

LOCAL INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL STUDENTS: IDENITTY AND LANGUAGE  
LEARNING INVESTMENTS

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# LOCAL INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL STUDENTS: IDENITTY AND LANGUAGE LEARNING INVESTMENTS

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## ABSTRACT

International schools often use English as the medium of instruction and include large student populations of expatriate children with parents in globally mobile professions, who decided that the local education would not be suitable for their family. However, student demographics of international schools have changed substantially in recent years to now include a growing number of local, non-globally mobile students who are socialized into a school culture that does not necessarily encourage nor share the local culture, associated values, and languages, while putting English forth as the main language of prestige. In this study, I conduct critical discourse analysis of written documents related to international schools in addition to individual interviews with local Hongkongers who attended international schools. I draw on Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of investment and the notion of space and scalar processes (Blommaert, 2007) to show how colonial ideologies in international schools that reinforce the perceived superiority of English and the Anglophone world impact participants' identity and language learning trajectories. I also demonstrate the long-lasting impact participants' international school experiences have on their lives long after graduation. I conclude with suggestions for changes in international schools to transform the status quo.

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## Introduction

International schools constitute a distinct form of education that is well worth greater attention from both researchers and practitioners alike (Hayden, 2011). The emergence of international schools parallels the rise in the number of Western expatriates working and living away from their country of origin (Heyward, 2002). In fact, there are over 8000 such schools serving over 4 million students around the globe (Phillipson, 2019). These schools are often marketed as ‘globalist’ or ‘internationalist,’ with an emphasis on preparing students for global mobility and international relations (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004). These schools typically have English as the medium of instruction. They also often include a large student population comprising of children of expatriate workers with globally mobile professions who, for language-related or other reasons, decided that the local education would not be suitable for their children (Mackenzie, Hayden, & Thompson, 2003).

Since their inception in the twentieth century, the student demographics of international schools have changed quite substantially to include an increasing number of “non-globally mobile families whose desire for an international school education is different from that of a transient family whose children, for instance, do not speak the local language of the host country” (Hayden, 2011, p. 218). Some of the reasons for which these local, non-globally mobile parents enroll their children in international schools include the following: a) a desire to prepare their children for greater global mobility in their future careers (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2017), b) a keen awareness of the linguistic capital English can offer their children (Mackenzie, 2009), or even c) disagreement with the ideologies and practices of the national curriculum (Hansen Edwards, 2018).

International schools certainly provide students an education that connects them to other parts of the world in ways that other local institutions might not. However, one must be careful not to have an overly rosy picture of international schools. Often it may push local students to aspire to a culture of internationalization that may be presented as “preferable to their home culture” (Hayden, 2011, p. 221). These students may find themselves in what Deveney (2005) termed, a “fourth culture.” This is distinct from third culture, which is associated with those who grew up with multiple transient and transnational circumstances outside of their home culture (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). The fourth culture is a hard to define culture that is different from the local culture, but also not affiliated with any foreign cultures situated in foreign nations. It is not a culture of an international school abroad, but a culture of an international school within the home context that doesn’t necessarily encourage or share the local students’ native culture, associated values, and languages. The present study aims to inform the serious implications this has on how children and youth negotiate and navigate their identities and sense of belonging in Hong Kong and abroad. A greater understanding of the variables contributing to hybridity in student identity can invite student self-reflections on their identity development, strengthen parental support, as well as inform critical pedagogy.

While much research on identity and multilingual development have been conducted on expatriate children in international schools, there has been markedly less attention on local students who attend this type of school, especially in the Hong Kong context (e.g. Pollack and Van Reken, 2009; Dolby & Rahman, 2008; Fail et al., 2004). The few scholars who focused their research on host nationals studying in international schools worked primarily with those who were attending international schools at the time that research were conducted. For example, Okada (2009) studied the multilingual and multicultural identities of two Japanese high school

students and a recent international school graduate and how their time in international schools within Japan influenced their perceptions of self and belonging. Bailey (2015), on the other hand, investigated the differences in the types of challenges faced by local Malaysian students in their international school experiences compared to third culture kids. Though these scholars and others have studied the identity negotiations of local children who attended international schools in different Asian contexts, none have explored how international schools may affect local students' language use and identity evolution long term, especially as they reach adulthood. In order to explore these topics further and to develop a greater understanding of the long-term impact that education in an international school environment has on local adults, I employ the notions of investment and scaling processes. I will present the key theoretical frameworks that guided this study in the following section.

### **Space, Scales, Identity and Language Investment**

Norton's (1995) foundational study on immigrant women and their language learning experience, through which she proposed her theory of identity and investment in language learning, contrasted with much of the research on motivation theories and language learning of the time. This has inspired many other researchers involved in the realm of language teaching to conduct similar work in the past decade and a half (Darvin & Norton, 2015). The slew of studies that have followed since have served to reinforce the importance of recognizing and acknowledging the inseparable nature of identity, society, and language learning, with an added emphasis on investment (Norton & Toohey, 2011; Jenkins, 2006; van Lier, 2004; McKay & Wong, 1996).

More recently, Darvin and Norton (2015) expounded on the use of identity and a model of investment in applied linguistics to study how "structure and agency, operating across time



and space, can accord or refuse learners the power to speak” (p. 36). This notion was inspired by Bourdieu’s (1977) research on the interplay between linguistic and cultural capital, and how such capital influences the use and interpretation of language in discourse and society. This model enables educators and researchers to gain a more multifaceted understanding of language learners and their investments in learning, which makes it an appropriate means by which the identity and multilingual development of local students in international school environment, the greater local city, or even abroad on a global level, may be investigated.

The present study explores the identity shifts and multilingual investments of local international students in different multicultural and multilingual communities, with an emphasis on studying how their multicultural identities and investments evolve as they move between multilingual spaces. Thus, it would also be appropriate to apply the notion of scales to analyze the dynamic nature of identity of study participants over different periods of their lives and in difference spaces in connection with their surrounding sociolinguistic ideologies.

The notion of scales and scaling processes point to the idea that social events and processes interact with varying levels of power and status on different points of a scalar continuum, such as from a local scale to a global scale (Blommaert, 2007). Scales have been employed in educational linguistics to analyze different language learning and teaching processes in a wide range of situations (Canagarajah & De Costa, 2016). For example, Duff (2015) used this notion to better understand the linguistic and cultural engagements of multilingual transnationals as they travel between various social and spatial scales that places differing value on their multilingual repertoires and identities. Others, such as Bernstein et al. (2015), drew attention to the impact that neoliberal ideologies related to language learning on a global scale have on the second or foreign language programs housed in the lower scales of

individual nation states, which in turn, reproduces and reinforces hegemonic neoliberal discourses on a global level.

In this study, scale is used to discuss the complex multilingual ecology (Gu & Tong, 2012) within international schools, the greater Hong Kong community, and in countries associated with Anglophone dominance abroad that either values or devalues different parts of participants' language repertoires and multilingual identities. I argue for a local, trans-local, and global scalar structure. Generally speaking, at the local scale, international schools place the greatest value on English, offering students comfortable with English access to academic success and social belonging followed by Mandarin as a second language. At the trans-local scale, the greater Hong Kong local community that hosts these international schools, offers those who can communicate and interact with locals with unmarked Cantonese membership in the community. At the global scale, it is English again that accords the most power when interacting with others and languages skills in languages such as Cantonese or Mandarin are devalued.

In the next section, I introduce the context in which this study is situated to demonstrate some of the ideologies and capital associated with different spaces and scalar processes of interest.

### **Study Context**

Hong Kong's history as a colonial city under British rule from 1841 to 1997 and its subsequent return to China in 1997 has had a tremendous impact on the types of language policies implemented in the city. Over 90% of Hong Kong's secondary schools operated with English-Medium instruction (EMI) in 1997. By 1998, after the handover of Hong Kong from the British back to China, only 30% of Hong Kong's secondary school employed EMI (Wang, 2019). This dramatic shift is reflective of the new language education policies implemented by

the change in government leadership, which prioritized mother-tongue instruction while promoting a biliterate and trilingual policy. This policy stipulates that Hong Kong citizens should be educated to multilingually, with a goal of being trilingual in Cantonese, Mandarin, and English, and biliterate in Chinese and English (Gu & Patkin, 2013). However, the change in language education policy alone does not equate to any decrease in Hong Kong parents' desire to enroll their children in EMI schools due to the linguistic capital that is so strongly tied to English still (Morrison & Lui, 2000). Bray and Leong (1996) predicted prior to the transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong that increased governmental pressure on local schools to teach in Chinese would create a "major demand from a segment of the population" for international schools that teach in English ("Conclusion," para. 7). Although the local government has eliminated the distinction between EMI and CMI school classification due to complaints about the labelling effect it caused between 'elite' EMI and 'second class' CMI schools in 2010 (Tai & Li Wei, 2020; Fung, 2020), Bray and Leong's prediction about the demand from local parents for English immersive international school education certainly holds true even two decades later as local student enrollment in international school continue to rise (SCMP, 2020).

Local language policies and school preferences of local families reveal much about the multilingualism in Hong Kong and any associated complex ideologies and attitudes that circulate in Hong Kong, or the trans-local space in which I have situated Hong Kong in this study, regarding Cantonese, English, and Mandarin. As one of Hong Kong's official languages, English is language of power; its prestige is maintained through its identity as a colonial language and the necessity of having English as a language for business and commerce given Hong Kong's world financial hub status (Sanders-Smith & Dávila, 2019; Shen & Gao, 2019). Hong Kong remains a predominantly Cantonese-speaking city, with unmarked ways of using Cantonese playing a

central role in successful social integration into the local community (Sung, 2020). As a Chinese language, Mandarin does hold official language status in Hong Kong. However, Mandarin has often been associated by locals with threats to the Hongkonger identity due to its perceived link to mainland China and anxieties related to Hong Kong's handover to the Beijing government (Albury & Diaz, 2021), in addition to discriminatory ideologies related to the perceived incivility, impoliteness, and aggressiveness of Mandarin dominant speakers (Gu, 2011). The value and ideologies attached to the languages discussed shift dramatically when scaling down to the local level, which for the purposes of this study, is set as the international school space.

The founding of international schools in Hong Kong is very much tied to the city's colonial past. The first international schools in the city were established chiefly to educate children of expatriate British families in Hong Kong (Bray, 1997). An ordinance was passed in 1967 to establish a foundation managing a chain of international schools that would be funded partially by government subvention (English Schools Foundation (ESF) Ordinance, 1967). However, after officials from the Education Bureau problematized the place of the ESF schools as subsidized government institutions with a 'colonial legacy' in post-colonial Hong Kong, and after much negotiation between the Education Bureau and the ESF starting from 2016, the government began a 13-year plan to phase out subvention to the ESF. By 2029, there will be no more subsidized students attending Hong Kong's international schools (Zhao, 2013).

According to a research publication by the Legislative Council of Hong Kong SAR (2018), as of the 2017-2018 academic year, there are 52 international schools in Hong Kong serving six percent of the Hong Kong total student population at primary and secondary levels, which is over 41,500 students. Although tuition fees of international schools in Hong Kong vary widely depending on the types of support they receive from the government, they remain on the

costlier end of the different types of schools offered in Hong Kong, serving mostly those from upper-middle class or wealthier families. Of all the international schools currently in operation in Hong Kong, 25% and 21% of the student population of primary and secondary international schools are local students, respectively. These percentages have been steadily climbing over the past decade, despite yearly increases in tuition, reflecting the attractiveness of international schooling for those who can afford it. This shows there is a definite and growing need, especially in the Hong Kong context, for a deeper understanding of how an immersive English education offered by international schools can influence the identity and linguistic development of Hong Kong youth.

### **Research Questions**

English-medium international schools often place heavy emphasis on promoting ‘global citizenship’. The promotion of global citizenship in students does not necessarily compel them to invest in their local community (at the trans-local scale), however. Thus, the present study investigated how post-colonial ideologies influence the identity and multilingual development of Hong Kong local international school students from their time in school to adulthood. This was done by asking the following research questions:

1. How do local students’ international school experiences influence their desire to learn and practice English, Cantonese, or Mandarin?
2. How do these Hongkongers’ language learning investments influence their career and life trajectories, as well as their imagined futures?

### **Research Design**

Qualitative applied linguistic research on the lived experiences of language learners have often employed the use of interviews and related autobiographical narratives (Prior, 2011).

Following the footsteps of research in this tradition, the current study mainly drew on biographical interviews, lasting about an hour each, to address research questions. This was because narratives constructed throughout the interview process are thought to be “the prime vehicle for expressing identity” (De Fina, 2015, p. 351). Participants were assured that they were welcome to use whatever languages they wanted to for the interview, and that they did not have to commit to using any single named languages throughout the interview.

I share very similar profiles with my participants, particularly in terms of our educational background, linguistic trajectory, and struggle with the hybridity of identities. Like them, I identify as Han Chinese and a Hongkonger. I also had several years of experience studying at a local school with Cantonese as the medium of instruction. My parents felt that the intense academic stress placed on me as an eight-year-old was too great and that it stifled any interest in learning. After several interviews with different international schools and rejections due to limited English proficiency, I eventually was admitted to an international school in year five. The first year or two at the international school were extremely difficult due to a language barrier and having to adjust to differences in teaching styles. After working extra hard to catch up with my peers the first year or so, I felt comfortable enough with English that having to do schooling through English ceased being a hinderance to learning. My time studying at international schools afforded many privileges into which I have been socialized. However, I am also painfully aware of the emotional and cultural costs brought on by exchanging investment into Chinese for assimilation into the English mainstream in international schools.

My personal connection with the topic of this study makes it impossible to disentangle my own perspective from those of my participants. Particularly since interviewing is ultimately an inherently interactional enterprise (Talmy and Richards, 2010), it is especially important to

make transparent the co-constructive nature of interview narratives when reporting analyses (Roulston et al., 2001). Doing so helps to avoid underplaying contributions to narratives from the interviewer or only partially presenting the voices of the interviewees (Mann, 2011). I knew that my participants would be curious about my own lived experiences or want to seek confirmation from me of the legitimacy of their thoughts and opinions as I try to understand their accounting of experiences relating to an international school education. I also knew that these narratives can potentially be very emotionally charged. Thus, I made a conscious decision to approach the interview process from an active perspective (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004), where I acknowledge the interpretive practice of interviewing that involved both respondents and me as the interviewer as we worked to account for the reality of our experiences.

I did not attempt to hide my own experiences that either paralleled or contradicted those of my participants in interviews. I believe this was the right interview approach to take because of the way it encouraged my participants to be comfortable sharing their own experiences. For example, after sharing his experiences of culture shock struggles with his cultural identity when he first arrived in Canada, one of my participants asked me when I moved to the U.S. This prompted me to share my own struggles with identity and how they motivated this study. To this, the participant responded,

Excerpt 1:

I'm not gonna lie, before you reach out to me, I actually thought I was the only one who felt like this. I'm really glad that uh, I'm not alone, can actually talk to people about this kind of experience.

This was a sentiment that seemed to be shared across most of my interactions with participants at one point or another. I did not feel it was right to simply act as an extractor of information

(Mann, 2011) without disclosing my own experiences or acknowledging how my positioning impacted the way participants reacted throughout the interviewing process.

The participants’ identity and language investment experiences across different spaces and scaling processes were the focal point of the personal interviews. At the conclusion of each interview, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants and the schools that they attended to protect interviewee anonymity. After interview transcriptions were completed, narrative content and themes were analyzed and coded according to emerging themes or conceptual categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This was done to provide a window into the lived experiences of the nine local Hongkongers, who studied at three different international schools in Hong Kong.

### **Participants**

Nine informants who identified as a Hongkonger and have attended international schools in Hong Kong for a significant period of time participated in this study. See Table 1 for an overview of participant information.

**Table 1**

*Participant Information Overview*

Name	Age	Years in International School	Higher Education Location	Work Location
Rachel	24	Year 8-13	Hong Kong	Hong Kong
Hoi Ling	25	Year 2-13	Hong Kong	Hong Kong
Justin	21	Year 1-13	Hong Kong	-
Sebastian	25	Year 5-13	UK	UK
Vicky	21	Year 1-13	UK	Hong Kong
Mandy	25	Upper kindergarten- year 13	USA	USA
Zara	25	Upper kindergarten- year 13	USA	USA
Calvin	20	Lower kindergarten- year 10	USA	-
Denis	21	Year 1-13	Canada	-



## **Documents for Critical Discourse Analysis**

A secondary source of data to supplement findings from participant interviews comes from critical discourse analysis on documents related to international schools in Hong Kong. The purpose of including this secondary source of data and analysis was to obtain a macro level understanding of power and dominance in public discourse (van Dijk, 1993) surrounding this type of school system in Hong Kong. This is important for the present study as it provides additional access to the dominant ideologies that influence capital as well as identity in participants, which ultimately impact their language development trajectories.

I drew inspiration from Valdez et al.'s (2014) approach to critical content analysis on marketing dual language education policies in print media for the analysis of public documents of interest in my study. In their study, Valdez et al. (2014) first identified value discourses associated with dual language education that they were interested in during a specified timeframe, and then with the help of guiding questions, investigated the extent to which those value discourses supported the assumption of a shift in public support for different value discourses. Similarly, I identified discourses associated with education in international schools in Hong Kong, and then explored how these ideologies were presented in public discourse.

Guiding questions for this part of the study were as follows:

1. To what extent are discourses implying the superiority of international schools over local schools present in local newspaper articles or welcome messages?
2. How are discourses reflecting colonial ideologies presented in these news articles or welcome messages?
3. What is discursively silenced in these articles?

Documents for analysis included 97 news articles from 2017-2021 on international schools in Hong Kong from *South China Morning Post (SCMP)*. *SCMP* was chosen as it is one of the most widely circulated Hong Kong-based English daily newspapers. The discourse in these articles can reflect and influence values and ideologies surrounding international schools in Hong Kong. This timeframe was chosen to provide a snapshot of public discourse on international schools from participants' graduation until the present time. The 97 news articles that were ultimately selected for initial review came from keyword searches of "international school" as well as articles listed under the topic tag of "International schools in Hong Kong" published between 2017-2021. See Table 2 for a list of the five most common topics covered by the 97 news articles of interest.

**Table 2**

*Most Commonly Occurring Themes from Newspaper Articles*

Themes	Count
Tuition hikes	12
Superiority of international school curricula	14
Reports of responses to COVID-19	11
Legal cases	17
Positive publicity of international schools	27
International school racism	3
Complaints about international school elitism	3

A second source of documents for analysis came from three principal's welcome messages hosted on the three international schools that participants attended. These welcome messages were obtained through the WayBackMachine (<https://archive.org/web/>). This was to ensure that the welcome messages that I analyzed were written by heads of schools that were hosted on school websites during participants' graduating year. These welcome messages

provided additional insight on the ideologies and capital surrounding investment in English and Chinese learning for participants.

## **Findings**

In this section, I will first provide content analyses of themes drawn from newspaper articles reporting on international schools and welcome messages from principals of international schools attended by participants that reflect values and ideologies surrounding international schools in Hong Kong. Next, I will provide an analysis of the investments into English, Cantonese, and Mandarin by participants across different scaling processes involving experiences prior to, during, and after their international schooling.

### **Value Discourses of Public News Media on International Schools**

There is an overall trend of discourses suggestive of international school superiority over its local counterparts found especially among articles on international school tuition or curricula. Discourse that reflected this trend included propositions such as the following

- Parents do not like the education system in local schools because they can be exam-oriented and overly demanding for children
- Government support for international schools may be perceived as unfair since they already enjoy larger and better campuses as well as more resources and activities
- Despite many local schools providing free education, parents generally see international schools as most prestigious and are willing to pay unreasonably high school fees

In general, these propositions reveal an unspoken assumption that other than the high cost, international schools seem to be preferable to local schools in almost all cases.

Some articles make explicit comparisons between the two school systems. Consider the following excerpts from three different articles:

- In Hong Kong, parents who choose one of the 80 international primary and secondary schools instead of the more than 1,000 local schools would likely do so to avoid a system **often accused of working pupils too hard and being too grade-oriented.** (Chan & Gurung, 2018)
- Rather than producing batches of **anxious grade-chasers**, something he thinks most local secondary schools see as their primary function, Newton says ICHK focuses on "interpersonal skills" and teamwork. (Vetter, 2018)
- Pauline Ngai Chiu-fung, co-founder of the Italian International Kindergarten, said children would learn by doing and experiencing, unlike in the local education system which she went through herself, and which is often **criticised for working pupils too hard and being too focused on grades.**” (Leung, 2019)

Keywords marked in bold point to the criticisms that are presented as widely acknowledged issues in the local school system. Agents of these criticisms are not explicitly mentioned, suggesting that the author expects that readers will recognize the criticisms as part of the discourse surrounding schooling in Hong Kong. Statements like these are reflective of and reinforce the prevalent idea that international schools are preferable to local schools since local schools are almost always cast in a negative light in articles reporting on international schools. This is problematic as it encourages binary thinking by posing international schools as inherently better than local schools, often without mention of any non-financially related shortcomings of international schools. Given the strong associations that international schools in Hong Kong have with the West and its colonial past, the frequent positioning of international schools above local schools can also be interpreted as remnants of colonial ideologies that threaten to other and to minimize local education.

An analysis of issues that have been discursively silenced reflect further ideologies present in public news media. For example, it seems that the preferences of the local community are often overlooked. The following are two excerpts from articles on the topic of school curricula:

- There is room within the overall framework to include additional or alternative courses. It is possible to cater to local needs by incorporating, say, extra classes in Mandarin. And students transferring to or from schools in other countries should find it easier to fit in. (Cremer, 2018)
- “The Chinese language is a second language for their students ... Some schools may think simplified characters will be more useful for their students as they will have more contact with the mainland in the future,” Lau said.” (Su, 2018)

These excerpts discuss the language needs of local students who attend international schools. However, it must be noted that it was Mandarin and simplified written Chinese that were the needs identified and attributed to local students. There is no mention of Cantonese, which is what locals generally speak in, nor traditional written Chinese, which is the writing system used in the city. This is suggestive of two things. One, international schools do not seem to be thinking of local Hongkonger language preferences when deciding which type of Chinese to teach their students. Second, news media do not question the mismatch between the type of Chinese used locally versus what is presented as the Chinese learning needs of international school students. This suggests once again, the power and prestige afforded to international schools, since they are lauded as preferable despite incongruities between the education it offers and what students may need to learn integrate socially into Hong Kong.

One article out of the 97 that were surveyed briefly touched the possible impact such incongruity may cause in local students who attend international schools. This was an article that discussed drug addictions in Hong Kong elite schools, or in other words, international schools.

- Chang believes a lot of students at international schools are struggling with identity issues – and this makes them more vulnerable to substance abuse. “International schools seem really polished on the outside, but when you really talk to the kids they are not necessarily having the best time. They are having so much cultural pressure from all sides – especially Asian kids who have a different background to the school they go to,” says Chang. (Whitehead, 2018)

As mentioned in previous paragraphs, news media tend to report international schools as the preferable school choice over local education. The serious issues students face in international schools, such as struggles with identity, receive limited coverage. The silence around such issues potentially falsely add to the dominant ideology of international school superiority over its local counterparts.

### **Value Discourses of Principals’ Welcome Messages on School Websites**

Next, I present key excerpts from the welcome messages by principals of the three international schools that participants attended, which reflect the same dominant ideologies as those associated with local news media presented in the previous section.

- In a time of **increased international competition** we recognise that good examination results alone will not secure places at prestigious universities, guarantee entry to professions or success in business.

- Eastern College students are eager to learn and **curious about the world around them**. We aim to prepare well-rounded **global citizens** who strive for excellence, appreciate the arts and understand the importance of tolerance and respect for others.
- Students make the most of their life at Central College and as adults go on to use their experiences to lead sustainable and fulfilling lives and **make the world a better place**.
- Our **international environment** demands a social, cultural and political learning process from our students. We want students to be **aware of the world and their responsibilities in it**

One common thread among all three welcome messages was the emphasis on promoting a well-rounded education. The underlined phrases alluding to not pushing for good examination results alone, or the emphasis on promoting well-roundedness, matches the discourse from news media on the educational styles of international schools and their pedagogical superiority to local schools.

Another common theme among the three sets of welcome messages is internationalism or globalism, which is indicated by bolded phrases. It is commendable and important to promote open mindedness to different worldviews. However, the phrases surrounding “the world” following the emphasis of the international nature of the schools suggest that the principals were referring only to the imagined greater international stage at the global scalar process rather than the immediate world beyond the school on a trans-local scale. This emphasis combined with the lack of explicit, positive references to the international school’s host city reflects the kind of discourse the school’s students are exposed to each day. These discourses suggest that these international schools do not seem to be encouraging students to make Hong Kong itself a better place. Instead, they demonstrate that, while schools do strive for what they think is best for their

students' development and future prospects, their idea of what is best is one where Hong Kong itself does not necessarily play a role.

### **Language Investments Prior to Attending International Schools**

Having shown some of the salient ideologies surrounding international schools, I now present the analysis of participant narratives of this study. I show that depending on the local, trans-local, or global spaces that participants were in, they move from different scales that privileges different parts of their language repertoire, which have implications for their identity negotiations and the languages that they invest in.

Interviews with participants all began with an invitation to introduce themselves to me, especially in relation to their language use from birth to the present time. In Excerpt 2, Justin begins his narrative with his language use as a toddler:

Excerpt 2:

I distinctly remember speaking mostly Cantonese as a toddler and a baby or whatever.

That's still quite fresh cause just a few days ago we were just watching some old recordings of me as a kid. And I know I barely spoke any English. I did read some picture books or something, but I know I mainly spoke in Cantonese.

Prior to attending international schools, most participants, like Justin, described themselves as Cantonese dominant speakers. Most spoke Cantonese at home, even those who never attended local schools. This is reflective of the language most commonly used for everyday communication among native Hongkongers and especially within native Hong Kong households (Tse et al., 2007). English seems to be present, but not used in home interactions. However, English does hold great importance to their families. Regardless of when participants began enrollment in international school, they were all taught English in their homes or at school and



were able to use English to varying degrees. Based on the lack of any mention of Mandarin from the participants' narratives in the early childhood period, Mandarin seemed to be irrelevant to participants at this point of their lives.

Two of the most common reasons given for parents of participants to choose international schools over local schools were the greater exposure to English and a desire for a less exam-oriented education. For parents of Donald, Vicky, Justin, and Rachel, the opportunity for an immersive English education was the largest motivator. On the other hand, Sebastian, Zara, and Calvin's reported that their parents chose international schooling for them because international schools put less pressure on students and place less of an emphasis on rote learning. Finally, Hoi Ling and Mandy did not do well in admissions interviews at popular local primary schools, which was an additional reason they gave for why their parents eventually enrolled them in international school.

Two strong ideologies seem to be at play for the desire to attend international schools: Acquiring 'good' English is important since it would be the passport to success (Morrison & Lui, 2000), and international schools and their non-local (Western) way of teaching are superior to local schools. This is reflected by the way participants explain why their parents chose to enroll them in international schools and the value discourses reflected in newspaper and principal welcome messages.

### **Language Investments During International School Years, Within School**

International schools and associated identities as international students created an environment conducive to English investment, but often at a cost to Chinese investment. Rachel is the only participant who attended local schools with Cantonese as the medium of instruction from kindergarten all the way to the end of primary school, and she was the only participant that

preferred to use Cantonese for the majority of the interview, since she seldom had opportunities to use English after graduating from university four years ago. We had a brief conversation about how the both of us began studying at international schools, which led to me sharing my own experiences when I first transitioned to an international school in year 5. I recounted the struggles I had with the abrupt change into a school environment where all interactions at school were done in English only. Here is Rachel's response after I asked her what it was like when she first transitioned to an international school in year 8.

Excerpt 3:

我嗰陣時覺得我哋英文水平係 okay, 咁我咪轉咗過嚟讀 Eastern College。但係當然啦, 入到嚟 Eastern College 後就覺得, 哇原來呢度嘅人嗰哋英文好好多喔。人哋嗰啲係即係非常之流利呀, 佢哋講得好好, 係既係好似啲外國人嗰啲咁樣咁好嫁啲。咁咪嗰陣時上到來係有 struggle 嫁…… 咁所以嗰陣時時候上課呀, 聽老師教書呀, 其實都係有困難, 因為有陣時都聽唔明佢哋喺度講咩囉。

I thought my English was okay so I switched over to study at Eastern College. And of course, after I went to Eastern College I felt, wow everyone is actually so much better. They are so fluent, they speak so well, just like the foreigners. So at the time after going there, there were struggles... Going to classes at the time, listening to teachers teach in class, it was difficult because I couldn't understand what they say.

係之後過咗頭一兩年, 你就開始都聽得明啲老師講咩嘞, 咁之後你又自己自律啲呀, 去勤力啲呀去做溫書呀做功課呀之類嗰啲, 咁你咪開始覺得 feel more comfortable 咁樣囉。咁去到除咗你聽明嘞, 咁你又寫到嘞, 咁你又開始覺得講嗰方面都 okay 啦啲, 咁你可以同人, at least make 到一個 conversation, 未必係

好單向嘅，配如人哋講，你聽咁樣，係可能大家都可以交流到，都可以 make 到一個 conversation，所以係都 okay 囉。

After the first year or two, you start to understand what the teachers are saying, and then with more self-discipline, working hard to study and to do homework, then you start to feel more comfortable. By the time you can listen and understand, you can write, and you can speak, then you can at least make a conversation with others, and it might not be so one directional, like if people are speaking and you listen. You can actually have interactive communication, so it was okay.

Rachel's experience adjusting to an international school reflects several key variables that make international schools a very different space in relation to the local community. Rachel's knowledge of Chinese and ability to study and socialize in Cantonese became irrelevant in this context. Instead, English, the language that at her local school was used only in English classes, dominated as the language of learning and socializing in international school. Rachel was expected to develop her English until she could listen, read, write, and speak in English the way many of her other classmates already could. Until she was able to do this, she risked exclusion as a legitimate member of an international school student in two ways. Socially, she was not able to communicate the way she wanted to. Practically, she was not able to complete the responsibilities of a student comfortably in English.

According to Rachel, when local people hear that a person is from international school, "their first thought is that oh your English must be really good." As a Hong Kong local studying at an international school, that was the identity that she wanted to take on. It was one of the main reasons that she transitioned to an international school. Though her transition was difficult, armed with the capital she brought with her from her English classes and English tutoring at her

local school, Rachel reported that she was able to catch up with her international school peers and function relatively comfortably in an immersive English environment after about two years.

Unlike Rachel, Vicky started studying at an international school since year 1. While giving an introduction of herself, she mentioned that she thought her parents had an idealized view of international schools as being less “academically pushing” and more supportive of “critical thinking and the ability to just experience and to try different things.” This is an excerpt from Vicky reflecting on her disillusionment with international schools after I asked for her thoughts on her parents’ idealized view of international school:

Excerpt 4:

I think from maybe junior school and maybe to the beginning of secondary school, I kind of started to realize that, while the English school system was really, really great, I enjoyed my time thoroughly and I felt like an integrated part of that community. But I did kind of feel that my Chinese was, you know, quite lacking. And I really struggled with reading perhaps newspapers or just watching the news or something. You know, that quite perplexed me that they never really put an emphasis to teach Chinese or maybe if it was, it was just quite basic or rudimentary and a lot of it was additional tutoring or had to take the initiative myself outside of school to kind of improve my Chinese to keep it on par with my English.

Vicky questioned the lack of emphasis placed on Chinese learning at school after realizing that she felt different compared with other Hongkongers who attended local schools, even from a young age. While English remained a language of prestige in the local community or trans-local space (Albury & Diaz, 2021), unlike within the international school space, it is not the language that locals would use with each other. Instead, Cantonese is the language of communication and

socialization among the locals. The mismatch in value and preference placed on Chinese and English within international schools versus the greater local community is reflective of the two separate scaling processes that local students who attend international schools must navigate. Vicky traversed these two spaces and the higher value placed on Chinese outside of her school by taking the initiative to study Chinese on her own in addition to the relatively elementary Chinese classes provided at school. However, despite her efforts, she still found her Chinese to be “quite lacking” since she was not able to easily accomplish tasks in Chinese that her peers who attended local schools would be able to.

Vicky was not the only one who was dissatisfied with the Chinese classes offered by international schools. Most of the participants felt so as well, and they also recognized a disconnect between their Chinese classes and the type of Chinese (i.e., Cantonese) that is used among the local community.

Given that international schools were originally established for English-speaking expatriates in the city (Bray, 1997), the association of English with internationalism and globalism, and the devaluation of local languages and cultures in international schools, Chinese is only taught as a second language in international schools. Specifically, they teach Mandarin Chinese, though individual schools differed on policies relating to the use of simplified or traditional written Chinese. As I discussed the choice by international schools to offer Mandarin classes as the second language option for students instead of Cantonese with Sebastian, he told me:

Excerpt 5:

It's to appease the masses in a way, or to allow as any culture to feel at ease as possible. And, in that case, I would have to agree, unfortunately, the crowd or kind of the trend in

general, it's to go full Mandarin for better or for worse. Definitely there are more people that speaks Mandarin. Even if you go onto an international stage, Mandarin would be the mainstream.

Sebastian's comment about international schools' choice to teach Mandarin instead of Cantonese suggests that they privilege languages and cultures that are considered to be more valuable on the imagined global stage. International schools offer Mandarin due to its perceived greater global appeal. However, in offering this variety of Chinese instead of Cantonese, they are blatantly ignoring their host city and host culture. They are putting aside what is valued on the trans-local scale in favor of what is valued on the global scale. The implication from this comment is that perhaps some expatriate families attending international schools in Hong Kong would consider Cantonese to be less relevant abroad when compared to Mandarin, making them less likely to approve of Cantonese as a second language option than Mandarin. The language needs of students in the greater Cantonese speaking community immediately outside international schools are not considered. With such ideologies dominating this elite space, Chinese investments on the part of local students, especially in Cantonese, were easily stifled.

### **Language Investments During International School Years, Outside of School**

Indeed, without much local language support from within international schools, many of the local students of this study reported extremely low confidence and limited knowledge of the Cantonese language in comparison with other Cantonese speakers who attended local schools. Despite identifying as a Hong Kong local, their identifies were often challenged by local Cantonese speakers. In post-colonial Hong Kong, speakers of prestigious varieties of English are admired, but this in and of itself does not equate to acceptance by local Cantonese speaking

Hong Kong people. Inclusion in this community requires speaking Cantonese with a local accent and lexicon (Gu & Tong, 2012).

Mandy shared with me her feelings of self-consciousness and lack of belonging among local Cantonese speaking communities when she would “say things that are wrong and sometimes people would laugh at [her] or make a joke out of it.” I also experienced similar reactions from locals to my Cantonese growing up, though I could not recall specific instances during the interview with Mandy. Therefore, I asked if Mandy remembered specific moments that she’d be willing to share with me. Excerpt 6 shows Mandy’s eagerness to use Cantonese to connect with local peers, followed by shame when her efforts were not acknowledged:

Excerpt 6:

Mandy: I remember one time when I was with my cousin and some friends or something and I was trying to talk about, like, foundation or something, you know, like makeup foundation or concealer. And in my mind, I was like, I don't know how to say this. And I was pretty young, and I was okay, foundation is something that makes your face white, right? So I was like, oh 白粉 [heroin, or literally white powder], but 白粉 [heroin, or literally white powder] is actually like, the drugs.

Vashti: Right

Mandy: And so like it was something I had no idea and I just said it, casually. I thought I was really smart cause I just like translated it into my head what it meant. And then like everyone just started laughing. And I remember that moment I was like, I’m always just so stupid. But at the same time, I remember feeling like,

Oh, like actually like, but I didn't know. I actually didn't know. It was not a word I would use normally. And so,

Vashti: Right, you were just trying to fit in

Mandy: And I just remember feeling bad about it, yeah.

(...)

Mandy: I remember as a kid, well, you know, all those small moments felt so big, and then it would make me less

Vashti: Yes

Mandy: Likely to say, well, I guess I should learn Chinese too. I'd be like, oh my English is good enough. You know what I mean?

Mandy found that outside of the international school space and in the local community, her expertise in English may still be admired as a form of capital. However, by moving from the international school scale to these local spaces on the trans-local scale, the value associated with her English expertise pales greatly in comparison to the practical need of being able to use Cantonese in ways deemed acceptable by the local mainstream in order to avoid exclusion to the community.

As a result of often being called out for being different or made to feel that her language abilities were lacking and not Hong Kong enough, Mandy would reassure herself by telling herself that her English is good enough. And that given the prestige associated with English on the global scale, at the time, she did not feel a need to invest in a language that she gets mocked for by the locals. Calvin, Hoi Ling, Zara, and Denis, the four other participants who were among the group that felt uncomfortable enough with their Cantonese to want to avoid using it at all



costs during their international school years, expressed similar experiences and emotions when talking about their interactions in the local Cantonese speaking community.

### **Language Investments After International School, in Hong Kong**

The language investments of local students in the greater Hong Kong community after their international school education creates yet another space with different sets of language values, ideologies, and environment for the fostering of different identities. Unlike while participants were students at an international school, as adults studying or working in the greater Hong Kong community, they no longer have Hong Kong international student as one of their most salient identities. Instead, their Hongkonger identity in general may become one that is most relevant given the new social circles that they were a part of. In addition, the priorities of which language is the most relevant for everyday life also shifted from heavily focused in English and some Mandarin to mostly Cantonese with some need for English at their universities.

Most participants decided to pursue higher education abroad for reasons such as their language repertoire, the lack of a sense of belonging in Hong Kong, and expectations for better career opportunities through a degree from Canada, the United Kingdom, or the United States. The three who remained in Hong Kong for their post-secondary education were pursuing careers (medicine, dentistry, pharmacy) that would require difficult, costly, and time-consuming additional licensing examinations should they hope to practice in Hong Kong with a degree from abroad.

Justin is one of the three participants who remained in Hong Kong for university. In Justin's introduction to me at the beginning of the interview, he shared a key moment in his life

when he moved from functioning primarily in the international school space to primarily in the local Hong Kong Cantonese-speaking context.

Excerpt 7:

Most of the new friends I made at uni, are local. So currently right now, I think my identity has basically shifted into being basically local. And I think it is with a bit of pride that I can say this. I think when I went to orientation camp in year one people could not tell I was an international [school] student from my Cantonese accent. So I was like, wow. I can't tell they're being nice or whatever. But I mean, they, they found out in the end, but I think at the end of the day, I think my Cantonese has improved to a point where it's not too obviously [not] local.

As mentioned previously, in the local space, being able to speak Cantonese in an unmarked way is one of the variables that determine inclusion or exclusion to local Cantonese populations.

Justin, aware of this exclusionary criterion, was very happy to know that his identity as local Hongkonger was ratified despite not feeling as comfortable with his Cantonese as he is with English. Like many others in this study who actively sought membership in the local community, Justin went out of his way to study Chinese outside of school to supplement his learning. The desire to belong and to fit into a Hongkonger identity without being challenged meant that he had to negotiate shifts in the value assigned to the different parts of his language repertoire. Outside of the international school environment, it was Cantonese, the language not given a place in international schools at all, that gained him immediate inclusion into the local group. As a medical student, he uses English 60-70% of the time and uses Cantonese the remainder of the time. However, he plans on continually developing his Chinese as he knows that he will need to use Cantonese professionally in the future as he begins medical practice after graduation.

Like Justin, Hoi Ling also remained in Hong Kong after graduating from an international school. She is now a practicing dentist at a local public hospital. During a conversation about her thoughts on her international school's language education policies, Hoi Ling shared her perspective of what she thought of the three main languages within her language repertoire, shown in Excerpt 8:

Excerpt 8:

My department is relatively more local, so I speak Cantonese at work. Sometimes I feel like my English has gone down the drain a little bit but it's okay. If you are in Hong Kong, you need to know Cantonese. It's a lot more used in Hong Kong. For Mandarin, it's just for your, you know, Mainland clients. Or going abroad, it's more of an international foreign language. That's the way I see it... English for me is my key language. You know, medical terms, dental terms. If I can't think of the word in Chinese, I will have to describe it in English for my patients. And I look to my nurse and ask, how do you say this? So it's still a struggle sometimes.

Hoi Ling found herself using Cantonese most of the time, to the point where she feels like she is losing her English due to a lack of reason or opportunity to use it in her daily life. Hoi Ling's experiences are another reflection of the shifts in capital associated with languages among the greater Hong Kong local community versus more removed international school spaces. In terms of everyday use, Cantonese remains the most necessary for practical interactions, followed by occasional use of Mandarin for her patients from Mainland China. The symbolic prestige brought by English's connection to internationalism and globalism as well as medical and dental terminology is still present in the trans-local scale that she now operates in despite a lack of opportunity to use it in her daily practice. This is reflected by the fact that she can afford to not

be able to communicate with her Cantonese speaking patients independently at times without having her authority or intelligence questioned. In addition, the power associated with her position as a dentist instead of a nurse meant that she could rely on her nurse to interpret for her when certain Chinese terminology escapes her. This is not a necessarily a luxury that other local international school students can enjoy in the Hong Kong work environment.

### **Language Investments After International School, Abroad**

A third major space that some participants navigated involved studying and working abroad after their international school experiences. To participants, this space, be it in Canada, U.S., or the UK, represented the larger “international” space abroad, away from the local Hong Kong spaces. On such a transnational scale, Chinese is devalued and ceases to provide as much immediate cultural capital to them as it did in Hong Kong or even within international schools. Though Mandarin remains a tool that may open up economic opportunities since the perception by participants such as Mandy was that “the Chinese market is huge,” the relative power provided by the ability to use Cantonese is much lower than in any of the spaces previously mentioned.

Ironically, it is while living in such a space abroad where Cantonese is not associated with much capital overall when compared to Mandarin and English that Zara began to gain greater interest in investing in Cantonese. The following is an excerpt from Zara on how she felt her language priorities and identity change when navigating this space away from her Hong Kong home.

Excerpt 9:

I think coming to university have definitely given me a little more desire to talk more in Cantonese, to go back to my roots, whether is talking a little bit more in Cantonese with

my sisters. It's something too gradual to notice. But I think maybe it's because now it's very, very American, very white, it's like the opposite of the spectrum, versus in Hong Kong it was the other side. So, I do miss some element of home. So, when I do see someone from Hong Kong and they speak Cantonese I feel that kind of affiliation. I will say though, you feel a connection, but sometimes not really though because there are certain things that are just so different. I think because of the way I've grown up it's definitely given me a sense that you struggle with who you are, right. Like you don't know if you should like fit more in with the Americans or fit more in with the Asian spectrum.

By describing her university abroad as “very, very American, very white” and Hong Kong on the opposite end of a continuum, Zara suggests that she imagines them to be different spaces with different associated values and ideologies. Being in a very “American” and white space as a Hongkonger navigating the global scale made Zara realize that the more “western” identity she held while in Hong Kong did not by default give her the perceived opposite identity, or that of a white American. The othering that she experienced in the U.S. pushed her to reconnect with her roots in Hong Kong, a place where she had previously not felt great affiliation with either due to differences in language use. In a space such as the US where Zara was studying, Cantonese may not afford capital. However, it can serve as a medium to connect with other Hongkongers living in the area. With these identities, capital and ideologies in mind, Zara voluntarily begins to use Cantonese more often in this international space that is away from Hong Kong.

Zara was not the only one who felt more desire to reconnect with their roots after leaving Hong Kong. Calvin, Mandy, and Denis all shared similar sentiment in their interviews when discussing the changes that they saw in their own feelings toward learning Chinese and their

Hongkonger identity. Denis explicitly mentioned that despite identifying as more Western than the average local Hongkonger, he also felt quite out of place in Canada. It led to “a greater appreciation for Hong Kong culture and just Chinese culture in general.”

The decision to study abroad among the six participants that left Hong Kong for university did not automatically mean that this group of participants never considered returning to Hong Kong for work after their studies. The realization that they did not fit in as Hongkongers in the Anglophone countries that they studied in as well as a desire to be with family were major factors in the participant’s hopes to repatriate after their schooling. However, this desire is complicated by constraints imposed on them by their professional linguistic repertoires.

While voicing his frustrations about his Chinese being below the level of locals and, as a result, the difficulty he felt with conforming to them, Denis mentioned that it translated to difficulty working in Hong Kong as well. In his interview, I asked a follow-up question regarding his experience working as an intern in an international firm based in Hong Kong in hopes of learning more about how he felt his shortcomings in Chinese complicated his work experiences. Denis’s explanation is presented in Excerpt 10:

Excerpt 10:

I find that having to learn about the vocabulary and adapt to that kind of environment was a very big strain on my mentally. You had to exert a lot of effort just to make sense of what's going on. As opposed to if I was locally raised, if I went to a local school, I wouldn't really have any problems understanding any of the slang any or have speaking difficulties or interpretation difficulties and I could just focus on my work there. So I think that if I had just been raised in a more local setting, I'd be able to work much more easily in a Hong Kong environment.

Despite Denis's excitement of being able to return to Hong Kong for an interning opportunity, he quickly felt the mental strain it brought due to a mismatch between the languages he was socialized to value at his international schools and abroad in Canada, and the language needed to communicate with coworkers in the local Hong Kong community. While his firm was an international company where English was all that was needed officially, in practice, the ability to converse and mingle with others in Cantonese was vital in the workplace. This shift in value placed on Chinese versus English led to his wanting and wishing that he had invested more during his secondary school years when it had not been as obvious to him the shifts in power that each language may bring him in the different spaces he would need to navigate as an adult.

Denis was not alone in struggling with work in Hong Kong. Calvin shared his increasing frustrations with his own language repertoire because of how limiting it seemed in Hong Kong outside of its international schools as an adult. The following is an excerpt of Calvin weighing his future career options:

Excerpt 11:

Vashti: Where do you see yourself in five to ten years? And what are some of the reasons for this?

Calvin: If I work in Hong Kong, it would be either online or with an English institution, maybe doing TESOL. Well, that's about it. I don't, I can't work in Hong Kong in a, in a field that is highly technical...

Vashti: When you say highly technical, can you explain what, explain a little bit more about what you mean by highly technical field?

Calvin: I wouldn't be able to, I wouldn't be able to do it, to do teaching. I couldn't teach the things that I want to. I couldn't teach music. I couldn't teach philosophy. I couldn't teach history. Yeah. I couldn't do those things in Hong Kong.

Vashti: Why—

Calvin Cause' I just don't have the vocabulary.” (Calvin)

He had considered developing his music passion into a career in teaching music, but because he does not feel very comfortable using Cantonese in more technical ways, he expects that he will struggle with establishing a career in Hong Kong in anything other than teaching English. His concern is not without merit, given the great mental strain that Denis discussed concerning his time working at an international firm in Hong Kong. This once again, highlights the mismatch of the hierarchy of value associated with Chinese and English between the international schools and the greater local community despite these international school values matching expectations of which languages are afforded greater capital on a global scale. The misrecognition of Cantonese as inconsequential in international schools have long lasting impact of local students who attended them.

### **Discussion**

In this study, I have used the model of investment to explore the ways that a hybridity of identities, post-colonial ideologies, and the assignment of different cultural capital to multiple languages affect the linguistic trajectories of Han Chinese Hongkongers who attended international schools. I have also used space and scalar analyses to show how the intersectionality of identity, ideology, and capital shifts and changes depending on participants' spaces of traversal, which further accords or refuses participants the power to use different languages.



Scale offers a spatial metaphor along a vertical continuum for discussing issues of power in stratified social systems (Blommaert, 2007). This vertical continuum of power locates international schools on the local scale, where languages valued in this local space may not necessarily influence what is considered valuable on the trans-local scale. From the perspective of the international school community occupying the local scale, Cantonese is a language that is neither valid nor valued. On the other hand, though Mandarin is only taught as a second language and is thus lower than English on the stratified hierarchy of languages of importance in international schools, it is still given official recognition in the school, suggesting that it is seen as having relatively more global privileges and is a relevant language beyond the local space of international schools in transnational spaces. Furthermore, as a colonial language and lingua franca, English is seen as a global language that holds the greatest importance and relevance in the widest range of situations, spanning from the local to the transnational scale. That, coupled with ideologies about the perceived superiority of international schools and their associated ‘internationalism’ that excludes the local community, reflected by trans-local discourses in Hong Kong, it is little wonder that local students attending international school find themselves in an interesting predicament. They invested very heavily into studying English and partially in Mandarin due to classes offered by their school, to the point where it is to the neglect of Cantonese, their home and local community language.

In contrast, the local Hong Kong community can be thought of as being on the trans-local scale since it has power—to some degree—over the language policies of international schools. Were these international schools not located in Hong Kong, they would most likely not all have Chinese as a second language option. However, the trans-local scale’s power over the local scale is limited. The structural power afforded to the local Hong Kong community on the trans-local

scale was not enough to influence international schools to offer Cantonese as a second language option. Despite the overt prestige that is associated with English as a colonial language as well as lingua franca, there is still much covert prestige (De Costa, 2016) associated with the mastery of Cantonese in this trans-local space. Research into language ideologies and identity construction in Hong Kong has shown that mastery of an unmarked variety of Cantonese was essential for acceptance into the local community (Gu, 2011). Mandarin, despite also holding official language status in the city, is relegated to the periphery due to its association by locals with negative and discriminatory stereotypes of mainland Chinese people as a monolithic group with a rural and uncivilized upbringing (Xu, 2015), with such stereotypes exacerbated by social media during current times of intensifying anti-mainland sentiments (Sung, 2020). Thus, the variety of Chinese that is somewhat valued and taught on the local scale is devalued when participants move to the trans-local space, and the variety of Chinese deemed unimportant on the local scale is assigned greater value in the trans-local space.

Once participants moved abroad into the transnational space, English deemed once more to have the greatest capital. This space holds great power as it is what largely influences the upscaling of English in the local and trans-local spaces. Though both Mandarin and Cantonese is devalued in the transnational space, Mandarin is seen as more global than Cantonese (Gu & Tong, 2012). This echoes the hierarchies of languages in the local scalar process of international schools.

Where native language and culture is devalued, English immersion in countries associated with Anglophone dominance often leads to subtractive bilingualism (Garza & Crawford, 2005). Indeed, under such circumstances, the intersectionality of Hongkonger identity, ideologies, and capital resulted in the rejection of Chinese or Cantonese learning from most

participants as children. Their language trajectory diverges from that of local Hongkongers who attended local schools that did not promote so strongly a dismissal of local Cantonese Hongkonger language and culture. This is a reflection of colonial ideologies that reinforces the hegemony of English in these spaces.

Gu and Patkin (2013) found that despite its status as an official language in Hong Kong, expertise in English without Cantonese makes entering the greater labor force in Hong Kong difficult. As adults, as suggested by Calvin and Sebastian, and shown by Denis, and Hoi Ling's narratives, there are struggles with adjusting to the workplace. It must be acknowledged that despite the greater difficulty or complications with adjustment to workplace due to a lack of professional Cantonese, they are still able to work to take advantage of their English skills in the Hong Kong workplace to make up for any communicative difficulties. They might be treated in ways similar to other English speaking expatriate workers in Hong Kong.

Scalar processes determining the power associated with particular languages change yet again in settings abroad. All participants who relocated abroad for higher education did so in English dominant countries such as Canada, the U.S. and the U.K. They are still spaces where English is afforded the greatest prestige, with other languages such as Mandarin Chinese positioned lower, and Cantonese, even lower on a vertical scale.

In a way, the scalar processes of international schools in Hong Kong are a reflection of these Anglophone dominant spaces abroad. Colonial powers that determine superiority of western/Anglocentric matters and assign inferiority to more local spaces such as the Hong Kong community have great power to exclude groups from gaining membership in Anglocentric dominant spaces. Perhaps because of this, Calvin, Mandy, Zara, and Denis all expressed very strongly that it was in these spaces that they felt a greater desire than ever to improve their

Chinese. According to them, leaving Hong Kong made them realize how non-western their personal identities and values were. Without the pressure of delegitimization from the local Hong Kong community, these three participants renegotiate their identities as non-western, but also a hybrid Hongkong identity that includes more western values. They understood the importance Cantonese played in gaining membership in the local Hong Kong community where they still maintain very strong ties, despite its devaluation in Canada, the U.S., and the U.K. Thus, despite shifts in scalar processes in these settings abroad, they chose to embrace the Hongkonger part of themselves that they once rejected as children and seek to put greater investment into Chinese once more.

### **Conclusion**

The experiences of participants in international schools are reflective of the systemic patterns of control present in policies and institutions (Darvin & Norton, 2019) that socialize their students into a colonial mindset where the local is perceived to be lesser than the ‘international’ or ‘global’ stage, which often are codes for the western or Anglophone world. The international school climate and language policies that influenced these language investments have far-reaching consequences for participants of this study.

The international schools promoting English in post-colonial Hong Kong along with the larger language policies give the impression that English alone is enough to help students thrive in school and beyond. However, the stories of the participants show that it is not enough. The difficulty with which they are able to live and work in Hong Kong as locals without being able to comfortably access the local language in daily interactions closes doors to local work opportunities and contribute to pushing them away from Hong Kong.

In the end, despite their international school education and relatively affluent family background, participants of this study neither feel like they belonged in Hong Kong, nor in the countries where they chose to pursue higher education. Their identity is always a major site of struggle. None of the participants had direct control over the decision to attend international school. None had parents who attended international school. As a result, they alone must navigate the price paid in terms of heritage culture and identity for their relatively smooth adjustment in Anglophone societies, a transition that often is touted as the international ideal from their international school education.

I suspect that it would be impossible for a Chinese immersion school in the US or other Anglophone dominant countries to be able to set up language policies of Chinese only in school, promoting Chinese as a dominant language that hold prestige over English, even at the cost of their English-speaking American students' home culture and language development. One of the main reasons why international schools are able to produce students from the local community who lose the local culture and languages in exchange for English, but not have its language and educational policies widely questioned by the public is due to hegemony and dominance of English and western colonial ideologies still very much present in Hong Kong.

To transform the status quo in international schools, awareness of the identity, ideologies, and capital surrounding the language investments of such international school students have great benefits for educators, students and parents. This can inform critical pedagogy, transforming international education into one that is inclusive not only in name, but also in its acceptance and appreciation of the local multilingual and multicultural community. This understanding can also strengthen parent support of these students and invite self-reflection in local students that may help them navigate the hybridity of their identities.

In a way, most international schools function similarly to how multilingual students sometimes are educated in the US- by trying to assimilate them into the English dominant mainstream and devaluing their home culture and heritage language. In the end, perhaps when we begin to challenge the strong colonial ideologies in international schools and one nation/race one language ideology (Li Wei, 2018) in the local and international school community, will local students attending international schools have an additive cultural and linguistic experience rather than a subtractive one.

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