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# Keeping In Touch With The Chinese Homelands: Use Of Chinese Media In The US

*Increase in Chinese immigration in the United States over the past decade has resulted in the growth and vitality of Chinese media as well as competition for market share. Although a number of recent content analysis studies have examined the coverage of specific events such as Tiananmen and its aftermath and Hong Kong's return to China, relatively little research has been conducted from an audience perspective. This study provides cross-sectional baseline data that can be used in future longitudinal studies to determine whether, how, or to what extent Chinese-language media use in the United States has changed over time.*

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The Chinese-language press in the United States is alive and well. By the mid-1990s, metropolitan areas with large Chinese populations such as New York City, San Francisco, and Los Angeles were served by up to 43 different Chinese media (Intertrend, 1995). Although the competition among Chinese media is fierce (Chou, 1997; Lau, 1989; Li, 1994; McCue, 1975), they are serving an expanding market of Chinese immigrants who have come to the United States during the past three decades.

In the 1980s and the 1990s, the largest immigrant group to come to the United States was Chinese (Gall & Gall, 1993; Hare & Felt, 1991). In the decade from 1980 to 1989, a record number of 433,031 Chinese from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao immigrated to the United States (Gall & Gall, 1993). Although the figures are dated now, the latest U.S. Census in 1990 put the number of Chinese in the United States at 1,648,696 of the total population.

Many of the recent Chinese arrivals are students and professionals from affluent backgrounds (Kang, 1997; Wong, 1998). A *Los Angeles Times*' poll of Chinese in Southern California found "a predominately immigrant community made up mostly of well-

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educated, white-collar workers and their families who have come to America since the 1970s to join relatives or to seek an education for themselves and their children" (Kang, 1997, p. 1).

The new arrivals are having an impact on the content of Chinese media (Chou, 1997; Lau, 1989; Li, 1994; McCue, 1975; Sam, 1993). McCue (1975) found that the older Chinese-language newspapers in New York City that did not contain news about the local Chinese community were hurt by the competition because the new Chinese immigrants who were urbanized and better-educated demanded more local news and news that was not as politicized. Similarly, Sam (1973) found that Chinese in San Francisco wanted more coverage of Chinatown.

And, as Lau (1989) noted, readers also want timely news coverage of their home countries: "In the minds of readers, timeliness creates a perceived difference in newspaper quality. National newspapers, with Hong Kong or Taiwan connections, have a competitive edge over purely local newspapers" (p. 88).

Chou (1997) found that, in contrast to studies conducted during the 1980s that showed that more than 50% of the lead stories were on events in the motherlands (Chen, 1995; Lau, 1989), 32% of the lead stories were about China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong. Chou also found that 39% of the stories in the four Chinese-language dailies that circulate in San Francisco were on events in the United States.

However, despite these changes, Chinese media in the United States rely heavily on satellite-fed news, information, and entertainment programming from the Chinese homelands because it is less expensive to produce (Chou, 1997; Li, 1994). Li found that 62% of all the Chinese-language television and radio programming in the San Francisco Bay Area was imported from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China, as compared with 11% of the programming that was from American media. However, Li did find that 27% of the programming was produced locally. Chou found that the staff-produced news in the four largest Chinese newspapers circulating in the San Francisco Bay Area ranged from only 2-8% of the total content.

## **Role Of The Ethnic Press**

Park (1922; 1925), a Chicago School sociologist, was one of the first researchers to examine the role of the ethnic press in helping immigrants to adapt to life in America. Park, like a number of other scholars (Delener & Neelankavil, 1990; Eiselein, 1978; Kim, 1979, 1989; Lam, 1980; Marzolf, 1979; O'Guinn, Faber, & Meyer, 1986; Won-Doornink, 1988), found that the immigrant press serves as a bridge to help ethnic minorities adapt to their new society.

Lam (1980) wrote that the Chinese press was essential because it provided consumer and other information about life in the United States in the mother tongue that new arrivals needed. He also noted that Chinese newspapers have a role in promoting Chinese culture and ideology and that they keep the immigrant's symbols, values, and historical achievements alive.

Research has shown that language ability and preference are key determinants in the adaptation of an individual to the host society and to media use in the host society (Kim, 1977, 1979, 1988; Shoemaker, Reese, & Danielson, 1985; Subervi-Velez, 1986; Yum, 1982). As Kim (1979) wrote, communication is both a cause and an indicator of an immigrant's level of acculturation.

Liu (1994), in her study of the information seeking behavior of first-generation Chinese immigrants who were taking English and American citizenship classes, found that although they were using both American and Chinese media, they were relying more heavily on Chinese media. She also found that immigrants who were not comfortable using English or who were not confident about their mastery of English "chose to isolate themselves within their own Chinese subculture" (p. 99) and were heavier users of Chinese media.

Liu's findings were similar to earlier research on European immigrants by Fishman (1972). Fishman noted that maintenance of their first language was strongest among immigrants who maintained the greatest "psychological, social, and cultural distance from the institutions, processes, and values of American core society" (p. 54).

However, Fishman stressed that the maintenance of an ethnic culture was much more stable than maintenance of the native language, explaining that there was a process in which most immigrants became bilingual long before they become bicultural or de-ethnicized. Nishida (1985), who explored the relationship between the cross-cultural adjustment of Japanese students and their English proficiency-speaking, listening comprehension, written expression, and written composition -- and their other communication skills, found that "communication variables are deeply interrelated with a good command of the language ... [t]hus, in the measurement of communication behaviors, language is the principal variable" (p. 265).

Language, communication, and culture are closely linked (Carey, 1975; 1989; Christian & Christian, 1966; Whorf, 1952). Whorf (1952) stressed that language is the foundation of a given culture. And, as Carey (1989) noted, "it is through communication, through the intergraded relations of symbols and social structure, that societies, or at least those with which we are most familiar, are created, maintained, and transformed" (p. 110). Christian and

Christian (1966) linked language maintenance to cultural identity, noting that Hispanic culture is embedded in the language.

Demographic characteristics have long been found to be determining factors in ethnic media behavior (See, e. g., Greenberg, Burgoon, Burgoon, & Korzenny, 1983; Kim, 1978; Subervi-Velez, 1986; Yum, 1982; Yum & Wang, 1983). For example, Yum (1982), in her study of information acquisition by recent Korean immigrants to Hawaii, found that length of stay was more strongly related to communication diversity -- use of a variety of mass media channels as well as bilingual interpersonal and mass media behavior -- than any of the other variables studied. Yum also found that English fluency, education, and occupational status were significantly related to communication diversity.

## **Methodology And Measures**

This study is a national survey of 463 Chinese and Chinese-Americans living in the United States that was conducted in the summer of 1994. Telephone interviews lasting from 30-45 minutes were conducted in Mandarin, Cantonese, and English -- about one-third in each language -- as well as in several different Chinese dialects. The sample was a randomly-generated sample of Chinese surnames. To ensure a high response rate, which was 71%, letters were sent to all respondents in the sample to explain why the survey was being conducted. In addition, repeated callbacks were made to respondents who were not at home. Hard-to-reach respondents were called up to 20 times. The sampling error for the entire sample of 463 respondents was plus or minus 5% and the sampling error for the 305 respondents used in the regression model was plus or minus 6%.

The independent variable measures that were constructed to develop the regression model to explain Chinese media use were (1) English fluency scale, (2) Chinese culture/values superiority scale, (3) two information-seeking items, and (4) demographics. The English-fluency scale and the Chinese culture-values superiority scale were both based on five-point Likert items that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The responses for each scale were summed across the items to provide an overall score for each scale.

The English fluency scale consisted of three items that asked interviewees whether they agreed or disagreed that their spoken English, written English, and comprehension of English were very good. The scale had an extremely high reliability coefficient -- a Cronbach alpha of .97.

In addition, a second language scale was developed to measure the extent to which respondents used American media

to improve their English. However, since it was highly correlated with the English fluency scale, it was not used in the regression analysis.

The Chinese culture/values superiority scale, a measure of Chinese ethnocentrism, consisted of two-Likert items that measured the extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed with statements that Chinese culture and values were superior to American culture and values. It had a fairly high Cronbach's alpha of .70.

Two information-seeking items were used as separate measures in the regression analysis. The first measured interest in news about China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong and the second measured the extent to which Chinese media are readily available where the respondent lives.

The fourth set of variables were demographics, including education, income, age, years respondent has lived in the United States, and gender.

The dependent variable measuring Chinese media use is a ratio scale-question that reads as follows: "Of the total time you spend using media, what percent of the time do you use Chinese-language media?"

Multiple regression was used because it is a technique for analyzing the relationship between the dependent variable, Chinese-language use, and the four sets of independent (predictor) variables. The statistical test assesses the strength of the dependence -- the percent of the variance, ranging from 0% to 100%, that can be explained by the linear dependence of the four independent variable sets operating jointly.

The four independent variable sets were entered in four separate steps in an effort to identify the best set of predictor variables; the goal was to explain the most variance in Chinese media use with the smallest number of predictor variables. When variables entered into the regression at each step did not meet the statistical criteria of .05 probability, they were dropped.

Since the sample was a random sample and since the variables were measured at the interval or ratio level, the results can be generalized to the Chinese and Chinese-American population as a whole in the United States.

Although the study included a large number of independent variables, a subset of these variables was selected for inclusion in the stepwise multiple regression based on the theoretical findings of the studies discussed in the literature review.

The English fluency scale was entered in the first step because research has shown that language ability is the principal variable in ethnic media use. The Chinese culture/values

## **Results: Respondent Profile**

superiority scale was entered in the second step and the two information-seeking items were entered in the third step because studies have shown that a major role of the Chinese press is to preserve cultural identity and values and to provide news of the homelands that is not available elsewhere.

Finally, demographic variables were not entered into the regression equation until the fourth and last step because, although demographics have been found to be related to ethnic media use in numerous studies, the goal of this study was to go beyond demographics for an explanation of why Chinese media are being used.

In general, the respondents are a fairly upscale group who are bilingual, who were born in China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong, who have lived in the United States an average of 19 years, and who either are U.S. citizens or are in the process of becoming U.S. citizens. Although almost three-fourths (72%) speak both Chinese and English, a majority (57%) prefer to speak Chinese at home. One-fifth speak a combination of Chinese and English at home. Sixteen percent of those interviewed speak only Chinese, 10% speak only English, and 2% speak a language other than Chinese or English. Of those who are employed outside the home, two-thirds speak English at work, 14% speak both English and Chinese, and 19% speak Chinese.

More than half (53%) had a household income of more than US\$40,000, with 19% having a household income of US\$60,000 or higher. Almost two-thirds (63%) had attended college, with one-fourth having college or post-graduate degrees. Almost half (48%) classified their occupations as being either professional or managerial/executive.

Less than one-third (29%) of the respondents have lived in the United States for more than one generation; of these, 18% were second-generation Americans, 8% were third-generation Americans, and 3% were fourth to sixth-generation Americans. Only 14% of the sample were born in the United States. Of the 86% who were born outside the United States, almost half (48%) were born in China, 21% were born in Taiwan, 21% were born in Hong Kong, and most of the remaining 10% were born in other Asian countries.

One-third of the respondents have lived in the United States for less than 10 years and 16% are new arrivals who have lived in the United States for five years or less. Sixty-five percent of those interviewed are U.S. citizens and, of those who are not U.S. citizens, 31% are in the process of becoming citizens.

Almost three-fourths (73%) of the respondents are married and 42% have children under the age of 18. More than half (55%) of the families have two generations living in the household and 12% are three-generation households. Only one-third are one-generation households.

Although this article is focused on the use of Chinese media, it is important to note that the study showed that a majority of the respondents use both English-language and Chinese-language media. An overwhelming majority (85%) use American mass media and more than two-thirds (69%) use Chinese-language media. In terms of total time devoted to mass media usage, 61% of the respondents' time is spent using American mass media, as compared with the 39% spent with Chinese mass media. Two-thirds of those surveyed reported that other members of their households use Chinese media.

When the 31% who did not use Chinese media were asked what was the one most important reason that they did not do so, 12% said they could not speak Chinese, 11% said Chinese media were not readily available where they live, 3% said they simply were not interested in using Chinese media, and 5% gave various other reasons.

Users of Chinese media (69%) said the one most important reason for doing so was to find out what is going on in China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong (39%), primarily for entertainment (15%), for commentary or analysis (7%), to learn more about Chinese society and culture (5%), and to find out what is going on in the United States (3%).

The study showed that respondents were not able to keep up with what was happening in their homelands and that they had become more interested in American news. Only 14% said they knew "a lot" about what was happening in China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong, with 42% knowing "some," 24% knowing "not much," and 20% knowing "very little."

When asked what news they were the most interested in, 49% said American news, as compared with 29% who said news about China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong, 17% who said foreign news in general, and 2% who were not interested in news.

When asked about preferences between Chinese and American media, 41% said they were the most likely to use Chinese media when they want news and public information and 49% said they were the most likely to use Chinese media when they want to relax or to be entertained.

Of the respondents who were employed outside the home,

## **Who Uses Chinese Media?**

64% said they were the most likely to use American media at work to improve their professional knowledge.

In terms of Chinese media use, respondents spent an average of 32 minutes a day reading newspapers, an average of 37 minutes a week reading magazines, 65 minutes a day watching television, and 29 minutes listening to radio programs.

The study showed that, if Chinese-language television programming were more widely available, the amount of time spent watching it would be even higher. Of the respondents who said they use Chinese media, half regularly watched Chinese TV programs.

However, 29% said they don't watch because they can't get Chinese programming at all and 18% said they watched only a few programs because they aren't able to get much Chinese-language programming. Only 3% said they didn't watch because they prefer to watch American programs.

The audience for Chinese-language television divides its time fairly evenly between news and information programs (51%) and entertainment and sports programs (49%).

Many of the respondents were critical of American television. Almost two-thirds (63%) felt that American television contained too many sex scenes, 80% felt that programs contain too much violence, and 51% felt that most American TV programs are not suitable for children to watch. Although it was expected that these TV dissatisfaction variables could be used to help explain why respondents use Chinese media, this was not the case. The variables were not correlated with Chinese media use.

### **Media Use Patterns Of Respondents Who Are Bilingual Or Who Know Only Chinese**

Table 1 examines the differences in Chinese media use patterns between respondents who know only Chinese and those who are bilingual. The differences in media behavior are not surprising. As expected, the amount of time spent on Chinese media, including reading newspapers, watching TV programs, and listening to radio programs is significantly higher for the group who know only Chinese as compared with the bilingual group. It should be noted, however, that there was no difference between the two groups in the amount of time spent reading Chinese-language magazines.

To determine what factors best explain the patterns of Chinese media use discussed earlier, four sets of predictor variables were entered into a stepwise regression. These sets of variables

Table 1

*Comparisons (t-test) of Media Use Patterns by Language*

Media Use	Chinese Only (n=71)		Chinese and English (n=246)		t
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Average Daily Minutes Reading Chinese-language Newspapers	46.6	65.8	27.3	33.4	2.367*
Average Daily Hours Watching Chinese TV programs	1.5	1.6	1.0	1.4	2.554**
Average Daily Minutes Listening To Chinese Radio Programming	82.1	161.7	13.6	65.1	3.300**
Average Weekly Minutes Reading Chinese-language Magazines	38.3	94.2	36.5	77.5	.147

\*p < .05  
\*\*p < .001

Table 2

*Intercorrelations for Chinese Media Use, English Fluency, Cultural Superiority, Information Seeking, and Demographics (N=305)*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<b>Chinese Media Use</b>									
<b>English Fluency</b>	-.71 <sup>c</sup>								
<b>Cultural Superiority</b>	.31 <sup>c</sup>	-.25 <sup>c</sup>							
<b>Information Seeking</b>									
Availability	-.08	-.01	.08						
Interest	.62 <sup>c</sup>	-.50 <sup>c</sup>	.22 <sup>c</sup>	-.02					
<b>Demographics</b>									
Gender	.13 <sup>a</sup>	-.13 <sup>a</sup>	.05	.07	.10 <sup>a</sup>				
Years in U.S.	-.23 <sup>c</sup>	.26 <sup>c</sup>	-.07	.00	-.23 <sup>c</sup>	-.10 <sup>a</sup>			
Income	-.43 <sup>c</sup>	.42 <sup>c</sup>	-.17 <sup>b</sup>	.04	-.35 <sup>c</sup>	-.06	.21 <sup>c</sup>		
Education	-.63 <sup>c</sup>	.61 <sup>c</sup>	-.29 <sup>c</sup>	.09	-.45 <sup>c</sup>	-.13 <sup>a</sup>	.10 <sup>a</sup>	.45 <sup>c</sup>	
Age	.38 <sup>c</sup>	-.38 <sup>c</sup>	.20 <sup>c</sup>	.06	.26 <sup>c</sup>	-.08	.47 <sup>c</sup>	-.10 <sup>a</sup>	-.31 <sup>c</sup>

p < .05  
p < .001  
p < .0001

**Table 3**

**Stepwise Regression Analysis: Chinese Media Use Regressed on English Fluency, Cultural Superiority, Information Seeking, and Demographics (N=305)**

Equations	Chinese Media Use			R <sup>2</sup>
	B	SE	Adjusted beta	
<b>Step 1</b>				
English Fluency	-2.86	.51	-.31***	.50
R <sup>2</sup> = .50				
<b>Step 2</b>				
Cultural Superiority	1.31	.78	.06	.52
R <sup>2</sup> Change = .02				
<b>Step 3</b>				
Information Seeking				.61
News Interest	-2.19	1.03	-.08*	
Availability	18.07	3.14	.25***	
R <sup>2</sup> Change = .09				
<b>Step 4</b>				
Demographics				.65
Gender	3.19	2.60	.05	
Years in U.S.	-.37	.13	-.14**	
Income	-.95	.73	-.05	
Education	-14.42	3.50	-.20***	
Age	.44	.12	.19***	
R <sup>2</sup> Change = .04				

\*p < .05

\*\*p < .01

\*\*\*p < .0001

were selected after factor analyses were run as a data reduction method and after exploratory regression models were assessed. The final model included fluency in English, an ethnocentric belief in the superiority of Chinese culture and values over American culture and values, information seeking needs, and demographics as predictors of Chinese media use. (See Table 1 and Table 2) This part of the analysis was conducted on respondents who know Chinese or are bilingual; the 47 respondents who know only English were excluded. As shown in Table 3, the four-step regression model explains 65% of the variance in Chinese media use.

As expected, fluency in English-written, spoken, and English comprehension-as shown in Table 2 has a very high negative correlation (-.71) with Chinese media use ( $p < .0001$ ). As Table 3 shows, English fluency explains a very high 50% of the variance in Chinese media use. Not surprisingly, this means that respondents who did not assess their fluency in English as being very good relied more heavily on Chinese media.

A related finding not included in the regression model is that a two-variable scale measuring the extent to which English-language media are being used as a way to improve English is also negatively correlated to both Chinese media use (-.19) and English fluency (-.29). Both of these correlations are highly significant at  $< .0001$ .

Taken together, the English fluency finding shown in Tables 1 and 2 and the negative correlations between the improve English scale and (1) Chinese media use and (2) English fluency provide evidence that Chinese media are being used as a means to bridge what respondents perceive as a language gap.

Although Chinese cultural ethnocentrism is positively correlated with Chinese media use at .31, it failed to explain much variance (.02%). Since English fluency was entered as the first variable block, some of the variance that could have been explained by a belief in the superiority of Chinese culture and values may have already been explained. The explanation for this may very well be, as other scholars have noted, that language and culture are closely linked.

The two information seeking variables shown in Table 2 explained an additional 9% of the variance. Almost all of this change was from the variable that measured interest in news about China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. This finding indicates that the Chinese press is fulfilling a role to bring news from the homelands that cannot be filled by American news media.

A combination of three of the demographic variables added an additional 4% to the amount of variance explained. Education was the best predictor, followed by age, and the number

of years respondents have lived in the United States. Since education and income are highly correlated at .45, income dropped out of the model as a predictive variable. Gender also dropped out of the model, indicating that it is a very weak predictor of Chinese media use. Table 2 and Table 3 show that the use of Chinese-language media increases as (1) educational levels decrease, (2) the number of years in the United States decreases, and (3) as age increases. This means that the younger, more educated Chinese who have been in the United States for a longer period of time use less Chinese media than other respondents.

## **Discussion**

The study shows that Chinese and Chinese Americans in the United States are using both Chinese-language and English-language media. Although almost three-fourths of those interviewed consider themselves to be bilingual, they are using Chinese media to fulfill certain news, information, and entertainment needs that are not being met by American media. They are using Chinese media to find out what is going on in their homelands, and they are using Chinese media for entertainment. One interesting finding is that they are not using their dissatisfaction with the sex and violence content on American television as a reason for turning to Chinese media.

The contribution to the literature of this study is that it provides a model that explains a very high 65% of the variance in Chinese media use by those who speak only Chinese and those who are bilingual. English language fluency is an especially important determinant of Chinese media use, with information seeking needs, demographic characteristics, and cultural ethnocentrism coming in as distant second, third, and fourth determinants.

As expected, the study provides evidence that fluency in English is the key determinant of Chinese-language media use and that there is an especially high reliance on Chinese media by those who are not comfortable using English. But there is more to the story than this. Unlike previous generations of Chinese immigrants who were not bilingual, who were not as affluent as the Chinese newcomers interviewed for this study, and who relied heavily on Chinese newspapers, the study shows that Chinese in the United States today are making pluralistic media choices.

Bilingual Chinese pick and choose various media -- television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and the Internet -- and pick and choose whether they want to be entertained or to get the news in Chinese or English. Because they are bilingual, because of the new technology that has made possible the instantaneous

transmission of news, information, and entertainment from anywhere in the world, especially from the Chinese homelands, they can make choices that could not have been imagined even a decade ago.

Even in terms of news from the Chinese homelands -- the traditional staple of Chinese media -- those interviewed are making choices. Only two-fifths said they were most interested in news about China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong, as compared to almost half who said they were most interested in American news. That is why Chinese media are scrambling to increase their coverage of the United States, with a special emphasis on what is happening in the Chinese community. It also indicates why the study shows that the information-seeking variables -- interest in news from the homelands and availability of news from the homelands -- explained only 9% of the variance in Chinese media use.

The pluralistic media use patterns of Chinese and Chinese Americans, at the time of this study, indicate that they are moving toward biculturalism in which they are adapting to life in America while preserving their cultural identity. In all probability, the bilingual Chinese and Chinese Americans are using English media and communicate in English in their day-to-day interactions with Americans at work but, when they return home, they talk to family members in Chinese. Later in the evening, they relax after making the choice of whether to use Chinese-language or English-language media.

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