



Department of Sociology  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Family and Population Health Lab presents

## Does Who You Know Help or Hurt? Social Capital, Social Cost, and Tie Strength in Three Societies

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Wednesday, April 20  
2 pm-3:30 pm

### Abstract

Does one's (ego's) accessed status (network members' or alters' hierarchical status) interplay with tie strength (closeness between ego and alters) to help or hurt across societies? To address this question, this study proposes a theoretical framework with four sets of theories or propositions: social capital theory versus social cost theory on the effect of accessed status, two tie-purpose matching propositions (the strength of strong ties for expressive purposes and the strength of weak ties for instrumental purposes) on the effect of tie strength, four tie-function-purpose matching propositions (strong tie-capital or cost enhancement for expressive purposes and weak tie-capital enhancement or reduction for instrumental purposes) on the interaction effect between accessed status and tie strength, and three institutional explanations—collectivistic advantage, collectivistic disadvantage, and inequality structure—on the variations of these three effects across societies. Using nationally representative data collected from three societies (the United States, urban China, and Taiwan), this study measures diverse indicators of accessed status, tie strength, and instrumental and expressive outcomes. The results support more the inequality structure explanation. There is stronger evidence for social capital theory, the two tie-purpose matching propositions, and two of the four tie-function-purpose matching propositions (strong tie- and weak tie-capital enhancement respectively for expressive and instrumental purposes) in Taiwan than in the other two societies. Theoretical and methodological implications are discussed.

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