language among ten Persian-speaking Iranian immigrant families in the Northeast U.S. Kaveh (2018) distributed surveys and interviewed first-generation Iranian

immigrant parents whose native language is Persian and who raised U.S.-born children. The findings revealed that a variety of factors—including family language policy and several sociopolitical factors (e.g., access to a Persian-speaking friends and community members)—shaped children’s HLM. The participants in this study with significant HL experience also discussed the influence of parental attitudes, beliefs, and efforts towards their HLM (i.e., HL use in the household, interactions with HL-speaking relatives, the provision of formal and informal HL learning experiences, and travels to Chinese-speaking regions) while growing up. These studies and findings from this study suggest that parental efforts—among many other intersectional and contextual circumstances to be discussed—can play an important role in children’s HL development and maintenance.

Conversely, five participants had limited HL experience with Chinese while growing up (Klaus, Myra, Evelyn, Sammie, Erin). They provided various explanations for their limited HL experience, ranging from: parental reluctance or even discouragement, limited HL use in the household, participants’ linguistic, cultural, and social environments, and participants’ individual resistance towards the HL. Below I describe the similarities and differences between Klaus, Myra, and Sammie’s limited HL experience while growing up.

Klaus, whose father is half Norwegian and half Chinese and mother is Cambodian Chinese, explained why his parents did not emphasize proficiency in Chinese for him or his siblings while they were growing up: “I think for my parents ... it was much more important [that] we spoke English well, and that we were doing well in English and so forth. And so [Chinese] was not emphasized at all.” He attributed this lack of emphasis on learning Chinese while he was growing up to his mother’s apparent limited English proficiency at the time. Klaus explained:

I think now, I mean, my mom speaks English well, and gets along in everyday society with no problems. But she really doesn't write it very well and is very slow at reading. And so I think one of the things that was very important for her was for us to be very high level proficient at English. To be able to read it and write it and speak it. One of the other things is that ... there have been some difficulties with especially with her older sister's kids who were actually born in Cambodia. So this is a little bit of a different circumstance. With adapting to English and with speaking unaccented English and so forth, and so there was ... quite an emphasis put on that while we were growing up.

Klaus's parents are not alone in their concern about the adverse impact of bilingualism on children's English language development. As Genesee, Paradis, and Crago (2004) note: "Many parents, teachers, and health care professionals dealing with children have the impression that bilingual children go through the stages of language development more slowly than monolingual children because they have a "double burden"—twice as much language to acquire in the same amount of time—but the research does not support this impression" (p. 77). King and Fogle (2006) echo this same sentiment, stating that: "Although many parents believe that bilingualism results in language delay, research suggests that monolingual and bilingual children meet major language developmental milestones at similar times" and "No empirical evidence links bilingualism to language delay of any sort" (p. 2).

While Klaus's parents were *reluctant* to teach him Chinese during his childhood, Myra's father *actively discouraged* her from learning Chinese in an English-dominant and white-dominant environment. Additionally, Myra resisted learning Chinese. Myra was born in rural California to a Chinese mother and a white father. When asked whether her father placed any importance on proficiency in Chinese while growing up, Myra replied: "I would say he placed a negative emphasis, like this is something he did *not* want for me, like very actively." Elaborating further, Myra explained that this stemmed from "classic racism," what she interpreted as "just like honestly stereotypical, like this is America, we speak English in America, kind of rhetoric." Myra's mother, however, "really really wanted" Myra to learn Chinese, particularly when she



was under the age of ten. However, Myra explained that she “was just like *not* into it as a kid” and “couldn’t get with the program.” Myra resisted her mother’s attempts to try to teach her Chinese, which as she recalled consisted of her mother “buying me all these books, or these games or flashcards that were meant to teach Chinese,” although Myra admitted that she “just could *not* get the point of why [she] was having to do it.” Myra, who grew up in a predominantly white area where “like everyone I knew spoke English ... didn’t really see the use” of learning Chinese. Myra described herself as one of the only Asian American kids in her community growing up and resisted learning Chinese in order to fit in with her white, English-speaking peers. As Myra phrased it: “one thing with being mixed-race is that you can kind of suppress, you gotta *pretend* you’re white, you know, um, and I think I really tried to do that a lot when I was small.” As Myra’s case illustrates, her parents’ different views and strategies regarding HLM were not the only factors that influenced her HL experience while growing up. Individual language learning attitudes among the participants, which are discussed in the next section, “Mixed Heritage Identity and Individual Language Learning Attitudes,” are also important to take into consideration.

Not unlike Myra, Sammie also resisted learning Chinese while growing up. However, Sammie’s resistance towards learning Chinese was not related to a desire to fit in with her white, English-speaking peers, as in Myra’s case. Instead, Sammie attributed her reluctance to the negative educational experience she had learning Mandarin Chinese at a weekend school from grades K-5 and the feeling of being “forced” to learn Chinese. Born and raised in New Jersey to a Chinese mother and white American father, Sammie grew up in a racially diverse area where there were “a lot of mixed families” and most of her childhood friends were “white or Asian.” To Sammie’s mother, who grew up speaking Cantonese and Mandarin Chinese, helping her

daughter acquire Mandarin Chinese proficiency was “very very important,” particularly when Sammie was little. Although, to Sammie, Mandarin Chinese “was not important for *me* at all when I was little.” Sammie attended a Chinese weekend school for five years throughout elementary school, where there were “a lot of handouts” and “textbooks” used. Reflecting back on the weekend school classes, Sammie admitted: “I did not appreciate them *at all*. I didn't like them. My mom forced me to go. And I didn't want to be there.” Sammie stopped attending the weekend school classes in middle school after negotiating with her mother, claiming that she would enroll in Chinese language classes at her middle school if she could stop attending the Chinese weekend school. Although Sammie's mom consented and she stopped attending the weekend school classes in middle school, Sammie did not take Chinese as she indicated she would. Instead, Sammie studied Latin in middle school. It was not until high school that Sammie “realized the importance” of learning Chinese, where she studied Mandarin Chinese for four years. When asked to explain why learning Chinese became more important to her as she grew older, Sammie explained: “it feels weird to be perceived as Asian, but I don't even speak the language,” adding that “I *should* know Chinese because I *look* Chinese.” As Sammie phrased it, Chinese “wasn't important when I was little, but then I think it became important as I got older.” This appears to be a common phenomenon, as substantiated by Shin (2010) in her study of adult mixed-heritage HLLs in the U.S. Several of the participants in Shin's (2010) study reported shifting attitudes towards the HL over time, illustrating “that negotiation of mixed-heritage identity is dynamic and continuously shaped by changing social contexts and developmental phases” (p. 216).

Klaus, Myra, and Sammie had limited HL experience while growing up. The reasons they provided for their limited HL experience share some important similarities and differences. A

significant commonality among Klaus, Myra, and Sammie lies in the fact that Chinese was not the primary language spoken in the household between the parents themselves nor with the children. Some differences between them were the parental views towards HLM. Klaus's parents were reluctant to teach him Chinese while growing up, while both Myra and Sammie's HL-speaking mothers placed a lot of importance on their HL learning. Myra's father actively *discouraged* her from learning Chinese. Another significant reason for Myra and Sammie's limited HL experience stemmed from their individual resistance towards the HL and the environments in which they grew up. Both Myra and Sammie described an initial resistance towards learning Chinese as children and adolescents growing up in English-majority environments in the U.S. accompanied by a later acceptance and active pursuit of the HL and HL learning. Myra related her resistance towards learning Chinese to her desires to assimilate into the English-dominant and white-dominant environment in which she grew up. Sammie, however, grew up in a more racially diverse area. Her resistance towards learning Chinese stemmed from being "forced" to attend Chinese weekend school and disliking the instructional approach in her classes.

Despite the mothers' best intentions to teach the HL and invest in their daughters' HL learning, both Myra and Sammie resisted the effort. The social and educational environment in which HL learning took place negatively shaped Myra and Sammie's experiences with the HL, generating ambivalence and resistance towards the HL, rather than motivation, enjoyment, and substantial HL development. The various factors that constituted their contexts for HL learning, including parental effort, social environment, educational approach, and learners' attitudes, seemed to interact and influence one another in complex and sometimes paradoxical ways, but together they all had a significant impact on Myra and Sammie's HL experiences. For example,

although Sammie's mother invested in her daughter's HL learning by sending her to Chinese weekend school, Sammie disliked how the HL was taught. Contrary to her mother's expectations, the instructional context generated ambivalence and resistance towards the HL rather than enjoyment and substantial HL development. This sentiment is not unique to Sammie and Myra, for other participants also expressed similar feelings. Reflecting on the Chinese weekend school classes she attended from preschool to 11th grade, Audrey, whose mother is Malaysian Chinese and father is white, said: "I wasn't really interested [in learning Chinese], because I hated going every weekend as a kid" and "I was forced to go." This disconnect between parental investment and children's attitudes towards HLM is also documented in SLA literature. For example, in a qualitative study of attitudes towards HLM among Chinese immigrant parents and their second-generation children in Philadelphia, Zhang and Slaughter-Defoe (2009) found that "while the Chinese parents value their HL as a resource and take positive actions to maintain the HL in the next generation, the children fail to see the relevance of HL learning in their life and often resist parents' efforts in HL maintenance" (p. 77). Zhang and Slaughter-Defoe (2009) used participant observation and ethnographic interviews to investigate attitudes towards HLM among 18 Chinese immigrant families who spoke Mandarin or Fujianese as their primary languages in the home; notably, both parents were first-generation Chinese immigrants who had proficiency in the HL.

The HL experiences of the participants in this study revealed that many intersectional and contextual factors shaped their Chinese learning while growing up. For example, parental HL use in the household, parental views towards HLM, social contact with HL-speakers (friends, relatives, etc.), and individual attitudes towards the HL varied greatly. These intersecting sociocultural factors collectively contributed to the wide range of HL experiences among the

participants. Similar factors—such as HL input; pressure to conform to mainstream social, linguistic, and cultural environments; parental views towards HLM; and learner identity and motivations—have been associated with HL development among CHL learners (Xiao, 2008).

### **Mixed Heritage Identity and Individual Language Learning Attitudes**

I had spent my adolescence trying to blend in with my peers in suburban America, and had come of age feeling like my belonging was something to prove. Something that was always in the hands of other people to be given and never my own to take, to decide which side I was on, whom I was allowed to align with. I could never be of both worlds, only half in and half out, waiting to be ejected at will by someone with greater claim than me. Someone full. Someone whole. For a long time I had tried to belong in America, wanted and wished for it more than anything, but in that moment all I wanted was to be accepted as a Korean. (Zauner, 2021, p. 107)

In her memoir *Crying in H Mart*, Michelle Zauner (2021) tells the story of her growing up as the only mixed-heritage Korean American kid in her school in Eugene, Oregon, the devastation of losing her Korean mother to cancer, and her evolving understanding of her Korean identity. In the above quote, Zauner, who is 32 years old, meditates on her half Korean, half white identity and the elusiveness of belonging and acceptance in the eyes of others. While growing up, she desperately wanted to fit in with her white, English-speaking peers. However, as she grew older, she yearned for a deeper connection to her Korean identity. In this study, the participants also shared how their identities as mixed-heritage individuals unfolded as they grew up, and their journeys were often similar to that of Zauner's. Their narratives reveal the intricate links between their self- and other-perceived (mixed-heritage) identities and their attitudes towards the HL and HL education.

While parental decisions and strategies regarding languages and literacies in the home are undeniably important in understanding HL acquisition, it is also important to discuss participants' personal attitudes towards the HL and HL education while growing up. Multiple participants described an initial reluctance to learn Chinese as children and adolescents raised in

English-majority environments in the U.S., followed by a later acceptance of the HL and HL learning as they grew older. However, the reasons for this initial resistance towards the HL and HL education are complex and diverse. For example, Myra described a resistance to learn Chinese due to a desire to fit into her English-speaking white peer group. In contrast, Madison resisted learning Chinese because she stated that speaking imperfect Chinese in front of her Chinese peers would highlight her “whiteness” and difference from her friends, who she referred to as “full Asian” with more advanced Chinese proficiencies. Madison, who is half white and half Chinese, reported that she did not quite “fit in” with her Chinese peers who were not mixed-heritage like herself. While very different from one another, Myra and Madison’s stories both highlight their sense of inbetweenness, marginality, and the “not white enough” or “not Chinese enough” feelings. This section examines components of both research questions in this study, namely, the background characteristics and experiences of mixed-heritage Chinese as a heritage language (CHL) individuals in terms of their language attitudes, and the relationship between participants’ self- and other-perceived, contested and negotiated identities and their HL learning and maintenance.

Myra, whose mother was born and raised in China and father was born and raised in the U.S., reflected on the tension between her individual resistance towards learning Chinese and her mother’s strong desire to teach her Chinese while she was growing up in California:

I think it was something that my mom really really wanted for me when I was young. And I remember my mom trying to teach me Chinese when I was maybe, you know, under 10. But it was like ... I was just not into it as a kid. I think I didn't want it because I think that I didn't really see the use of it, like everyone I knew spoke English. And I think ... it was not really a side I wanted to bring out in myself, um, and so I think my mom kind of gave up.

Myra reported that learning Chinese would highlight the side of her that she wanted to conceal in an English-dominant and white-dominant community. In other words, her individual attitudes

towards the HL and HL learning were intricately tied to her identity. Growing up as a mixed-heritage person in “a very very white area” of rural California where “99% of [her] friends and classmates growing up were white” was isolating and difficult. Myra explained that children often bullied her, singling out her Chinese identity with racial epithets and name-calling. She admitted that her mixed-heritage identity “definitely wasn't a part of myself I super liked when I was kid, ‘cause I think it just was always causing problems when I was little.” To Myra, suppressing or downplaying her Chinese side of her identity—and resisting learning Chinese—was a way to fit in with her white childhood peers and, as she phrased it, “pretend that I was just like everyone else.” However, as she got older—particularly throughout high school and college—Myra explained that she developed an interest in learning more about her Chinese roots and began to have “a lot more pride” in her identity, identifying herself as Asian American and Chinese American:

As I started entering college, and ... I started seeing more people like myself, like who are mixed-race, I think I sort of felt like I fit in a little bit easier, like I just saw people who were also like myself. And I think also then starting to learn Chinese ... and studying Asian American history, I think ... I started to have a lot more pride and just sort of feeling more connected to who I was.

Currently, as a PhD student in Chinese American history, Myra has a strong desire (and need) to continue improving her knowledge of Chinese. To satisfy her degree requirements, she must pass a Chinese proficiency exam before graduating. Apart from professional reasons, Myra also shared that improving her Chinese now as an adult is important for personal reasons: “I have always felt like there's a barrier between myself and my family because I can't speak Chinese, and it's something that I always feel sad about.” Now that Myra's perception of her identity has shifted as an adult, learning Chinese is viewed as a way to bring her closer to and validate her newly embraced identity as a self-described Asian American and Chinese American. This marked shift—from an initial resistance towards the HL to a later acceptance and active pursuit

of the HL—has also been observed in other HL learners. For example, in Shin’s (2010) study of adult mixed-heritage HLLs in the U.S., she noted that several “participants reportedly rejected their heritage language at various stages of their development in an effort to identify more with the mainstream group, only to embrace it later in their lives” (p. 216).

Similarly, Madison, who grew up with significant Chinese input through private tutoring, Chinese school, Chinese dance, and Chinese use in the household, described an initial resistance towards learning Chinese as an adolescent due to a desire to not stand out from her peers. However, unlike Myra, Madison was not primarily concerned about her difference from her white, English-speaking peers; rather, she was conscious of her difference from her Chinese friends, who she described as having a higher degree of proficiency in Chinese than her:

Part of the reason that I was so stubborn about [learning Chinese] and part of the reason I didn’t want to learn it is because I felt like I sounded very *white* when I spoke Chinese. Like I wasn't getting the pronunciation quite right, even though I knew how it was supposed to sound in my head, I knew I sounded different from my [Chinese] friends who are more fluent, um, and I just thought I was making a fool of myself for trying. And obviously now I don't feel that way, I mean I wish that I felt differently, but that's definitely how I felt growing up. Like if I'm gonna sound this way, I might not as well not speak it at all.

Despite having significant exposure to Chinese input while growing up, Madison, who says “I look white ... and don’t look Chinese,” stated that she was isolated from her Asian peers who reportedly had more advanced Chinese proficiency and were, as she phrased it, “full Chinese.” Reflecting back on the Chinese dance classes she took for approximately ten years, Madison described feeling marginalized by her Chinese friends due to self- and other-perceived differences in physical appearance and Chinese proficiencies:

In Chinese dance, you know, most of the people there are *full* Chinese. And a lot of the dance looks very uniform, and here I was, this this face [gestures towards face and laughs], in the same crowd as them, kind of mismatched. Um, not only that, everyone was much slimmer than me, and it wasn't even like I was big in any way, um, I was actually pretty fit, but it always felt like I was *too* big, and, um, then beyond that ... they spoke mostly Chinese when we were doing dance, but they never bothered to try to speak



Chinese to me, and it's not totally their fault because it's not like my Chinese was super strong, but it was also like I can understand you enough that you can talk to me, so, um, there was ... it did feel like there was a little bit of like ... I don't know if I want to say discrimination, but they were very presumptuous, and maybe didn't like that I was messing up their uniform ... like their kind of perfect image of what their dance is supposed to look like.

Myra and Madison's initial resistance towards learning Chinese as children and adolescents was intrinsically connected to their self-perceived and socially contested identities. In both cases, there is a clear link between their self- and other-perceived identities, language attitudes, motivation to learn the HL, and their HL learning and maintenance. Myra and Madison initially resisted learning Chinese because they did not want to stand out from their white, English-speaking peers and "full Chinese" Chinese-speaking peers, respectively. This finding is significant in that it demonstrates that the desire to assimilate can be conditioned by one's social peer group and intimately tied to learners' evolving attitudes towards HL learning as they continually assess and adjust across varying settings and different developmental stages. Other studies have examined pressures for social acceptance into mainstream groups among HLLs. For example, citing Dai and Zhang (2008), Xiao (2008) observed that "under the omnipresent driving force of assimilation and acculturation ... to gain social acceptance, CHL learners tend to abandon their HL and switch to English" (p. 262). While 'CHL learners' in Dai and Zhang's (2008) study refers to children of immigrant parents who grew up in Chinese-speaking households in the U.S., Myra and Madison grew up in households with exposure to Chinese through one HL-speaking immigrant parent as mixed-heritage HL learners. Nonetheless, they, too, resisted learning their HL due to pressures for social acceptance. As Myra and Madison's stories demonstrate, the desire to assimilate is dynamic and highly contextualized by social settings and different developmental stages. Madison sought to assimilate not into the mainstream, English-speaking group (as in Myra's case), but rather, into her Chinese-speaking

peer group. Despite their initial resistance towards the HL and HL learning, they both later actively pursued Chinese language studies and came to embrace their identities as mixed-heritage adults of Chinese descent. Myra clearly articulated a shift in her self-perceived identity: from suppressing and concealing her “Chinese side” to proudly identifying herself as an Asian American and Chinese American. This shift is manifested in her changing attitudes towards and active pursuit of Chinese language learning. Unlike Myra, Madison wanted to belong to her friend group that mostly consisted of “full Chinese” friends. Her resistance towards HL learning stemmed from her fear of sounding “very white” when speaking Chinese and embarrassing herself. In other words, she reported that her self-perceived imperfect Chinese language proficiency would further distance her from her desired identity on top of not looking “full Chinese.”

As illustrated above, inherent in Myra and Madison’s descriptions of their self- and other-perceived identities as mixed-heritage individuals is the acknowledgement that identities are contested, negotiated, and are cultivated across many contexts (i.e., family, community, classrooms, and broader discourses in society). Self- and other-perceived identities do not exist in isolation; rather, “the identities that people represent and ascribe to others are often negotiated in interaction, or ‘co-constructed’” (Jacoby & Ochs, 1995, as cited in Showstack, 2018, p. 96). In Myra and Madison’s cases, their identities were negotiated vis-à-vis themselves and others.

### **Legitimation in Question: Claiming “Chineseness”**

This section addresses the second research question in this study, i.e., How are self- and other-perceived, contested and negotiated identities of mixed-heritage individuals related to their HL learning and maintenance? Many participants recounted their mixed-heritage identity formation from childhood to adulthood as a complex process filled with negotiation,

contestation, and assertion. From interactions with complete strangers to acquaintances to family members, participants described the ways in which their identities were co-constructed and at times subject to judgment from other HL-speaking individuals. These moments were recounted in relation to HL learning and maintenance. Because of this, for many participants, learning Chinese became a means for them to ‘legitimize’ their ethnic identity as mixed-heritage individuals of Chinese descent. They related their HL learning and maintenance to a desire to feel more ‘legitimate’ or ‘authentic’ in their Chinese identities and acquire a greater sense of membership in their HL-speaking communities.

In second language acquisition (SLA), the concepts of authenticity and legitimacy are understood as related but distinct (Kramsch, 2012). Creese et al. (2014) note that “Demonstration of proficiency in emblematic features of a heritage language may be sufficient for an individual to be positioned as an authentic speaker of that language, and an authentic member of the heritage group” (p. 939). In other words, increasing one’s knowledge of a language (i.e., linguistic capital) can be seen as a means to position oneself (and be positioned by others) as more ‘authentic’ across different social contexts. In this sense, language proficiency can be tied to group membership and self- and other-perceived identities.

Previous research has explored the correlation between HL proficiency and positive ethnic identity identification among Chinese Americans and Korean Americans (Chinen & Tucker, 2005; Cho, 2000; He, 2006). For example, through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 16 second-generation Korean American adults in the U.S., Cho (2000) found that HL maintenance and development positively impacted Korean Americans’ “interactions and relationships with parents, relatives, and HL speakers” (p. 383). Cho’s (2000) findings revealed that HL proficiency led to stronger social ties with members of the Korean community and a

greater sense of social belonging for HL speakers. In this regard, “HL development can be an important part of, and contributor to, ethnic identity formation and maintenance” (Mu, 2015, p. 240).

Among the participants in the present study, a motivation to learn Chinese was manifested by comments about increased Chinese proficiency being related to feelings of an increased Chinese ethnic identity or sense of legitimacy. When asked how important a knowledge of Chinese was in her identity as a mixed-heritage individual, Madison answered:

I would say it's pretty important, especially because, like I said, I don't look Chinese. And so it makes me feel like ... the more that I know, the more Chinese I get to claim ... like even though I am half Chinese, and I always will be half Chinese, it doesn't feel like I get to claim to be Chinese, unless I know a good amount [of the language].

Like Madison, Evelyn, whose father is white and mother is Chinese, described a knowledge of Chinese language as important in feeling “legitimate in Chineseness” and “assured” of her “Chineseness”:

As an ethnically Chinese person, just in the world, I think being able to read Chinese a bit at least and to write—like at least to know how to write—even if I've forgotten lots of characters, makes me feel more legitimate in Chineseness, or something? Or like, more connected to that ethnic heritage ... It makes me feel good to know that as a Chinese person, I can read and write a little bit, if not that well ... maybe it makes me feel more assured of my Chineseness, in the sense that, so as a mixed person, there's like a tension with like, oh, are you Chinese enough? And so, knowing, being able to read some, or speak some, or like any knowledge of Chinese language of any kind, makes me feel stronger in that identity ... or maybe ... it gives me more of a claim ... But I wouldn't say, like, oh, if you're a Chinese person and you can't speak any Chinese, you don't have the right to claim Chineseness. I wouldn't say that, but I think emotionally, being inside it, it's like, but it still *does* make me feel that way.

For Madison and Evelyn, demonstrating proficiency in the HL constituted a means to be positioned as authentic members of the HC or heritage group. Blommaert and Varis (2013) propose that authenticity and legitimacy are dynamic processes that “involve conflict and contestation, especially revolving around ‘enoughness’ (s/he is *not enough* of X; or *too much* of X)” (p. 147). To Evelyn, improving her knowledge of Chinese language allows her to adjust this

criteria of 'enoughness' in her own eyes and perhaps others': in other words, by improving her language skills, she is asserting her Chinese identity and claim to her own authenticity and legitimacy as an individual with Chinese descent. As demonstrated by Madison and Evelyn's accounts, their sense of authenticity and legitimacy as members of the HC are not static across time and space. Rather, their identities are dynamic, negotiated, contested, and asserted by themselves and by others. As Creese et al. (2014) phrase it: "authenticity and legitimacy are negotiated from moment to moment, and are subject to local and global contingencies" (p. 939). Furthermore, their motivation for HL learning is tied to the (trans)formation of their learner identities. He (2008) states that "HL learning takes place as the learner moves across time and space" and "the learner is situated in his/her ongoing, evolving assessment and adjustment of him/herself vis-à-vis other persons in interactions across varying settings and during different developmental stages" (p. 5). In other words, HL development and identity are influenced by many intersectional and contextual circumstances. Not unlike Madison and Evelyn, Myra also shared how studying Chinese language (and Asian American history) led to an increased Chinese ethnic identity orientation.

When asked to describe what it was like growing up mixed-heritage, Myra said it was "definitely really difficult" because "there wasn't really a category that I fit into well." She explained how kids bullied her, calling her "the sort of remarks that kids make towards Asian kids growing up." Due to the bullying she endured, Myra tried to "just kind of downplay the Chinese side of me, and just kind of play up the white side of me. And kind of that I was just like everyone else." However, throughout high school and college, Myra "started seeing more people like myself, like who are mixed-race, and I think I sort of felt like I fit in a little bit easier." Throughout this period in her life, as she started taking Chinese language classes and Asian

American history classes, Myra “start[ed] [to] have a lot more pride and just sort of feeling more connected to who I was.” Myra recounted how in late high school and throughout college:

I really started to identify more strongly as Asian-American and as Chinese-American. I used to be a lot more ... kind of contested, like I sort of didn't know what I wanted to be identified as. But I think that getting that sort of cultural knowledge just gave me a lot more security and being like *this is who I am*.

In other words, by acquiring a “cultural knowledge” of her Chinese identity through Mandarin and Asian American history classes, Myra claimed a greater sense of “security” in her identity. For Myra, this educational experience and socialization with more mixed-race individuals like herself led her to feel a sense of greater access to and membership in the Chinese community. A rich body of scholarship has examined the connection between CHL learning and ethnic identity. Many researchers have found a mutually constitutive relationship between CHLL’s self-identification and their CHL learning. For example, in a study of young Chinese American adults, Kiang (2008) found a positive relationship between their CHL proficiency, sense of belonging to a Chinese ethnic group, and their study of Chinese history and culture. Likewise, this language-identity interaction can be seen in Myra’s case. Myra’s CHL learning experiences and ethnic identification were intertwined. As shown above, Myra reflected on the ways in which improving her CHL proficiency led her to feel an increased Chinese ethnic identification, access to, and membership in the Chinese community. Other participants, including Frances, Roland, and Sammie, also described how HL proficiency was linked to their Chinese ethnic identity orientation.

Reflecting back on her Chinese language classes in college, Frances shared: “I felt like as I was learning more Mandarin, I was becoming more Asian.” Likewise, Roland, who identifies “strongly as Taiwanese American,” explains that throughout high school and college, as he began critically exploring his own ethnic identity, the importance of learning Mandarin Chinese

“rose accordingly.” Sammie, who self-evaluated her Mandarin Chinese at the novice level, shared that if she has children in the future, she would want them to learn Chinese better than her to “be part of a culture and a heritage” intrinsic to their identity. She explained, “if they learn [Chinese] better than I do, then they’re even more a part of it than I was—*am.*”

These cases illustrate how the acquisition (or lack thereof) of Chinese language led individuals to feel a greater (or lesser) claim to authenticity or legitimacy in terms of their Chinese heritage. In *Crying in H Mart*, Michelle Zauner (2021), whose father is white and mother is Korean, recounted a similar experience in a Korean bathhouse in Philadelphia. While getting a full body scrub from a Korean woman, Michelle was asked, “Are you Korean?” Terrified that the Korean woman in the bathhouse could not see her Korean side, she replied swiftly in Korean “as if trying to impress her, or more realistically, trying to mask [her] linguistic shortcomings” (Zauner, 2021, p. 225). It was not long before their rudimentary conversation in Korean completely broke down, as Zauner described:

She began speaking quickly and I was no longer able to keep up. I mimicked the Korean mumbles of understanding, wanting so badly to keep up the charade, pretending to understand long enough to catch a glimpse of a word I recognized, but eventually she asked a question I failed to comprehend, and then she too realized that there was nothing left for her to relate to. Nothing more we could share. (Zauner, 2021, p. 226)

Clearly, Zauner (2021) desperately wanted to assert her Koreanness by prolonging her conversation in Korean, even to the point of feigning comprehension. The linguistic breakdown inevitably amplified her fear of losing her Koreanness, as Zauner (2021) lamented: “I no longer had a right to ... the hint of Koreanness in my face” (pp. 225-226). Her limited Korean language skills led Zauner to question her “Koreanness” and intensified her fear that Korean people would not be able to discern the Korean part of her identity.

Relatedly, the interviews revealed a link between participants’ desire to legitimize their Chinese identities through HL development and their physical appearance as mixed-heritage

individuals. Not looking “full Chinese,” as Madison described, HL development becomes a crucial way for them to validate their self-perceived and other-perceived Chinese identities. Similarly, Myra, who self-identifies as a Chinese American, chose a career path that entails advanced proficiency in Chinese language. In an effort to “make [her Chinese side] more visible” and assert or ‘front’ her Chinese identity, Myra even hyphenated her patronymic surname with her mother’s Chinese maiden name (i.e., Zhao). She explained that she “started going by the [Zhao] ... as a way of wanting to bring that [Chinese] side of me out more, and make it more visible,” which she says has “actually made a big difference in people pinning me as Chinese.” In other words, Myra negotiated her name choice in her public presentation through self-naming. Myra’s hyphenated name signals and evokes her Chinese identity and sense of self. In Myra’s case, name choice is a means to claim her “Chineseness.” A number of studies have explored how individuals negotiate their identity through name changing, which can occur for many reasons, including but not limited to: “a new personal self or revised public identity” (Fang & Fine, 2020, p. 428). Relatedly, Emily Wong, a second-generation Chinese Canadian whose mother is white and father is Chinese, negotiated her Chinese identity by *not* changing her name: “when I got married [to my white husband], I chose not to legally change my last name, Wong, because I was afraid that if I had a Caucasian last name people would no longer view me as Asian and I would lose that identity completely” (2021). Emily also described how her name choice relates to the negotiation of her mixed-heritage identity and “Chineseness”: “Throughout my life, I have been referred to as a “half-breed,” “mutt,” and a “mixed-race” person ... I am a biracial Asian woman and proud” (Wong, 2021).

As described above, many participants in the present study expressed a motivation to improve their HL proficiency in order to feel more ‘legitimate’ or ‘authentic’ in terms of their



ethnic identity orientation as mixed-heritage CHL learners. Self- and other-perceived identities do not exist in isolation; instead, they are “constituted by the values and assumptions of particular social contexts, and by societal belief systems, which offer positions of power to certain categories of individuals and not to others, and at the same time, [are] negotiated and created through interaction” (Davies & Harré, 1990, as cited in Showstack, 2018, p. 94).

Furthermore, as Norton and McKinney (2011) state: “Language learning engages the identities of learners because language itself is not only a linguistic system of signs and symbols, but also a complex social practice through which relationships are defined, negotiated, and resisted” (p. 77). Madison, Myra, Frances, Roland, and Sammie’s stories reveal how their (ethnic) identities and motivation to learn the HL are neither fixed nor one-dimensional, but rather dynamic, multifaceted, and highly contextualized.

### **“Occupying a Third Space”: Self-Perceived Inadequacies as Mixed-Heritage HLLs**

Many participants described the ways in which self- and other-perceived, contested, and negotiated identities relate to their HL learning and maintenance. Among them, multiple shared feelings of inadequacy associated with their mixed-heritage identities and HL learning experiences. For example, Roland described feelings of guilt, shame, and inadequacy in learning Chinese. Klaus, on the other hand, recounted his feelings of inadequacy when interacting with fellow Asian and Asian American scholars due to his self-perceived limited Chinese proficiency. Below, I describe Roland and Klaus’s feelings of inadequacy as mixed-heritage HLLs to illustrate the interconnectedness between their identities and HL learning and to answer the second research question in this study, i.e., How are self- and other-perceived, contested and negotiated identities of mixed-heritage individuals related to their HL learning and maintenance?

When asked to describe what it was like growing up mixed-heritage, Roland said, “I think that being a mixed-heritage person comes with so many conflicting expectations,” adding that “it’s like occupying a third space.” He further elaborates: “being someone who kind of has to embody two different identities while not fully being able to own either of them” is “an exhausting experience in many ways.” Another participant, Myra, echoed this sentiment, stating: “I think that being mixed-race is not satisfying *anyone*.” In reflecting back on the Mandarin classes he took while living in Taiwan from grades 5-11, Roland described feeling “a sense of inferiority when it comes to learning Mandarin as a second language.” He admitted that then, and even now, “I feel like I *should* be better, and so the fact that I am *not* better kind of gets me to give up when I should be pushing harder to learn more.” Roland’s feelings of guilt at “not [being] better” at Chinese than he feels he “*should* be” relate to his self- and other-perceived identities as a mixed-heritage individual. For example, Roland wonders whether his mother is “disappointed with [his] lack of development in Mandarin.”

Even though his efforts to improve his Chinese proficiency were accompanied with complex feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and shame, Roland plans to continue developing his Chinese proficiency and may even move to Taiwan for work in the future. For Roland, a knowledge of Mandarin Chinese in his identity as a self-described Taiwanese American “has grown a lot more important especially as I’ve gotten older and more mature ... and especially as I’ve specifically spent time trying to figure out who I am.” Still, Roland anticipates that his “usual failings” and feelings of inadequacy as a mixed-heritage CHLL will surface when he continues his Chinese studies in the future. He sees studying Chinese as “a long-term goal” and “something I can’t just try for a little bit and give up on. It has to be a consistent process.”

Klaus, a Cambodian Chinese religious studies scholar born to a Cambodian Chinese mother and half-Norwegian, half-Chinese father born and raised in the U.S., described feelings of “inadequacy” and “embarrassment” about his self-perceived low proficiency in Mandarin in particular spaces, both professional and public. These feelings, he explained, surface when his lack of proficiency is highlighted through his interactions (or lack thereof) with other Chinese speakers. In “Asian and Asian American [professional] spaces,” he is very conscious of his difference as a mixed-heritage individual in terms of his self-perceived low Chinese language proficiency and his “European-sounding” name, describing harboring feelings of “self-consciousness” and “inadequacy”:

There’s a little self-consciousness in not being able to engage in all the discussion, because I only speak English especially in an academic setting. There’s also, uh—and this is one that I’ve reflected on a little bit more lately—but because of my name, I often feel a little bit, I guess, uh, *inadequate* in spaces, in terms of the fact that you’ll often see, at these sorts of colloquiums, kind of a list of names. And my name often will stick out of them, because it’s so European.

As a result, Klaus explained that improving his Chinese proficiency is “a *big* priority” for him in the future for both personal and professional reasons. By improving his Chinese proficiency, Klaus feels that he will be able to interact with colleagues who speak Chinese and “feel more comfortable” in academic spaces. Apart from professional reasons, Klaus said that he would “love to get much better” at both Chinese and Cambodian (his HLLs) due to a “twofold reason”: “One is sort of the family heritage, and that ability to communicate” and “one is the fact that there is a certain amount of embarrassment on my part.”

As shown above, Klaus and Roland both revealed feelings of inadequacy as mixed-heritage HLLs due to their self-perceived limited Chinese proficiencies; this negative emotional response spanned from personal spaces to professional settings. What contributed to these feelings of inadequacy? First, as mixed-heritage individuals, their feelings of not “fully

belonging to” parts of their multiracial identities and “occupying a third space” appear to contribute to their feelings of inadequacy. Second, both Roland and Klaus’s feelings were linked to unique expectations stemming from their mixed-heritage identities. Embodying two different linguistic and cultural heritages, they carry expectations to learn multiple languages from parents, friends, and even HL-speaking colleagues. Consequently, not being fully proficient in HL gave rise to the feeling that they failed to meet the expectations placed on them. Third, their self-perceived lack of HL competency and their own desire to “do better” also contributed to their feelings of inadequacy, especially in the context of interacting with native speakers of Chinese. The wish to “do better” in Chinese seems to have both negative and positive consequences. On one hand, it leads Roland “to give up” when he “should be pushing harder to learn more.” On the other hand, it motivates them to develop their Chinese proficiency in the future. In summary, both Roland and Klaus’s stories showcase the complexities embedded in the mutually constitutive relationship between identity and language learning among mixed-heritage CHL learners.

As shown above, inherent in their feelings associated with learning HL as mixed-heritage individuals is their desire to connect with their Chinese heritage in personal, social, and professional realms through HL maintenance and development. Admittedly, feeling inadequate is not desirable, but for both Roland and Klaus, it has proved to be a motivating factor in their future plans for HL development.

## **Heritage Language Proficiency**

### ***Overview***

This section examines the background characteristics and experiences of mixed-heritage Chinese as a heritage language (CHL) individuals in terms of their levels of HL proficiency (i.e.,

the first research question). Participants were asked to self-evaluate their Chinese language skills in a language proficiency survey after completing the interviews. The survey included six NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Proficiency Statements encompassing reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills across three Modes of Communication: Interpretive, Interpersonal, and Presentational. The Can-Do Statements were sourced from the Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior NCSSFL-ACTFL Proficiency Benchmarks. The six skills for which participants indicated their self-claimed proficiencies include: Interpretive Reading, Interpretive Listening, Interpersonal Speaking, Interpersonal Writing, Presentational Speaking, and Presentational Writing. To analyze the survey results, I assigned numerical scores to all of the possible selections for each skill as follows: N/A = 0, Novice = 1, Intermediate = 2, Advanced = 3, Superior = 4. After assigning numerical scores, I tallied the total scores for each skill and for each participant based on their self-reported proficiencies (see Table 4). This allowed me to rank the skills and participants from highest to lowest in accordance with their self-claimed proficiencies. Overall, the total scores assigned to each skill indicate that participants claimed the highest levels of proficiency in Interpretive Listening, followed by Interpersonal Speaking, Interpretive Reading, Interpersonal Writing, Presentational Speaking, and Presentational Writing. Self-claimed levels of proficiency were variable, dependent on each participant's environment, educational experiences, and attitudes. That being said, there were significant patterns that emerged in the data, which I describe below.

<b>Table 4</b> <i>Claimed Heritage Language Proficiencies</i>							
<i>Participant Name</i>	<i>Interpretive Reading</i>	<i>Interpretive Listening</i>	<i>Interpersonal Speaking</i>	<i>Interpersonal Writing</i>	<i>Presentational Speaking</i>	<i>Presentational Writing</i>	<i>Participant Total</i>
Audrey	Intermediate (2)	Advanced (3)	Novice (1)	Novice (1)	Novice (1)	Novice (1)	9
Sammie	Novice (1)	Novice (1)	Novice (1)	Novice (1)	N/A (0)	N/A (0)	4
Holly	N/A (0)	Novice (1)	N/A (0)	N/A (0)	N/A (0)	N/A (0)	1
Erin	Novice (1)	Novice (1)	Novice (1)	N/A (0)	N/A (0)	N/A (0)	3
Roland	N/A (0)	Novice (1)	Novice (1)	N/A (0)	N/A (0)	N/A (0)	2
Myra	Intermediate (2)	Novice (1)	Novice (1)	Intermediate (2)	Intermediate (2)	Intermediate (2)	10
Madison	Novice (1)	Advanced (3)	Novice (1)	Novice (1)	Intermediate (2)	Novice (1)	9
Frances	Novice (1)	Advanced (3)	Intermediate (2)	Novice (1)	Novice (1)	Novice (1)	9
David	Novice (1)	Advanced (3)	Intermediate (2)	Novice (1)	N/A (0)	N/A (0)	7
Evelyn	Novice (1)	Intermediate (2)	Novice (1)	Novice (1)	N/A (0)	N/A (0)	5
Klaus	N/A (0)	Novice (1)	N/A (0)	N/A (0)	N/A (0)	N/A (0)	1
<i>Skill Total</i>	10	20	11	8	6	5	

***Key Observations***

Based on participants' self-reported Chinese language proficiencies, I made four key observations: (1) most participants claimed Novice proficiencies across the board, (2) the highest self-claimed proficiencies were in Interpretive Listening, (3) the second highest were in Interpersonal Speaking, and (4) the lowest were in the Presentational Mode. Below, I describe these patterns in more detail.

First, across the board, the majority of the participants claimed Novice levels of proficiency, although some also claimed Intermediate and Advanced. No one selected Superior, the highest Proficiency Benchmark, in any of the statements. Second, participants claimed the highest levels of proficiency in Interpretive Listening (4 Advanced, 1 Intermediate, and 6 Novice). Notably, Advanced proficiency was not claimed by anyone in any of the other skills. Furthermore, Interpretive Listening was the only skill in which all participants claimed at least Novice proficiency. All of the other skills had at least two 'N/A' selections. Third, after Interpretive Listening, Interpersonal Speaking was the skill in which participants reported the second highest proficiencies. Fourth, the lowest claimed proficiencies were in the Presentational Mode of Communication. Seven out of 11 participants selected 'N/A' in Presentational Speaking and Presentational Writing.

***Discussion and Analysis***

Although the participants grew up in environments wherein Chinese was not the dominant language, having one HL-speaking immigrant parent ensured that they received some degree of exposure to spoken Chinese language while growing up. They also all had varying degrees of experience speaking Chinese while growing up. Thus, it seems logical that Interpretive Listening and Interpersonal Speaking were the skills in which participants claimed

the highest proficiencies. However, as the participant interviews revealed, their listening and speaking Chinese at a young age was usually limited in scope, context, and register. Most participants were not exposed to presentational speaking while growing up, thus, the Presentational Speaking skill (7 N/A, 2 Novice, 2 Intermediate), along with Presentational Writing (7 N/A, 3 Novice, 1 Intermediate), was ranked the lowest among all of the skills.

The survey data revealed that in general, the more exposed participants were to the HL while growing up, the higher their self-claimed Chinese proficiencies were. Exposure to the HL was determined based on participants' responses to questions 3 and 4 in the language proficiency survey (see Appendix B) along with the interview transcripts. Participants were divided into two categories: those with "significant HL experience" (Frances, Madison, David, Roland, Audrey, Holly) and those with "limited HL experience" (Klaus, Myra, Evelyn, Sammie, Erin). Therefore, when I refer to "exposure to HL," I am referring to the way in which I categorized their HL experience while growing up. Below I provide a few examples to show how the survey results (largely) aligned with participants' HL experience.

As expected, all of the Advanced self-claimed proficiencies were among participants who were identified as having had significant HL experience growing up (Frances, Madison, David, Roland, Audrey, Holly). All of the Advanced self-claimed proficiencies were in one skill: Interpretive Listening. This aligns with what other researchers have identified as common among HLLs: higher levels of proficiency in the receptive skill of listening compared to productive skills such as speaking and writing (Lee, 2002). As Mellinger and Gasca-Jiménez (2019) note, HL speakers "who lack productive skills, often called receptive bilinguals, can comprehend oral language but have significant difficulties producing oral or written language" (p. 959). Among the six participants who claimed Intermediate proficiencies (Audrey, Myra, Madison, Frances,



David, Evelyn), the majority (four out of six) were identified as having had significant HL experience while growing up (Frances, Madison, David, Audrey). Five out of the 11 participants claimed Novice proficiencies only (Klaus, Holly, Sammie, Erin, Roland). Of these five, three were identified as having had limited HL experience while growing up (Klaus, Sammie, Erin). By and large, participants with more HL experience had higher self-claimed proficiencies. However, there were a few notable exceptions to this pattern. For example, despite having lived in Taiwan for nearly ten years and studied Chinese in classroom settings for 6.5 years, Roland, who I categorized as having had “significant HL experience,” ranked himself as Novice in only two of the skills, listing N/A in the remaining four. While unexpected, I surmise that Roland’s self-evaluation relates to the self-blame and sense of guilt he expressed experiencing as a Chinese second language learner in our interview. It is possible that Roland underestimated his Chinese language skills in the self-assessment. Holly, who was also categorized as having had “significant HL experience” while growing up, only indicated Novice in one of the six skills, listing N/A for the remaining five. Holly, along with Klaus (who had “limited HL experience”), had the lowest total score out of all the participants in terms of their self-claimed proficiencies. Holly indicated that her mother began speaking Chinese “80% of the time” to her and her siblings when she was eight years old. Holly also shared that she occasionally speaks in Chinese to her mother and relatives, so I was surprised to see that she did not at least claim Novice proficiency in Interpersonal Speaking. It is possible that Holly listed N/A for most of the skills due to the fact that she lacks formal Chinese learning experience in a classroom setting. On the other hand, Myra, who I categorized as having had “limited HL experience” while growing up, not only claimed Novice and Intermediate proficiencies in all six skills, she also had the highest total score out of *all* the participants in terms of self-claimed Chinese proficiency. Although

Myra had very limited HL exposure throughout her childhood and adolescence, she began formally learning Chinese in college, where she took two years of Chinese classes. This formal training in Chinese Myra obtained recently as an adult may help to explain her higher self-claimed Chinese proficiency.

Another key finding that emerged was that formal training in the HL, such as taking Chinese language classes in high school and college, appeared to play a significant role in HL development, particularly in terms of self-claimed proficiencies in the Presentational Mode and reading and writing skills. The majority (seven out of 11) of the participants indicated N/A for the skills of Presentational Speaking and Presentational Writing. Notably, the only four who *did* claim proficiency in the Presentational Mode (Myra, Audrey, Frances, Madison) all had previous formal classroom learning in Chinese.

### **Looking Ahead: HL Maintenance and Intergenerational Transmission of the HL**

#### ***HL Maintenance***

The previous sections largely focused on participants' language learning experiences and identities from childhood to adulthood. This section examines participants' *future* plans with regards to their Chinese language maintenance and intergenerational transmission of Chinese to their (future) children. In doing so, it provides insight into the background characteristics and experiences of mixed-heritage Chinese as a heritage language (CHL) individuals in terms of their motivation to learn the HL (i.e., the first research question).

All of the participants expressed regret at not having learned more Chinese as children and adolescents. Many explained that they did not place importance on learning Chinese while growing up, but later came to value learning the language as adults. For example, Myra described having a "really difficult relationship" with learning Chinese, for when she studies the

language, she often feels “an immediate sense of I wish I had just *known* this, I had learned this as a kid.” Not unlike Myra, who did not place importance on learning Chinese as a kid, Klaus explained: “Growing up, I don't think I really thought about it. It's one of the things that I really regret as an adult.” Frances expressed similar sentiments by saying: “I should have studied more when I was a kid and spoke more Mandarin with my parents when I was younger.”

While all of the participants said they wished their Chinese proficiency was better, not everyone indicated plans to continue improving their Chinese language skills in the future. Out of the 11 participants, a little more than half (six) expressed plans to continue studying Chinese (Myra, Klaus, Audrey, Frances, Roland, Holly). For example, Myra needs to improve her Chinese in order to pass into the All But Dissertation (ABD) phase in her PhD degree program, and Klaus hopes to communicate with Chinese-speaking colleagues in Chinese. Audrey plans to complete four semesters of Chinese to fulfill undergraduate degree requirements. Roland hopes to one day work in Taiwan. The participants who plan to continue learning Chinese shared a variety of personal and professional motivations to continue their HL development.

First, multiple participants expressed a desire to improve their Chinese to communicate with family members. They hope to improve their Chinese in order to facilitate more meaningful communication with family members, with whom they fear they will lose their connection if they do not improve their HL proficiency. As Frances phrased it, HL maintenance is a current priority because: “I do think it is very valuable to be able to talk to my family members in China. And like actually have conversations.” For Audrey, Chinese is important to her to “connect with family.” Myra explained: “I have always felt like there's a barrier between myself and my family because I can't speak Chinese, and it's something that I always feel sad about.” Roland hopes to improve his Chinese proficiency while he “still [has] the ability to develop ties” with his

maternal relatives, adding: “I know that a lot of families can sometimes go their separate ways because of language barriers. And I definitely don't want that to happen for my family. So that is always in the back of my mind, for sure.” Likewise, Holly framed “conversational Chinese” and “speaking Chinese as home” as “trait[s] that Chinese people or Chinese second generation immigrants have,” yet ones that she feels she lacks. As she phrased it: “most of my Chinese friends can speak Chinese at home with their family, and I can't really, I can't speak to my grandparents beyond very basic things when I have to, so I feel like I'm missing out.” In this regard, Holly's motivation to improve her CHL proficiency is connected to both her self- and other-perceived identities, for she explained: “I just think that since I am Chinese I would also want to speak the language and maybe *feel more Chinese* as a result.”

Second, multiple participants voiced a combination of personal and professional motivations to continue studying Chinese. For example, Myra described her motivation to learn Chinese as follows: “I think I want it for personal reasons, but also [laughs] as like a Chinese American historian, it has like work reasons to need it.” Like Myra, improving his Chinese is “a *big priority*” for Klaus, who is motivated by a desire to be able to more fully engage in academic discussions with other ethnic Chinese scholars by using Mandarin. On a more personal level, Klaus plans to improve his Chinese because “the language heritage is a part that's very important to me ... just in terms of my own identity, to be multilingual.” Audrey hopes to improve her Chinese to “connect with family” and satisfy undergraduate degree language class requirements. For Audrey, Klaus, and Myra, studying CHL is useful for professional and personal reasons alike. Such motivating factors are not uncommon among HL learners. According to a National Heritage Language Resource Center (NHLRC) (2009) report of a survey of 1,732 university student HLLs across different HLs and geographic regions in the U.S. conducted from 2007-

2009, HLLs' top reasons for studying their HLs were: "(1) to learn about their cultural and linguistic roots (59.8%), (2) to communicate better with family and friends in the United States (57.5%), and (3) as a purely pragmatic goal, to fulfill their language requirement (53.7%)" (Carreira & Kagan, 2011, p. 48). Additionally, "a significant number (49%) also cited professional reasons" (Carreira & Kagan, 2011, p. 48).

As shown above, Myra, Klaus, Audrey, Frances, Roland, and Holly expressed a combination of instrumental and integrative motivations to learn, maintain, and develop their Chinese proficiency. In SLA, instrumental reasons to learn a language are tied to practical reasons, such as getting a job promotion or meeting admission requirements to apply to a university. Integrative motivation in language learning, on the other hand, is driven by a desire to better understand and connect with speakers of that language (Norton & McKinney, 2011).

While Myra, Klaus, Audrey, Frances, Roland, and Holly indicated strong intentions to continue learning Chinese in the future, five expressed more ambivalence about maintaining their HL (Sammie, Madison, Erin, Evelyn, David). Sammie, a current PhD student, reasoned, "I don't have enough time to really keep up with it. And there's no opportunities here to even do that." Although she doesn't plan to continue studying Chinese, she nonetheless expressed regret, saying: "I wish I had taken the opportunity to learn it [earlier]." When asked to share how important Chinese proficiency is for her as an adult, Madison, who is also a PhD student, shared: "I don't know about *important*, but I *do* wish I was more proficient in Chinese." She added that Chinese proficiency is not a "necessity" in the U.S. Erin, a software engineer, also characterized a knowledge of Chinese language as "not very" important in her identity as a self-described "half white, half Chinese" individual, although she wishes her mom had made learning Chinese "more

of a priority” when she was younger. When asked to share how important maintaining CHL is to her now as an adult, Evelyn explained that it is “not super important,” adding:

I guess I feel sort of like regretful about losing Mandarin, like oh, I should have kept it up better or done something. But I don't feel super motivated to like make that happen by like putting myself out there or putting myself in situations where I would have to speak Mandarin with people or or like try to read stories or something. So yeah, I'm glad to have studied it, and I kind of like don't want to lose a whole lot of it, but I'm also not ... it's not like a priority right now to maintain it.

All five participants who shared that they do not intend to continue studying CHL nonetheless expressed regret about not having a higher proficiency in the language.

This section provided an overview of participants' future plans (or lack thereof) to maintain or develop their Chinese proficiency. Additionally, participants' plans to pass down the language to their (future) children were discussed.

### ***Intergenerational Transmission of the HL***

The vast majority of participants shared that they would want their (future) children to learn Chinese in the future (eight out of 11). However, two said that they would be content with their (future) children learning a language other than Chinese (Sammie, Evelyn), and one participant said that he was still undecided (Roland). The three ambivalent responses stemmed from participants' self-perceived negative experiences learning Chinese and limited Chinese language proficiencies.

Sammie (age 22) shared that she would “encourage [her future] children to learn a language ... but it doesn't have to be Chinese.” Sammie's reasoning is related to her own experience learning Chinese as a child: “I think pushing kids to do something makes them *not* want to do it, which is why I didn't want to learn Chinese.” Reflecting back on the Chinese Saturday school classes she attended from grades K-5, Sammie admitted: “I did not appreciate them *at all*. I didn't like them. My mom forced me to go. And I didn't want to be there.”

Similarly, Roland (age 23), who self-identifies as Taiwanese American, expressed hesitation about teaching his (future) children Chinese if it doesn't align with their interests. Recalling his own negative experiences learning Chinese while attending an American school from grades 5-12 in Taiwan, Roland shared: "I had great Mandarin instructors, but as a student of Mandarin, I was always I think challenged by my own perception of myself as a learner. So I think something I struggled—and still struggle with a lot—is a sense of *inferiority* when it comes to learning Mandarin as a second language." Roland further expressed his ambivalence about teaching his (future) children Chinese:

As far as whether I would want them to learn Mandarin, I think it would be something that I would have to approach with the children themselves once they were of age. I wouldn't want to put that on them if that wasn't their way of identifying or their interests. But I know that's a delicate balance too, 'cause I know that sometimes tradition and heritage are not picked up unless they are introduced at a pretty early age. And I know that the answer I gave earlier about wishing my parents had done that for me earlier complicates it as well. But hard to say at this time ... I'm not sure. I'm not sure. But I would certainly think it through. I can definitely guarantee that.

In addition, Roland shared that the decision of teaching Chinese to his (future) children would be influenced by his partner's ethnic heritage: "unless I were to marry and have kids with another person who has my exact heritage, my children will likely not have my exact heritage, which is something that I have not fully parsed out." Roland's comments raise important questions about what it means to be Asian American and raise mixed-heritage children in a family with parents from different ethnic, racial, and linguistic backgrounds. As Hsieh et al. (2020) posit:

When one of the most fundamental elements of a culture is language, what does it mean to not have that language? Also, what does it mean to pass on a culture to your children when they are multi-ethnic as well?. (p. 574)

These are questions that were clearly on the minds of several participants in the present study, including Roland.

On the other hand, Evelyn (age 30) shared that she would be content with her (future) children learning a language other than Chinese due to her own self-perceived limited Chinese language proficiency: “I would want them to speak more than one language, but personally, I don't think I could raise them speaking anything except maybe French. But I'm not sure I would do that.” Evelyn attended a French immersion elementary school and continued learning French throughout middle school and high school; she considers herself more proficient in French than Chinese. Nonetheless, Evelyn shared that she would “definitely consider” having her (future) children attend a language immersion school, like herself, to learn a language other than English. As shown above, there is a clear connection between Roland, Sammie, and Evelyn’s individual HL learning experiences and their intergenerational transmission plans.

In contrast, eight out of eleven participants stated that they would want their (future) children to learn Chinese. Their reasons include: feeling connected to the HL-speaking community and HC, the ability to communicate with relatives, and the usefulness of learning a language that is widely spoken.

First, many participants plan to teach their (future) children Chinese in order to help them feel connected to the HL-speaking community and HC. Madison (age 26), who is half Chinese and half white, shared: “I would definitely want to teach them Chinese ... because now I just feel so tied to my culture, and I don't feel like I could feel that way if I don't speak it.” Describing herself as white-passing, Madison is cognizant that her (future) children may not “look at all Chinese,” and places importance on teaching them the language in order to feel more connected to the HL-speaking community and the HC:

My boyfriend is Hispanic, so if we had a kid, that kid would only be a quarter Chinese, and they're not gonna look at all Chinese probably. And I don't want that to make them feel like they're at all *not* a part of the culture. So I want to, from an early age, make sure



that they recognize that they are Chinese, they are a part of this culture. And just because they're only a little bit Chinese, doesn't mean they're not Chinese at all.

Similarly, Frances (age 28) shared that she would “love” for her (future) children to speak Chinese because “it would be part of their heritage.” Holly (age 22) also plans to teach her (future) children Chinese to help them feel more connected to their Chinese heritage, noting that: “depending on who my partner is, my kids will have some level of Chinese in them, and if they want to feel connected to the community, I think language is a huge part of that.” In other words, Holly believes that if her (future) children acquire Chinese proficiency, they may feel more connected to the HC and HL-speaking community.

Second, many participants shared that they would teach their (future) children Chinese in order to facilitate communication with HL-speaking relatives. Myra (age 25) said: “I would definitely teach some Chinese, because I want them to know that part of their family.” Myra voiced a concern that her mother might lose her English proficiency as she gets older, adding: “I’d like my children to be able to talk to my mom.” Audrey (age 20) wants her (future) children to attend Mandarin weekend school classes like she did while growing up in order to communicate with relatives. Erin (age 22), who self-identifies as “half white and half Chinese,” expressed that learning Chinese would be helpful for her (future) children in “talking to relatives.”

A third reason participants provided for intergenerational transmission of the HL was connected to the “usefulness” of learning a language that is widely spoken. As Holly pointed out: “a lot of people in the U.S. and just in the world speak Chinese, so it is a very important language, just in terms of usefulness.” Holly also added that she would want her (future) children to learn multiple languages because “it's kind of odd that Americans mostly only speak one language. Like most countries speak their own language plus English, so I think there's a benefit

to learning more than one.” Similarly, Erin expressed: “it’s a very Americanized concept not to be able to speak other languages,” adding that she would want her (future) children to learn Mandarin because “knowing multiple languages is more convenient, it lets you travel more easily.”

As described above, all of the participants reported that they wished their Chinese proficiency was better. However, only six out of the 11 participants expressed plans to continue studying Chinese. In terms of intergenerational transmission plans, the majority of participants (eight) said they would like to teach Chinese to their (future) children, although three had more ambivalent responses.

### **Conclusion**

While much research on language and identity has examined HLLs whose parents are both speakers of a shared HL, little research has been directed towards mixed-heritage HLLs, or those with an English-speaking American parent and an HL-speaking immigrant parent. This study contributes to the small but growing body of literature on mixed-heritage individuals’ language learning experiences and identities. In particular, this study examined the background characteristics and experiences of 11 adult mixed-heritage Chinese HLLs. Participants also discussed the ways in which their personal (positive or negative) attitudes towards the HL, self- and other-perceived identities, and desires to assimilate into the dominant social, cultural, linguistic, and racial groups in their communities affected their HL learning. The research questions that constituted the focus of this study include: What are the background characteristics and experiences of mixed-heritage Chinese as a heritage language (CHL) individuals in terms of levels of HL proficiency, language attitudes, and motivation to learn?

And how are self- and other-perceived, contested and negotiated identities (e.g., racialized, gendered) of mixed-heritage individuals related to their HL learning and maintenance?

The findings suggest that HL proficiencies and self- and other-perceived identities are varied and occasionally unpredictable. Among the 11 adult mixed-heritage Chinese HLLs in this study, their background characteristics and HL learning experiences were varied, although there were significant similarities and differences that emerged. First, participants reported varying levels of HL proficiency in terms of reading, speaking, listening, and writing. Although the proficiency levels varied, most participants claimed Novice-level proficiency, with the highest skill reported in Interpretive Listening, followed by Interpersonal Speaking. The lowest self-reported proficiency levels were in Presentational Speaking and Presentational Writing. Second, the participants had varying degrees of HL experience while growing up, ranging from significant HL experience to limited HL experience. The HL experiences of participants appeared to be influenced by not only parental decisions and strategies regarding HL learning and maintenance, but also participants' self- and other-perceived identities and their attitudes towards HL learning. Exposure to the HL while growing up varied widely, as not all participants had multiple parents who spoke the HL, nor did they all have regular contact with HL-speaking relatives. Participants' formal and informal language learning experiences were varied as well (e.g., Chinese weekend school, private tutoring lessons, Chinese K-12 classes, living in HL-speaking countries). No two participants were entirely alike in their background characteristics and experiences in terms of HL proficiency, language attitudes, and motivation to learn the HL.

Despite these differences, many of the participants shared significant similarities. For example, many resisted learning Chinese as children and adolescents growing up in English-majority environments in the U.S., but later accepted and actively pursued HL learning as adults.

For many participants, the negotiation and contestation of their mixed-heritage identities factored into their HL learning in significant and diverse ways. Specifically, owing to their mixed-heritage identities (in addition to names and physical appearance), many expressed that developing and maintaining their HL proficiency is an important means for them to assert their Chinese heritage. Not having attained their desired levels of HL proficiency became a source of regret later in life for all of the participants. Everyone stated that they wish they could speak, read, write, and/or listen in Chinese better and expressed regret over not having learned more Chinese as children. The vast majority (8 out of 11) indicated that they would like their (future) children to learn Chinese. More than half (6 out of 11) of the participants intend to continue improving their Chinese skills themselves in the future. Clearly, for many of the participants, HL maintenance and intergenerational transmission of the HL are desirable.

This study considers the similarities and differences across a small group of adult mixed-heritage Chinese HLLs' background characteristics and HL learning experiences. However, it does not attempt to convey a universal picture of identity development and language learning among mixed-heritage individuals. Rather, this study illustrates the complexity of these individuals' lives, as well as the dynamic, multifaceted, and continually negotiated nature of their identities. The portraits of mixed-heritage CHLs in this study offer insight into the under-examined HL experiences of mixed-heritage language learners in the U.S. In the following sections, I discuss this study's implications, limitations, and future research directions.

### **Implications**

As this study illustrates, there is a dynamic and complex relationship between HL learning, development, and HL learner identity. The findings from this study will be of interest to language policymakers, researchers, educators, and even families.

All of the participants in this study expressed regret over not having learned more Chinese at a younger age. Families—and in particular, parents—can take measures to increase their children’s interactions with HL-speakers from an early age. For example, families can facilitate interactions with HL-speaking relatives, friends, and individuals in the community. Exposure to environments in which HL language use is more prevalent may also help children learn the language in a way that does not feel “forced.” Studies on family language policy have named a variety of language strategies to be effective in supporting children’s HLM, such as: “expanding HL use beyond everyday activities, scaffolding children’s HL use, endorsing cultural values, and establishing a strong monolingual familial network,” along with “visits to homeland, children’s interaction with HL-speaking peers, and enrollment in HL classes” (Bayley et al., 1996; Park et al., 2012; Phinney et al., 2001, as cited in Kaveh, 2018, p. 449). Parents can be creative in teaching their children an HL, for example, by providing multiple means for them to learn the language (i.e., formal, informal, and *voluntary* learning experiences). Families can also seek community with other HL-speaking and mixed-heritage families in order to exchange language learning ideas. As shown in this study, many of the participants initially resisted learning the HL while growing up, but later came to accept and embrace HL learning as adults. In other words, even if there is resistance towards learning the HL while growing up, language learning attitudes and motivations can evolve.

Apart from families, the findings from this study may also be of interest to language educators. In foreign language education in the U.S., some language programs offer HL-track classes and non-HL-track classes. Regardless of whether or not mixed-heritage learners are placed into HL-track or non-HL-track classes, foreign language educators can attempt to learn about their students’ diverse, multifaceted identities at the beginning of a course of study.

Individuals enrolled in a non-HL-track class may have a familial or cultural connection to a language, so educators can utilize culturally responsive pedagogy and asset-based pedagogy to engage students in a deeper exploration of their cultural identities while developing their language proficiencies. In other words, educators can aim to understand who their students are, where they come from, and their motivations as language learners, thus validating the “learner’s prerogative to define him/herself in terms of their language and culture of ancestry no matter how remote or insignificant the connection to this ancestry may seem to native speakers of the HL or to anyone else” (Carreira, 2004, p. 8). For HL learners with a strong family or cultural connection to the HL, educators can implement pedagogical strategies that help facilitate “the learner’s search for identity vis-à-vis the HL/HC” such as “compiling oral histories of relatives, writing heritage-culture autobiographies, and exploring the history of the HL community in the U.S.” (Carreira, 2004, p. 8). Additionally, it is important for language educators to recognize the connection between emotion and language learning. While foreign language enjoyment plays a positive role in facilitating language learning, foreign language anxiety, which is “associated with negative feelings such as uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension and tension,” has been recognized as “the affective factor that most pervasively obstructs the learning process” (Arnold & Brown, 1999, p. 8). To help mixed-heritage learners in the classroom, teachers can attempt to learn about their students, especially their past learning experiences, attitudes, motivations, and feelings. This knowledge will be helpful as teachers design learning activities for their students. For instance, if care is not taken to provide an emotionally safe atmosphere for communicative activities, anxiety-provoking situations could easily arise. In other words, it is crucial that educators create an environment of mutual support and care in the classroom where

students feel safe and encouraged to take risks in the target language without feeling embarrassed or ashamed.

More broadly speaking, the findings from this study also bear societal implications. As Shin (2010) notes, in the U.S., “the labeling of mixed-heritage individuals as problems is prevalent in our envisioning of race and ethnicity” (p. 207). Mixed-heritage individuals, who are “living at the intersection of two cultures,” are “frequently subjected to marginalization in their respective heritage communities because of their dual ancestry” (Nakashima, 1992; Wallace, 2001, as cited in Shin, 2010, p. 216). Participants in this study further confirmed the feeling of being marginalized by others due to their mixed-heritage identity and the difficulties of “fitting in” while growing up in the U.S. They also recounted instances in which they encountered prejudicial and discriminatory beliefs about race and ethnicity. This type of experience is not an isolated event. A 2015 Pew Research Center survey of approximately 1,500 multiracial adults found that 55% report that they have experienced racial discrimination in the form of slurs or jokes (Parker et al., 2015). Such marginalization is often intensified by insensitive comments about mixed-heritage individuals’ physical attributes, as many of the participants revealed. For example, Myra and Madison described how they reported being “othered” by their white, English-speaking peers and second-generation Chinese American peers with immigrant parents who speak the same HL, respectively. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a dramatic increase in violence and hate crimes against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI). Between March 2020 to March 2021, 6,603 hate incidents were reported to the Stop AAPI Hate reporting center in English and 10 other languages (Jeung et al., 2021). According to the reporting center, 44% of the reports during this time period were made by Chinese Americans (Jeung et al., 2021). This rise in anti-Asian hate crimes affected many of the

participants in this study. For instance, Frances described how it has intensified her sense of “inbetweenness” as a mixed-heritage Asian American, leading to conflicting feelings of increased connectedness to and isolation from the AAPI community: “on one hand these events kind of make me feel *more* part of the community, because people will reach out to me, like, my Asian American friends will reach out to me ... but on the other side, I'll also talk about it with my mom and [she's] almost, like, a little dismissive of me.” As a society, we need to raise awareness of anti-Asian racism and racism towards multiracial people. Rather than contesting mixed-heritage individuals' membership within their HL community, we should adopt a more inclusive attitude towards race and ethnicity. In other words, we should not tell multiracial people how they “should” identify.

### **Study Limitations**

The present study relied on two sources of data from participants: remote interviews and language proficiency self-assessment surveys from individuals. By relying on data collected from a single source (i.e., the participants themselves), there is a possibility that there were inaccuracies reported by the participants. Future research could incorporate more voices into the data collection process to triangulate the data and increase the internal reliability of the study. For instance, participants' relatives (e.g., parents, siblings) could also be interviewed in order to gain more insight into participants' HL experiences and identity and/or corroborate information shared by the participants themselves. Alternatively, questionnaires to participants' relatives could be administered in tandem with the participant interviews. These are but a few ways in which the study's credibility, reliability, and accuracy could be improved upon. In terms of evaluating participants' language proficiency, a more objective assessment (e.g., the Oral



Proficiency Interview [OPI]) of their language proficiency could be used to corroborate or replace their self-assessment.

In addition, due to public health concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic, at the time of the data collection for the present study, the interviews could not be held face-to-face with participants, and instead needed to be conducted remotely. While the remote interviews were convenient for scheduling purposes, face-to-face interviews may have resulted in increased rapport between the researcher and participants.

### **Future Research**

I share these stories to show how important identity is in shaping language learning. The findings from this study highlight the need for more research on HL development and identity among CHL learners from mixed-heritage families. More restrictive, proficiency-based definitions of HLLs fail to take into account another group of HLLs, a growing population of language learners in the U.S. who may have been raised with a “strong cultural connection to a particular ethnolinguistic group and have a ‘heritage motivation,’ but who do not speak or understand the language at all” (Potowski, 2014, p. 405). More research about these learners, their HL experiences, and identities is needed. In the present study, all of the participants conveyed feelings of regret about their prior Chinese learning experiences. One future direction of inquiry could examine the connections between emotions such as regret and language learner identity, motivations, and aims in language acquisition. For example, Prior’s (2016) research centers on emotion and second language learning and use, particularly among adult immigrant learners of English in the U.S. There is a need for educators to understand the role of student feelings (e.g., regret, inadequacy) in second language acquisition in order to offer pedagogical caring (Noddings, 2005) to their students. Future studies can further explore the impact of

pedagogical caring in language classrooms. Finally, future studies could examine the HL experiences of mixed-heritage language learners from different ethnic, racial, linguistic, and geographic backgrounds.

Portraits of mixed-heritage Chinese heritage language learners will contribute to an understanding of CHL learning and education in the U.S. There is a need for more in-depth, ethnographic research that documents adult CHL learners' HL experiences—particularly their language attitudes, motivation to learn the HL, and self- and other-perceived identities—and how these affective variables change (or remain static) over time. Such research will provide important insight into issues related to HL development, ethnicity, identity, and language learning motivation among CHL learners in a variety of geographical and cross-linguistic settings. Such contextualized, individual case studies can provide nuanced understandings of the range of educational and affective experiences, intersectionality of identities, and trajectories of CHL maintenance among CHL learners.

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**Appendix A**

## Semi-structured Interview Questions (adapted from Shin, 2010)

1. Please tell me your name, age, your occupation, and highest education.
2. Where were you born? Where were you raised?
3. Please tell me about your family. Where were your parents from? How did they meet?
4. Do you speak in Chinese to your parent(s), relatives, and/or sibling(s)?
5. What was it like for you growing up as a mixed-heritage person? What were the racial/ethnic backgrounds of your friends?
6. How much contact with Chinese speakers did you have growing up? How about now?
7. If you attended a community heritage language school (weekend school) or studied Chinese at college/university, when and for how long did you study? How were the classes?
8. If you have been to China, what was the purpose of your visit? Did you go to school in China?
9. How important was proficiency in Chinese for you as you were growing up? How important was it for your parents?
10. How important is proficiency in Chinese for you now as an adult?
11. Do you ever wish that you could speak (read, write) Chinese better? Why or why not?
12. How were you received by people from your parent's/parents' ethnic/racial background?
13. How do strangers see you? Can people guess your ethnic racial/background? What kind of comments do people make about your physical appearance, language, (speech), name, etc.?
14. If you could relive your childhood, is there anything you wish your parents had done differently in terms of language?
15. How do you identify yourself ethnically/racially?
16. How important is knowledge of Chinese in your identity as (your response to #15)?
17. If you have children, would you teach them Chinese (or any other language other than English)? Why or why not?

## Appendix B

### Language Proficiency Self-Evaluation Online Survey Questions

#### Block A: Background Questions

1. First Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Please describe any FORMAL Chinese language learning experiences you have had (e.g., K-12, higher education settings, academic study abroad, etc.) Please include approximate time frames and ages as well (e.g., took Chinese classes for 3 years in college up to the intermediate level, ages 18-20.) If not applicable, type 'N/A.'
4. Please describe any INFORMAL Chinese language learning experiences you have had (e.g., communicating with friends/family, tutoring, travel abroad, etc.) Please include approximate time frames and ages as well (e.g., took tutoring lessons in the summer, ages 15-18.) If not applicable, type 'N/A.'

#### Block B: Chinese Language Proficiency Questions

For each of the questions below, please select the statement that BEST describes your proficiency in Chinese. The statements are arranged from elementary to advanced. Choose the HIGHEST one that applies. If not applicable, please select 'N/A.'

5. Interpretive READING:
  - a. I can identify the general topic and some basic information in both very familiar and everyday contexts by recognizing practiced or memorized words, phrases, and simple sentences in texts that are WRITTEN.
  - b. I can understand the main idea and some pieces of information on familiar topics from sentences and series of connected sentences within texts that are WRITTEN.
  - c. I can understand the main message and supporting details on a wide variety of familiar and general interest topics across various time frames from complex, organized texts that are WRITTEN.
  - d. I can interpret and infer meaning from complex, academic and professional texts on a range of unfamiliar, abstract, and specialized issues that are WRITTEN.
  - e. N/A
6. Interpretive LISTENING:
  - a. By LISTENING, I can identify the general topic and some basic information in both very familiar and everyday contexts by recognizing practiced or memorized words, phrases, and simple sentences.
  - b. By LISTENING, I can understand the main idea and some pieces of information on familiar topics from sentences and series of connected sentences.
  - c. By LISTENING, I can understand the main message and supporting details on a wide variety of familiar and general interest topics across various time frames.
  - d. By LISTENING, I can interpret and infer meaning from complex, academic and professional texts on a range of unfamiliar, abstract, and specialized issues.
  - e. N/A

## 7. Interpersonal SPEAKING:

- a. I can communicate in spontaneous SPOKEN conversations on both very familiar and everyday topics, using a variety of practiced or memorized words, phrases, simple sentences, and questions.
- b. I can participate in spontaneous SPOKEN conversations on familiar topics, creating sentences and series of sentences to ask and answer a variety of questions.
- c. I can maintain spontaneous SPOKEN conversations and discussions across various time frames on familiar, as well as unfamiliar, concrete topics, using series of connected sentences and probing questions.
- d. I can participate fully and effectively in spontaneous SPOKEN discussions and debates on issues and ideas ranging from broad general interests to my areas of specialized expertise, including supporting arguments and exploring hypotheses.
- e. N/A

## 8. Interpersonal WRITING (typed or handwritten)

- a. I can communicate in spontaneous WRITTEN conversations on both very familiar and everyday topics, using a variety of practiced or memorized words, phrases, simple sentences, and questions.
- b. I can participate in spontaneous WRITTEN conversations on familiar topics, creating sentences and series of sentences to ask and answer a variety of questions.
- c. I can maintain spontaneous WRITTEN conversations and discussions across various time frames on familiar, as well as unfamiliar, concrete topics, using series of connected sentences and probing questions.
- d. I can participate fully and effectively in spontaneous WRITTEN discussions and debates on issues and ideas ranging from broad general interests to my areas of specialized expertise, including supporting arguments and exploring hypotheses.
- e. N/A

## 9. Presentational SPEAKING:

- a. I can present information on both very familiar and everyday topics using a variety of practiced or memorized words, phrases, and simple sentences through SPOKEN language.
- b. I can communicate information, make presentations, and express my thoughts about familiar topics, using sentences and series of connected sentences through SPOKEN language.
- c. I can deliver detailed and organized presentations on familiar as well as unfamiliar concrete topics, in paragraphs and using various time frames through SPOKEN language.
- d. I can deliver extended presentations on abstract or hypothetical issues and ideas ranging from broad general interests to my areas of specialized expertise, with precision of expression and to a wide variety of audiences, using SPOKEN language.
- e. N/A

## 10. Presentational WRITING (typed or handwritten)

- a. I can present information on both very familiar and everyday topics using a variety of practiced or memorized words, phrases, and simple sentences through WRITTEN language.
- b. I can communicate information, make presentations, and express my thoughts about familiar topics, using sentences and series of connected sentences through WRITTEN language.
- c. I can deliver detailed and organized presentations on familiar as well as unfamiliar concrete topics, in paragraphs and using various time frames through WRITTEN language.
- d. I can deliver extended presentations on abstract or hypothetical issues and ideas ranging from broad general interests to my areas of specialized expertise, with precision of expression and to a wide variety of audiences, using WRITTEN language.
- e. N/A

Block C: Gift Card Question

11. Please enter your email address that you would like the \$20 Amazon gift card sent to. All participants who complete the interview and survey will receive a gift card.