



12-2004

## Cultural Identities of Chinese American Adolescents

Yan Cao

*University of Tennessee - Knoxville*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk\\_gradthes](https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_gradthes)



Part of the [International and Comparative Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Cao, Yan, "Cultural Identities of Chinese American Adolescents. " Master's Thesis, University of Tennessee, 2004.

[https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk\\_gradthes/1894](https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_gradthes/1894)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact [trace@utk.edu](mailto:trace@utk.edu).

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Yan Cao entitled "Cultural Identities of Chinese American Adolescents." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Instructional Technology and Educational Studies.

Diana Moyer, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Barbara Thayer-Bacon, Joy T. DeSensi

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Yan Cao entitled “Cultural Identities of Chinese American Adolescents.” I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Instructional Technology and Educational Studies.

Major Professor  
Diana Moyer

We have read this thesis  
and recommend its acceptance:

Barbara Thayer-Bacon

Joy T. DeSensi

Accepted for the Council:

Anne Mayhew

Vice Chancellor and  
Dean of Graduate Studies

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

**Cultural Identities  
of Chinese American Adolescents**

**A Thesis**

**Presented for the**

**Master of Science Degree**

**The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Yan Cao**

**December, 2004**

## Acknowledgement

I wish to thank all of my families for their continuous encouragement and spiritual support during my master's degree study in the United States. I wish to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to my advisor, Dr. Diana Moyer, for her excellent academic support and guidance, encouragement, and patience. I would also like to thank two other committee members, Dr. Barbara Thayer-Bacon and Dr. Joy T. DeSensi, for reading this thesis and providing constructive comments. I also want to thank Dr. Handel Wright and Dr. Amos J. Hatch. I learned how to do qualitative research from these two qualitative specialists. I want to highlight my thanks to Dr. Hatch for his kindly helping me revise the IRB proposal with Dr. Moyer. I want to thank all teachers, students and parents of the Chinese American school where I conducted this study for their kindly giving me the opportunity to interview and observe them. I respect and appreciate all of the teachers' and parents' efforts to help Chinese American children study the Chinese language and nurture a Chinese cultural inheritance. I also want to extend my sincere thanks to my friends who helped me edit the thesis.

## Abstract

This study examines the cultural identities of five Chinese American adolescents in a Chinese school in a southern city of the United States. This is a story of how the informal Sunday Chinese school setting, the regular school settings, the Chinese American community and the family shaped the identities of these Chinese American adolescents. It is a story of how they deal with two different cultures (American & Chinese culture) in everyday life and how they give meanings to their lives.

This study employs the qualitative research method and ethnographic tradition. Using data collected from interviews, observations, and a literature review, the researcher used political analysis and a critical paradigm to analyze the multiple factors shaping cultural identities of Chinese American adolescents.

This study aims to improve social justice based on ideals of cultural diversity and social difference. It hopes to develop cultural diversity in American society and bring more attention to Chinese American studies.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</i> .....	1
<i>ABOUT THE STUDY</i> .....	2
<i>THEORETICAL AND INTERPRETATIVE FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY</i> .....	2
<i>PURPOSE OF THE STUDY</i> .....	4
<i>SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY</i> .....	5
<b>CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<i>SOCIAL AND POLITICAL MOVEMENT</i> .....	9
<i>CHINESE AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS IDENTITIES STUDIES</i> .....	13
<i>CRITICAL MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION</i> .....	19
<b>CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<i>DESIGN OF THE STUDY</i> .....	25
Criteria for Selecting Study Participants .....	25
Research Site, Number and Characteristics of Participants.....	25
The Methods for Recruiting Participants.....	26
Methods for Data Collection .....	27
Interviews .....	27
Field Notes.....	29
Reflective Journaling.....	29
<i>INTERPRETING THE STUDY</i> .....	30
About Ethnography Tradition in Qualitative Study.....	30
Rationale for Selecting Ethnographical Tradition for My Study.....	31
Research Paradigm.....	34
Limitation of the Study .....	35
<b>CHAPTER IV DATA ANALYSIS.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<i>LEARNING EXPERIENCE OF CHINESE AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS IN CHINESE SCHOOL</i> ...37	
<i>CULTURAL IDENTITIES OF THE CHINESE AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS IN CHINESE SCHOOL</i> .....	44
<b>CHAPTER V CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<i>FACTORS IN SHAPING CULTURAL IDENTITIES OF CHINESE AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS</i> .....	54
<i>MY SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CHINESE SCHOOL</i> .....	57
<i>SOME OF THE NEW IMAGES OF CHINESE AMERICANS</i> .....	60
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>VITA.....</b>	<b>67</b>

# **CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION**

This study examines the cultural identities of five Chinese American adolescents in a Chinese school in a southern city of the United States. This is a story of how the informal Sunday Chinese school setting, the regular school settings, the Chinese American community and the family shaped the identities of these Chinese American adolescents. It is a story of how they deal with two different cultures (American & Chinese culture) in everyday life and how they give meanings to their lives. I attempt to make sense of how they live through cultural transition between two cultures (Chinese culture and American culture) and from one way of life to another. I also discuss how material and racial, gender, and class circumstances contribute to different meanings in the lives of the people.

In the process of data collection, I realized that one important factor in the identity formation of those Chinese American adolescents was the uniqueness of the Chinese school itself, and the courses and activities that the school provided for them. Thus, my initial focus was on understanding the experiences of five Chinese American adolescents in a Chinese school as compared to their family experiences.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study, which focuses particularly on the experiences of five Chinese American adolescents, addresses the following questions to guide this research:



1. What are the cultural identities of these Chinese American adolescents and what experiences and factors are understood by these students to influence their identities?

2. What meanings do the students attach to these experiences?

3. What are the educational and cultural implications of the students' experiences of their cultural identities?

## **ABOUT THE STUDY**

This research is to advance our understanding about the factors that shape five participants' cultural identities. I used the ethnography tradition observing the participants in conjunction with open-ended interviews to understand the experiences of these Chinese American adolescents.

In addition, a critical perspective provided the theoretical framework for the study and, in conjunction with the methods of interview and observation, was used to analyze those Chinese American adolescents' stories and to develop richer understandings about the meaning they attached to their experiences.

## **THEORETICAL AND INTERPRETATIVE FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY**

The perspective of critical scholars emphasizes material difference is based on race, gender, and social differences. "The critical qualitative paradigm is based on the assumption that the material world is made up of historically situated structures that have a real impact on the life chances of individuals. These social structures are

perceived as real and their perceived realness leads to different treatment based on race, gender, and social class.”<sup>1</sup>

From the angle of a postmodern feminist, I reject the notion of a stable and unified self but see the self as a product of ideology, discourse and language. I examine several hypotheses in this study. First, I will argue that there are some different ideas in the ways the student’s identities are shaped by the American public school and in the Sunday Chinese School. Generally, the goal of this Chinese school is to provide Chinese American adolescents with a Chinese cultural and linguistic inheritance. The Chinese educational model emphasizes developing collective identities through social constructive educational models while the American public school model emphasizes self identity through appreciating individualism. The American public school has a larger impact in shaping the identities on Chinese American adolescents than does the Sunday Chinese school.

Second, I will argue for a perspective of critical multiculturalism rather than that of liberal multiculturalism. Critical multicultural perspective claims that each race clarifies their ethnicities.<sup>2</sup> One hypothesis of my study is that Chinese adolescents identified themselves as Chinese American.

Further, I assume that family background plays an important role in shaping identities of Chinese American adolescents. If the family has an appreciation of Chinese culture, the children will have more appreciation too. There are parts of Chinese

---

1 Amos J. Hatch, “Narrative Research: Telling Stories of Stories,” *Journal of Tennessee Education* (2002): 17.

2 Joe L. Kincheloe and Shirley R. Steinberg, *Changing Multiculturalism* (Open University Press: Buckingham, Philadelphia, 1997): 20.

culture that come through in the personalities of those Chinese American adolescents. Many Chinese Americans are living in the dilemma of dealing with bicultural concepts. The Chinese American parents want their children to grow up as an American well adapted to the mainstream cultural environment but at the same time with typical Chinese virtues such as respecting their parents and being modest. How should a child grow up with an education from two totally different cultures? The Chinese cultural concepts that they learned from their parents and Chinese school are not quite adapted to the status quo in American society. This is a factor that has formed a gap between the older and younger Chinese Americans.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of my study is to explore what factors shaped the cultural identity of the Chinese American adolescents at the Chinese School during the process of their development in American society. My goal is to provide more specific information about the cultural images of Chinese Americans. In this study, I expected to see what role students enacted in public schools, in Chinese schools, and in their families or other social settings. I explored the impact of those social settings on shaping their identities, how those Chinese American adolescents react to those settings, and how they shape their identities through self-balancing of those factors. As an international student traveling from Chinese culture to American culture, there is a strong passion and interest for me to understand the voices of Chinese Americans, their current status in American society, their thoughts about American and Chinese society, and their role in the United States.

As a practitioner involved in Chinese and American educational fields, there is a need for me to address the social context that shapes Chinese American adolescents. Based on my experiences of working as a volunteer Chinese teacher at the Chinese school, I have a strong passion and curiosity for knowing how the social, family and individual spheres impact the identity of Chinese American adolescents. In order to accomplish my research goal, I investigated the relationship of these adolescents with their classmates both in the regular public school and the Chinese school, their behaviors in the classroom of the Chinese school, the cultural background and social status of the parents of the adolescents, their purposes for learning Chinese and Chinese culture, and the setting, administration and activities of the Chinese school.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

In general, my study aims to improve social justice based on ideals of cultural diversity and social difference. It hopes to develop cultural diversity and work against racism in American society. It also tries to bring more attention to Chinese American studies. I am particularly interested in peoples' experiences of problems or biases in the process of their identity formation and trying to figure out transformative alternatives to solve those problems. My study is not only to help the Chinese American children become clearer about the cultural capital of their parents; it also provides multiple social and educational experiences for the children in my home country as a reference. My study also brings attention to Chinese American parenting, the role of informal education in shaping students' identity, and the Chinese American community. When I reviewed the existing research, I found that there was a lack of work on the

Chinese American educational experience. My study is a contribution to the literature within this area. The study asserts complementing current Chinese American studies, which regard resistance to racism as a dominant theme.<sup>3</sup>

Although the current society in America emphasizes cultural pluralism, racism is still an important issue that cannot be avoided either directly or indirectly. To some degree, there is some social injustice due to the hegemony of whiteness and marginalization of minority races. As a minority race, Chinese Americans not only need to keep shaping and reshaping their identity to merge into American society, which Chinese-Hawaiian poet Lum called it to be a big “Chinese hot pot”, but also need to maintain their cultural uniqueness.<sup>4</sup> The perspective of “hot pot” is a decentralized image of America, and is another alternative to metaphor of the “melting pot” that prevailed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> The metaphor of “melting pot” was criticized because its image of American dominant cultural assimilation. The rise of multicultural education brought appreciation of cultural differences. The image of the “hot pot” is of several people sitting around one big table with many small raw dishes. There is a big hot pot with hot soup in the middle of the table and people can choose what they want to eat and put the raw food into the soup. Then they wait as it is heated and chat with each other. When the food is cooked they pull out the items they put into the hot pot and use the bowl to eat. In this way, people can choose what they want, and the food is still kept the same after being heated and doesn’t mix together in the hot pot. They can eat what they personally

---

3 Haiming Liu, “Transnational Historiography: Chinese American Studies Reconsidered,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* (Volume 65, Number 1, January 2004):135-153

4 Wing Tek Lum, “Chinese Hot Pot,” *Expounding the Doubtful Points* (Honolulu, HI: Bamboo Ridge Press, 1987):105.

5 Israel Zangwill, *The Melting Pot*, ( New York: Macmillan,1910)

want while still enjoying a common meal. According to the perspective of the “hot pot”, individuals still keep their individuality but also absorb what they want from the larger society. The people are friends and equals, voluntarily participating in cultural transformation and mutual enrichment instead of passive cultural assimilation.<sup>6</sup> The aim of my study is to present one view of cultural images of Chinese Americans who found balance between assimilation to American culture and preserving their cultural diversity. The construction of cultural diversity will lead to the positive development of society.

While most Chinese Americans are active in the fields of natural science, technology, and business, few of them participate in public areas such as mass media and politics. Even in academic fields, most people choose to major in natural sciences rather than social sciences. Most Chinese Americans in my study are in the middle class, and lack an interest in politics and social change, which leads to their comparatively lower social status in American society. The goal of my study is to attract more attention to Chinese American’s voices and contribute to the improvement of their social status and political power in the long run.

Rather than describing the updated cultural images of Chinese Americans and bringing more attention to them in current American society, it is important to determine a comprehensive and critical concept about China and America for these Chinese American adolescents and the children of my home country within the context of globalization. By comprehending cultural diversity and social difference in the world, the students will understand narratives about major eras of Chinese American history, the

---

<sup>6</sup> Saul-ling Wang, “ Promise, Pitfalls, and Principles of Text Selection in Curricular Diversification, The Asian-American Case,” in “*The Freedom’s Plow: Teaching in the Multicultural Classroom*”, ed. Theresa Perry and James Fraser( New York: Routledge Press, 1993):109-203

locations and characteristics of places, cultures, and settlements by identifying the people involved. The students will know the causes, consequences, and geographic context of major global issues and events. My study also can strengthen their mutual relationship and understanding because almost every Chinese American child is the relative or friend of a child from my home country. My study can help Chinese American children clarify some issues such as their cultural heritage from their parents.

A goal of my study is to contribute to the Chinese American social development in American society. According to the history of Chinese American immigrants, there are two waves of immigration to the United States from China.<sup>7</sup> In my opinion, most studies of current Chinese American still focus on the first waves of Chinese American or their descendents. The lack of study about the more recent waves of Chinese American creates a gap between the current cultural theories and the actual experiences of Chinese Americans. My work will be the research about those new waves of Chinese Americans and their children. The development of this Chinese Americans will be part of the future of Chinese Americans in the U.S...

---

<sup>7</sup> Shehong Chen, *Being Chinese, Being Chinese American* (University of Iloilo's press, 2002)

## **CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW**

The concept of identity is central to this study, it is therefore important to discuss the different meanings of identity. In this chapter, I will explore the issue of identity in relation to three areas: social and political movements, the psychological literature about adolescents, and Chinese American studies.

### **SOCIAL AND POLITICAL MOVEMENT**

Identity is an important issue in cultural studies. Identity is a complicated concept determined by multiple factors in different contexts. As a political concept, it cannot be separated from traditional structures like class, party, nation, and state. For example, in Britain, the political identity of the Left became associated with the New Right after ten years of Thatcherism. Identity is also an important notion in several different theoretical traditions such as Marxism, Modernism and Postmodernism.<sup>8</sup>

Definitions of identity are linked to the historical and social environment. During the past decades, the term has been important to gay rights, feminist, environmental rights and other movements. Identity was tied to the debate about “consciousness” in the 1960s and “subjectivity” in the 1970s. For example, black power arose to be a new racial consciousness among blacks in United States in the middle of

---

<sup>8</sup> Kobena Mercer, “‘1968’: Periodizing Postmodernism Politics and identity,” in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula A. Treichler with Linda Baughman and assistance from John Macgregor Wise (New York : Routledge, 1992): 424



1960s.<sup>9</sup> The issue of sexual difference in the 1970s related to subjectivity.<sup>10</sup> In the 1980s, there was a perspective that identity was not inherited but made through cultural and political construction. Simone De Beauvoir proposed that female identity is made by the male by saying that:

“Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man.’ And she is simply what man decrees; thus she is called ‘the sex’, by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex - absolute sex, no less She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute - she is the Other.”<sup>11</sup>

Through combining with social and historical factors, “identity” is “currently invoked as a way of acknowledging the transformations in public and private life.”<sup>12</sup>

Identity definitions are highly personal and cannot easily be changed by others. Only the individual can define and re-shape him or herself. In post-modern society, this process increases the instability of identity because of its interaction with society. Self-reflection leads to a constant process of shaping and reshaping, which is like a "continuous feedback loop" in a society characterized by ever increasing information and intensifying demands due to a rapid role-shift. “This result is what has been called ‘the mutable self’ or ‘protean man’--a self that has no permanent essence but continuously re-invents itself.”<sup>13</sup> The individual identity continually reshapes with the changes in time, space, and sites, etc. The transformative characteristic makes the individual identity

---

9 <http://www.umich.edu/~eng499/concepts/power.html>

10 Eeva Jokinen, “Sexual Difference in Marriage in the 1970s. Interrogating Women’s Magazines,” September and October, 2000, a paper to be presented at the 4th European Feminist Research Conference, Bologna.

11 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Ruth Evans, (New York: Manchester University Press; New York: Distributed in the USA by St. Martin’s Press, 1998).

12 Ibid, 425.

13 Jonah Goldstein and Jeremy Rayner, "The Politics of Identity in Late Modern Society," in *Theory and Society* 23 (1994), pp. 367-384

changeable and then fit for the collective identity, therefore, there is no conflict between collective identity and individual identity.

The transformative characteristic of identity is paraphrased in a plethora of academic theories. From poststructuralist theory, the politics of identity is presented through the exploration about the term “subject” and “subjectivity”. Subjectivity is used to refer to the conscious and unconscious thoughts, emotions of the individual, her sense of herself, her ways of understanding, and her relationship to the world.<sup>14</sup> According to feminist post-structuralism, the subjectivity of people is shaped historically and continuously in response to the surrounding world. Transformations in the external environment result in several changes in individual subjectivity or lead to multiple subjectivities. Conflicts created by various subjectivities influence identity development, and the individual must adapt accordingly. For example, one participant studies four languages at the same time. She is fluent in English and Chinese, learning English in American public school and learning Chinese in Chinese Sunday school and by talking with her family. She moved with her parents from America to Japan and Germany and lived there for several years and learned those languages. Her parents encourage her to retain all four, so she takes German as her second language course in the public school, and she goes to Japanese school every Saturday. When I asked her feeling about those different languages and schools, she told me she had to change her behavior in different settings. She found that while she was very active girl in American public school, she was very polite and quiet in Japanese school as influenced by her Japanese classmates. At the Chinese school, her behavior was more active than in Japanese school and less than

---

14 Ibid

American school. She changes her behavior in different schools to adapt to her surroundings.

The identity of people is also influenced by their ways of thinking. Feminist poststructuralists propose that women in similar social situations should share their personal experiences and therefore contribute to the change of subjectivity of the individual.<sup>15</sup> Some of my personal experiences are a good example of this theory. When I first came to America, a Christian organization set up several gatherings for the international young women to share their experiences of living abroad and how to adapt to our new life. This experience of sharing with a common group was helpful for me to be more comfortable and confident in the new environment. In addition to that, feminist post-structuralism encourages that individual change be combined with social changes. It is effective for feminist practices by addressing “the questions of how social power is exercised and how social relationships of gender, class and race might be transformed.”<sup>16</sup>

From the perspective of psychological theories, Saskia and Harke challenge Kroger's proposal that the identity statuses can be understood as a developmental hierarchy of stages.<sup>17</sup> Fischer describes identity development as a dynamic system in which stability and change come from continuous and mutual interactions between a person and the surroundings.<sup>18</sup> This approach argues that

---

15 Lynda Stone, *The Education Feminism Reader*, edited with the assistance of Gail Masuchika Boldt., (New York: Routledge, 1994).

16 Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1997).

17 Saskia E. Kunnen and Harke T. Bosma, “*Fischer's Skill Theory Applied to Identity Development: A Response to Kroger*,” in *Journal of Identity* (Jul 2003, Vol. 3 Issue 3):247

18 Ibid

particular psychosocial identity stages are determined by both the person and the living environment.

The issue of identity is also of importance in the study of adolescents. Shawn and Gerald think there is an association between family environment, parent-adolescent relationships, and identity style in late adolescents.<sup>19</sup> In their design study, they find that adolescents from cohesive families with close relationships tended to have normative identity styles. The normative identity means that the behaviors fit for the general standards of the society. The adolescents from less cohesive families were more likely to be diverse and unique in society. Their findings provide partial support for the theory that family relationships play a role in the making of individual differences in identity style during adolescence.

## **CHINESE AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS IDENTITIES STUDIES**

“Adolescence is viewed both as a chronological period between puberty and early adulthood and as any time in the life cycle when an individual explores important life-alternatives with the aim of making commitments.”<sup>20</sup> Adolescence can be seen as the stage of life in which individuals develop their own identity by exploring different alternatives. The research about adolescence is meaningful because it presents the transition between the child and the adult.

The research of Chinese American studies is meaningful to enrich social difference and increase awareness of minority experiences. Some scholars have been

---

19 Shawn Matheis and Gerald Adams, “Family Climate and Identity Style during Late Adolescence,” in *Journal of Identity*, (Jan 2004, Vol. 4 Issue 1, AN 11945816):77.

20 James E. Marcia, “Adolescence, Identity and the Barnardo Family,” *Journal of Identity* (Jul.2001, vol.2 issue 3, AN 6814366):199.

attempting to understand the transformation of Chinese identity in the United States and how they historically have constructed their identities. In Chen's study, he concludes the identities of Chinese Americans to be a "new and distinctively Chinese American cultural sensibility".<sup>21</sup> He says that Chinese immigrants selectively accepted the dominant American culture during the process of accommodation into the new society in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In general, there are two waves of immigrants of Chinese American. The first wave began primarily in the middle of the 19th century, the most part of these immigrants consisted of young male peasants who came in search of economic success. Hearing the news of the California Gold Rush, they arrived in America with hopes of being able to send money back to their poor rural homes, or of returning to China in a few years with newly acquired wealth.

Later, with the rapid increase of Chinese immigrants, the door of Chinese immigration was closed because of some racial biases and the fear of Chinese immigrants taking away job opportunities. The resistance to Chinese Americans started with the Chinese Exclusion Act, which was passed by the Congress in 1882. "The law serves as the first in US history to ban a specific racial group from entering America."<sup>22</sup> But in time, "America began to realize that the treatment of Chinese immigrants was contrary to the very foundations of the country".<sup>23</sup> In 1943 the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed allowing immigrants already in the US to bring over their families. Finally in 1964, the Immigration and Nationality Act removed the last barriers to Chinese immigration initiating a new era in the history of America.

---

21 Shehong Chen, *Being Chinese, Being Chinese American* (University of Illinois Press, 2002)

22 *A Brief History of Chinese Immigration to America, American Heritage Project: American Immigration Law Foundation*, [http://www.aifl.org/awards/ahp\\_0001\\_essay01.htm](http://www.aifl.org/awards/ahp_0001_essay01.htm)

23 Ibid

In 1965, the second wave of Chinese immigrants entered the United States for a variety of reasons. Most of them are quite different from the immigrants during the Gold Rush days of the 1800's. Most of them came to America with a higher education degree, technology skills, and so on. With the inclusion of those new arrivals, the images of Chinese Americans have changed from blue-collar class to be white-collar. Today many well-educated and highly specialized Chinese immigrants come to America seeking jobs in fields that the first Chinese American immigrants would never have envisioned, such as high-tech fields, management or administrative fields, and educational fields. In my study, participants' parents are the members of second wave of immigrants. My study examines the relationship among cultural identity, parental influences, and future career orientation of these Chinese American adolescents.

In addition to immigrant literature, adolescent identity is an issue of importance in the field of educational psychology. Erikson views the chronological era of late adolescence as crucial for the individual's construction of an initial identity: "a sense of which one is, based on who one has been, and who one imagines oneself being in the future."<sup>24</sup> Marcia then specifically describes individuals as being in 1 of 4 identity "statuses" according to where they are in the process of identity formation: identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, or identity diffusion.<sup>25</sup> During the identity shaping of the individual, it is a process of appreciation, suspicion, rejection, and then finding alternatives because of the effects of the external environment. He stresses the role of the

---

24 Ibid

25 Ibid

social context in shaping identity by saying “identities are not constructed in a vacuum; they are both facilitated and constrained by social and interpersonal contexts.”<sup>26</sup>

Parents and adolescents shape each other’s identity in a process of intergenerational mutuality. “That is, adults rely on children to confirm them in their growing sense of generalization, and children rely on adults to aid them in their developmental tasks of trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, and identity. The developmental crises are made of both parental generalization and adolescent/young adult identity.”<sup>27</sup> From the gradual growing up of the children, parents start to know more about their own generational roles. The children also realize their identity and generational roles when regarding their parents as the reference. This perspective shows the role of families in shaping the identities of adolescents by presenting the inter-influences between adults and adolescents. Therefore, the identity shaping of Chinese American adolescents is not only a singular trans-cultural process of mixture between western and eastern world views; it is also a process of mutual identity shaping between parents and Chinese America adolescents.

Using three psychological activities, V. Benet-Martínez, Lee and Morris suggest that cultural framework of Chinese Americans shifts between two cultures based on “cultural cues”.<sup>28</sup> “Culture cue” is a psychological phenomenon about different cultures when being exposed to different external cultural environments. Some perceived perspectives hold that cultural identities of people are compatible or contradictory

---

26 Ibid

27 Ibid

28 Leu J. Benet-Martínez, F. Lee; M.W. Morris, “Negotiating Biculturalism: Cultural Frame Switching in Bicultural with Oppositional Versus Compatible Cultural Identities,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, (Vol. 33 No.5, SAGE Publications September 2002): 492 – 516.

between the two cultural orientations---western culture and eastern Asian cultures. They claim the individual differences to be bicultural identity integration (BII), and the cultural identity of individuals, who have experienced the bicultural process, are different because those people have more tension to deal with between the dominate culture and other minority cultures. Three of the studies found that Chinese Americans living in bicultural contexts perceived their cultural identities as compatible to the cultural cues. They found that the children depend on each other, a characteristically Asian behavior, more after being exposed to Chinese only contexts. The children show more independence, a characteristically western behavior, after being exposed to American cultures. That is, the exposure to different cultural contexts is very important in shaping Chinese American cultural identities. The individual differences in bicultural identity also affect how cultural knowledge is used to interpret social events. According to my observations and interviews, Chinese American adolescents were more group-oriented in the Chinese school. The characteristic of group-orientation is closer to Chinese ethnicity rather than American ethnicity, with its individual-orientation.

Besides the aforementioned studies, the issue of identity is also a research theme in immigrant literature. Ruth McKoy Lowery argues there are some educational implications of a critical-sociological approach for reading immigrant literature.<sup>29</sup> He holds that most children know the life of immigrants through immigrant literature; therefore, the just and fair writing and reading of immigrant literature is very important to make outsiders know the cultural images of immigrants. Lowery makes a critical reading

---

29 Ruth McKoy Lowery, "Reading 'The Star Fisher': Toward Critical and Sociological Interpretations of Immigrant Literature," in *Journal of Multicultural Education* (Vol. 10, No. 3, spring 2003):19-23.



of the novel “The Star Fisher”, written by Laurence Yep from the perspective of an offspring of Chinese American immigrants and combines the story with his own life experiences. He stresses some descriptions about the representation of race relations and of class relations and images of Chinese immigrants in the novel. Lowery thinks Yep gives a fair description of the historical race and class relations between Chinese immigrants and mainstream American society, but Yep seems to magnify the physical and linguistic features and customs and traditions of Chinese immigrants.

Yip designs a study to examine the ethnic identities of some Chinese American adolescents.<sup>30</sup> His research tries to explore the multiple factors shaping the ethnic identities of Chinese American adolescents such as their global ethnic identity, their ethnic behaviors, ethnic identity characteristics, and psychological status based on their daily diaries collected over a 2-week period. Global ethnic identity describes the whole image of ethnic identity; ethnic behaviors are the behaviors showing Chinese culture such as using chopsticks to eat food instead of using a knife and fork. The study shows that the “nurturing of specialized atmosphere of ethnic behaviors and ethnic characteristics” play an active role in shaping the ethnic identity of Chinese American adolescents. The everyday ethnic identities of the Chinese American adolescents are influenced by their global ethnic identity.

For those adolescents with a strong sense of global ethnic identity, their ethnic identity characteristic was active under the nurturing of positive daily ethnic impacts. Youths who were weak sense of ethnic identity were reluctant to participate in

---

30 Tiffany Yip and Andrew J. Fuligni, “Daily Variation in Ethnic Identity, Ethnic Behaviors, and Psychological Well-being Among American Adolescents of Chinese Descent,” *Journal of Child Development*, ( Vol.73, No.5, Sep.-Oct. 2002) 1557-1572

ethnic activities. In addition to that, the factors of gender and age also play an interesting role in the study. Girls show a strong association with ethnic identity than that of boys; younger youths show stronger association with ethnic identity in the study than older youths.

## **CRITICAL MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION**

In this section, I will discuss the status of minority groups from the perspective of multiculturalism in education. I raise the following questions in the project: Is the inequality in society also found in educational settings? Do schools reflect biases in social structures or do they nurture students with critical knowledge of social injustice in society? In light of critical multiculturalism, educational purposes should be rethought to include social change and social justice. But how can teachers educate students to be unbiased citizens? What should students be taught? How should students be educated?

Critical multicultural theories discuss factors such as curricula, the role of critical multicultural teacher, and pedagogy. First, with regard to curricula, biases may play an important role. Because of the dominance of whites in American society, their culture is associated with privilege, wealth and power. All white people have privilege, whether or not they are overtly racist themselves. Such privilege plays out differently depending on context and other aspects of one's identity.<sup>31</sup> In her 1988 article "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack", Peggy McIntosh provides a list of

---

31 Robert Jensen, *Black Directory Archive: White People Need Acknowledge of Unearned Privileges*, (1998)

examples of “unearned privileges” that exposed the position of dominance and subordination in society via everyday life.<sup>32</sup>

Some history books also provide evidence of “white privilege”. They devalue the diverse culture of immigrants and highlight the dominance of white culture. Assimilation by the dominant culture is expected by the dominant group as a condition of survival in the United States. “With few exceptions, textbook authors continued to judge immigrant groups against the perceived norm of the Eurocentric tradition. Immigrants were only esteemed if they supported the thesis that America was a land of opportunity for those who worked hard, embraced the English language, and accepted the superior traditions of the dominate culture.”<sup>33</sup>

By definition, the critical multicultural teacher and pedagogy are against racial and gender biases in the curriculum. Instead, they try to include voices of the powerless and minority groups to students. “A critical multicultural teacher is a scholar who spends a life time studying the pedagogical and its concern with the intersection of power, identity, and knowledge.”<sup>34</sup> The teacher appreciates other’s perspectives and knowledge as a way of leading to social justice.

Besides the critical multicultural teacher, student-centered pedagogy is another approach that critical multiculturalism recommends for improving traditional education settings. “A basic principle of pedagogy maintains that good teaching takes the lives of all students seriously. Critical multiculturalists affirm this principle, maintaining

---

32 McIntosh Questionnaire: <http://www.mdcbowen.org/p2/rm/mcintosh.html>

33 Stuart J. Foster, “the Struggle for American Identity: Treatment of Ethnic Groups in United States History Textbooks,” *History of Education*, (Vol. 28. No.3, 1999):251-278

34 Joe L. Kincheloe and Shirley R. Steinberg, *Changing Multiculturalism*, (Open University Press: Buckingham, Philadelphia, 1997)

that it requires that they account for the race, class and gender diversity of student populations.”<sup>35</sup> Life experiences, race, and gender are all factors for multicultural teachers to consider in order understanding identities of students.

Focusing on pedagogy, critical multiculturalism helps promote the purposes of multicultural education ---social changes and social justice through helping students to explore their identity in society. “Drawing on the work of Raymond Williams, Henry Giroux contends that the most fundamental impulse shaping critical multiculturalism involves his effort to make the pedagogical political; that is, to make learning a part of the learner’s struggle for social justice”.<sup>36</sup> A critical multiculturalism concerns itself with issues of justice and social change and their relation to the pedagogical. As defined here, the pedagogical refers to the production of identity ---the way we learn to see ourselves in relation to the world.

The philosopher Maxine Greene argues that the passion of pluralism will benefit the establishment of democratic community.<sup>37</sup> She says “passions, then, engagements, and imagining: I want to find a way of speaking of community, an expanding community, taking shape when diverse people, speaking as who and not what they are, come together in speech and action.” In this way, she calls for the necessity of pluralism, point out the invisibility of pluralism (multiculturalism), the intentional ignorance and suspicion of the marginalized group such as the powerless, the poor, the immigrants, etc. In my point of view, the marginalized group has either reluctantly or voluntarily been silenced in society. Their voices have been ignored, isolated, or muffled

---

35 Ibid

36 Ibid

37 Maxine Greene, The Passions of Pluralism: Multiculturalism and the Expanding Community, *The Journal of Negro Education* (Summer, 1992). pp250-261

by the dominant group. Some other people may willingly keep silent because they do not have confidence to attract attention of the dominant group. But how can we empower the marginalized groups in society? Greene also brings attention to valuating cultural diversity and empowering voices of marginalized groups by the construction of a democratic community.

Greene argues there is no conflict between the conception of pluralism and democratic community as described by John Dewey. Democratic community is not fixed but is continuously in the making. She warns that an absolute appreciation of U.S. culture prevents attention to new cultures and personal history. Greene argues that cultural background does not determine identity but only plays a partial role in shaping identity. For young students, articulation of their own story will help them to pursue the meaning of their lives: they will find how things are happening and keep questioning why. They would learn new things and learn about “distinctive cultural and political practices of oppressed people”.<sup>38</sup> Greene recommends that we should value other voices rather than ignoring marginalized people.

The process of “Othering ” includes “differential valuing”, which means valuing one group more than the other, and holds the dominant group as the norm and the subordinate as the other. “Othering” means negatively comparing “out-group” with the dominant group, subjecting “out-group” to be unequal and deviant outsider.<sup>39</sup> According to the constructive thinking model, caring for others is a good way to construct a bridge between self and others. In this way, the problem of “otherness” and “Othering” can be

---

38 Ibid

39 Race and Ethnicity, Spring, 03, Lecture Outline,  
<http://sobek.colorado.edu/~crosbyt/REidentitynotes.PDF>

improved. The perspective of social justice in cultural studies is associated with caring about others' knowledge. Seyla Benhabib's "generalized others" and "concrete others" helps us to care about the knowledge of others.<sup>40</sup> The concept of "generalized others" looks at human beings as a common group with shared interest. While "the concept of 'concrete others' acknowledges that each of us is a unique human being with our own specific contexts and different, individual gifts and talents as well as needs and limitations."<sup>41</sup> Consideration of the unique identity of the individual constructs a process of appreciating the differences of others, respecting others, and finally removing the distance between others and self.

There is some application process about learning from cultural differences in critical multiculturalism theories. According to the perspective of critical multiculturalism in education, "critical theory is especially concerned with how domination takes place, the way human relations are shaped in the workplace, the schools and everyday life. Critical theorists want to promote an individual's consciousness of himself or herself as a social being."<sup>42</sup> Therefore, critical theory also appreciates others by looking at people as individuals and emphasizing their relationships with their social contexts. Then the individual will have an appreciation of difference and understanding the role of oppression in his/her live when he/she has "a consciousness of him or herself,

---

40 Barbara Thayer-Bacon with Charles S. Bacon, *Philosophy Applied to Education*, (Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1998):119.

41 Ibid

42 Joe L. Kincheloe & Shirley R. Steinberg, *Changing Multiculturalism*, (Open University Press: Buckingham, Philadelphia, 1997)

understands how and why his or her political opinions, socio-economical class, religious beliefs, gender role and racial self-image are shaped by dominant perspectives.”<sup>43</sup>

Banks & Banks argue that “ethnic identification need not necessarily lead to the ‘Othering’ in the negative sense, however---the comparison with those who differ from ‘Us’ need not be invidious.”<sup>44</sup> They propose meaningful appreciation of cultural differences. They began to notice all of their customary practices in their lives and to identify them as cultural differences. In complex and diverse modern societies, ethnic, racial, religious, and gender groupings have become increasingly important to identity. Banks & Banks also hold that “cultural differences can be framed as boundaries rather than as borders even such framing takes effort to maintain.”<sup>45</sup> The understanding of cultural differences helps remove the gap between self and others, contribute to individual identity shaping, and ultimately increases social justice. The actions of caring about others’ knowledge and also appreciation of individual differences in cultural studies will lead to the task of maintaining social justice in multicultural education in the long run.

---

43 Ibid

44 James A. Banks and McGee A. Banks, *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives*, (2004): 40-45.

45 Ibid

## **CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY**

### **DESIGN OF THE STUDY**

#### **Criteria for Selecting Study Participants**

My research participants were made up of 5 Chinese American adolescents from age 10 to 15 enrolled at a Chinese school in a southern town in America and 5 of these students' parents. The Chinese school is an informal Sunday school that meets at a state community college. The students meet around 2 to 3 hours every Sunday to learn Chinese and Chinese martial arts. Some of the students were born in the U.S. but all of them are green card holders or American citizens. Their parents were born and raised in China.

First, I chose the participants according to the criterion of age. Only the children from age 10 to 15 were included in my study. Second, I chose based on gender. I enrolled 3 boys and 2 girls in the study. Third, based on my observation, I chose some children who have dealt with two cultures (American culture and Chinese culture) very well, and other children who have been frustrated with learning Chinese language and culture.

#### **Research Site, Number and Characteristics of Participants**

Data were collected at the Chinese school, the houses of the students, and centers where students and their families conducted traditional Chinese cultural activities.



These centers were a civic center, a YMCA auditorium that Chinese Americans community rented for regular gathering, the International house of a local university where they presented for Chinese cultural nights, and the university where they held a traditional Chinese New Year party.

Two of the parents interviewed also taught at the Chinese school. The majority of teachers at the Chinese school were parents of the students. Because the parents wanted their children to inherit the Chinese culture and language, they set up this informal Sunday Chinese school. Parents also work as board members of the Chinese School or on the board of the local Chinese American community organization.

A significant characteristic of the parents who participated in the study is their extensive travel. Some of the parents interviewed worked or studied in other countries such as Germany, France, Japan, etc. or other states in America. Their traveling experience provided me a large amount of information on other Chinese Associations and Chinese American children with which to compare and supplement my research in this city. Most parents were the faculty members at a local university and/or work for a large research lab in the area. All the parents come from mainland China, and most of them came to American over a decade ago and after a few years decided to stay.

### **The Methods for Recruiting Participants**

I worked as a volunteer Chinese teacher at the Chinese School from August of 2002 until May of 2003. This experience enabled me to get to know the students and parents involved in the Chinese School and to be a friend a number of them.

After receiving the permission from the principal of the Chinese School, I recruited the participants through phone calls or emailing. I asked students to sign an assent form and parents to sign an informed consent form. All formal interviews were audio-taped and transcribed for analysis.

### **Methods for Data Collection**

In general, I utilized several approaches including interviews with the participants, writing field notes and reflective notes from observations, and using some paper files and photographic archives about the school.

#### ***Interviews***

In qualitative research, interviews are used to gather descriptive data in the respondents' own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how respondents interpret some piece of the world.<sup>46</sup> I used a semi-structured interview format. The semi-structured interview has specific themes but not necessarily specifically worded questions. Therefore, the researcher has some freedom to allow for changes in order and direction of the questions based on how the interview proceeds.<sup>47</sup> This flexibility provides the interviewer more flexibility to collect data related to the research theme rather than being bound by the questions list. I also did a follow-up interview if I found some problems were not clarified.

---

46 R.C. Bogdan and S.K. Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*. ( Allyn & Bacon, Boston, 1992)

47 Handel Wright, "Qualitative Research in Education: From an Attractive Nuisance to a Dizzying Array of Traditions and Possibilities," *Journal of Tennessee*, (2002): 7-16

I chose the ethnographic tradition in qualitative research. There are some concerns how to define the role of interviewers and interviewees in ethnographic study. The researchers always have to be careful about their own involvement. For example, they need be cautious about issues such as how many participants are appropriate for the study and how much private information they can ask participants to reveal in the interview process. But voices and feelings of participants are important to record.

My interview protocol was composed of three parts: social factors, economic factors and administration factors. Basically, social questions included age of the children, students' purposes of learning Chinese, students' impact and reactions of learning Chinese in America or in China, the family background of students, and their activities in American public school. Economic factors were the amount of organization membership fees, tuition, textbooks fees and classroom-renting fees, and participants' feeling about the paying fees. Administration factors included the categories used to divide children into different grades, selection of formal/informal textbooks, recruitment of students and school board and board management of the school.

In addition to formal interviews with students and informal interviews with parents, I spoke with the current and former principals of the Chinese school. They provided me information on the history, the development, the structure, mission and future plans for the school, and relative to Chinese schools in other states. They also showed me the school website and its electronic archives.

### ***Field Notes***

With dual roles as a participant and facilitator, I recorded each session of my observations in field notes. My role was not only as an observer. Sometimes the teacher asked me to help explain the texts or participate in their in-class activities. My notes included classroom activities, events after class, and students' conversations. I also asked a teacher to collect literature from the class for me on days I was not at the school (e.g. internet pictures for texts explanation, activity sheets, and homework sheets).

### ***Reflective Journaling***

I maintained a reflective journal to record my step-by-step progress and my reactions to all participants in my study. It included my reactions and comments to participants' actions and conversations, my perceptions and suggestions about textbooks, teaching methods, and so on.

In conclusion, triangulation in research terms usually means that researchers use different sets of data, different types of analyses, different researchers, and/or different theoretical perspectives to study one particular phenomenon.<sup>48</sup> I used the overlapping and cooperation of different qualitative research skills of interviews (formal/informal), field notes, and reflective journals to strengthen the accuracy of my qualitative research project.

---

48 N. K. Denzin, *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods* (2nd Ed., New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978)

## INTERPRETING THE STUDY

### About Ethnography Tradition in Qualitative Study

There are five traditions of qualitative research inquiries: biography, phenomenology, ground theory, ethnography, and case study.<sup>49</sup> The discussion that follows details my reasons for working within the tradition of ethnography. Ethnography describes or interprets the group portrait of a cultural or social group, community, or system. According to Creswell, “One key component of ethnographic research is composing a holistic view of the culture-sharing group or individual.”<sup>50</sup> I chose to do an ethnographic study for several reasons. My project focuses on one culture-sharing group--Chinese American adolescents. They are dealing with two kinds of cultures (American and Chinese culture); they coming from similar family and class backgrounds; both the children and their parents are about the same age. My work is a process of meaning construction based on these students’ life and school experiences.

Terese M. Peretto Stratta describes ethnography as originating in cultural anthropology and data collection based on the lived experiences of human beings.<sup>51</sup> It borrows from naturalistic, participant observation inquiry by entering the field of another culture, and identifying a key informant. It also tries to learn about that culture in order to access cultural definitions, practices, and community understanding.<sup>52</sup>

---

49 John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, choosing Among Five Traditions*, (Sage Publications, International Educational and Professional Publisher, Thousand Oaks, London New Delhi, 1998)

50 Ibid.

51 Terese M. Peretto Startta, “Using Ethnographic Methods: in Cross-Cultural Research,” *Journal of Tennessee Education*. (2002/2003):32-39

52 W. Bishop, *Ethnographic Writing Research: Writing It Down, Writing It Up, and Reading It*. (New Hampshire: Boynton/Cook. 1999)

“The purpose of ethnography as process is the systematic observation of a culture or community of interest, involving the materials, behaviors, and interactions of its members. The goal is to provide ‘thick description’ of the culture, describing the culture or community to an audience outside the community or culture that was researched”.<sup>53</sup>

The ethnographical designs include investigation preparation, site selection, and gaining entrée to the research site. In ethnographical studies, field notes are composed of participant observation, interviews, sampling, and sampling within cases. Diverse artifacts of the culture or community can be used as ethnography data: photographs, letters, newspapers, art, instruments, tools, etc.

“Thick description” is a narrative, detailed description and exploitation of the data. My research was the practice of thick description of the holistic portrait of a bi-cultural sharing community---the Chinese American adolescents at the Chinese school. It then analyzed the cultural identity of these adolescents by using a critical framework.

### **Rationale for Selecting Ethnographical Tradition for My Study**

Creswell argues the importance of choosing the appropriate research tradition.<sup>54</sup> He states, “Qualitative investigators overlay a tradition of inquiry –the methodology and methods of inquiry as advanced by writers in the disciplines of sociology, psychology, anthropology, and the humanities.” Although he offered five traditions of qualitative research inquiries, the match between traditions and the research project is the key factor in deciding the tradition of inquiry.

---

53 Terese M. Peretto Startta, “Using Ethnographic Methods in Cross-Cultural Research,” *Journal of Tennessee Education*, (2002/2003):32

54 John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, Choosing Among Five Traditions*, (Sage Publications, International Educational and Professional Publisher, Thousand Oaks, London New Delhi 1998)

My research project specifically matched the characteristics of the ethnography tradition in several ways. First, the ethnographic approach is a lengthy study which usually lasts from six months to several years. My personal experience of working as a Chinese teacher involved me with the bi-culture sharing group and collecting data for a year and half. Second, qualitative research is based on the living experience of cultural communities, and aims to understand the lives of the people being studied.<sup>55</sup> My status as a volunteer Chinese teacher provided me with an advantage for getting entrée from the Chinese school principals and the participation of the children and their parents. Third, my methodology of data collection employed ethnographic approaches. The qualitative research data is collected by “more than one method (interview, direct observation, artifacts) in order to assure triangulation, verification from multiple sources.”<sup>56</sup> My multiple data sources included the interviews with principals, students and their parents, observations of the Chinese school class, and artifacts of the community including activities photographs, school files, holiday newsletters, and the like.

The unique interaction of American and Chinese cultures within the culture-sharing group attracted me to the study. There was also some similarity between me and the culture-sharing group of the Chinese American students. They inherited some cultural traditions from their parents, who came from my home country of China. But there were also gaps and new fields for me to explore because they were born and grew up in a different social-cultural system from me. As second-generation immigrants, the social context of American’s multi-cultural milieu shaped their pluralistic cultural

---

55 Ibid

56 W. Bishop, *Ethnographic: Writing Research: Writing It Down, Writing It Up, and Reading It*. (New Hampshire: Boynton/Cook, 1999):100

identities. It was represented by openness to new cultures as well as struggling among pluralistic cultures. I conducted my research to observe their individual identity and their collective identity as a culture-sharing community.

The focus on the experiences of a bi-cultural sharing group community (American and Chinese culture) was an important factor in deciding to work within the ethnographic tradition of inquiry. According to the theory of ontology,

“Human beings exist within the realm of meaning as well as in the material and organic realms; ethnographers now pay careful attention to this dimension. One of the most important forms for creating meaning is a narrative that attends to the temporal dimension of human existence and shapes events into a unity.”<sup>57</sup>

That is, meaning comes from the experience of human beings. But the experiences of the human beings are shaped by multiple social factors but not individual and fixed. In the social context, the differences (gender, ethnicity, and race) of human beings can also be presented as their partial identities. “An ethnographer can allow both self and other to appear together within a single narrative that carries a multiplicity of dialoguing voices.”

<sup>58</sup> My project was to embody the meaning of experience of Chinese American adolescents and the people around them. My bi-language ability and some of my cultural similarities with the parents of the Chinese American adolescents provided me the opportunity to access their life and record their experiences as a participant observer.

---

<sup>57</sup> N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2000)

<sup>58</sup> Ibid



## Research Paradigm

There are six research paradigms including positivist, post-positivist, constructivist, critical/feminist, and poststructuralist paradigms.<sup>59</sup> I employed the critical paradigm. According to Creswell, critical researchers focus their critiques on changing ways of thinking. Based on these changes, critical researchers argue that basic concepts of knowledge claims must be set within the conditions of the world today and in the multiple perspectives of class, race, gender, and other group affiliations.<sup>60</sup> This argument suggests attention to social contexts and knowledge based in the experiences of human beings.

As a critical researcher, I also argue that transformed ways of thinking are necessary to understand cultural identities of the ethnic minorities. In an American society calling for cultural pluralism, cultural diversity should not be a simple acceptance of superficial cultural markers of other races or ethnicities such as cultural customs, food, or language. Cultural pluralism requires comprehending “self-other” relationship in society. The acceptance of different ways of thinking across diverse ethnicities is very important to accomplishing the goal of multiculturalism, cultural understanding and respect for other people, races, and groups. There are taken-for-granted views in which whiteness requires the people of color around them to be the “other”. Transformative ways of thinking of the dominant group will help make the people of color be more powerful. The action of keeping attention on perspectives from both the insider and

---

59 Amos J. Hatch, *Doing Qualitative Research in Research in Educational Settings*, (State University of New York Press, 2002) :13

60 J. W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research: Choosing Among Five Traditions*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage 1998)

outsiders will lead to the appreciation of cultural diversity and empathy in the multicultural social context.

My study calls for empowering Chinese Americans in the U.S. pluralistic cultural society. The Chinese American adolescents and their parents in my study presented their unique voices and collective cultural identity in American society. Their feelings and subjectivity enrich our understanding of Chinese American cultural image and identity. As the product of critical paradigm, the study also examines the school textbooks and makes suggestions to improve teaching quality.

### **Limitation of the Study**

There are several limitations in my study. Because I come from mainland China, my views developed within the traditional Chinese educational system. My insider view caused some misunderstandings when I made judgments about students' cultural influences from American culture versus Chinese culture. Some behaviors of my participants that I took as the impact of American culture were seen by an American researcher as the cultural inheritance of Chinese culture. Students always talked with each other in English during break time or answered teachers' questions in English. They also asked other students' what grade they received after the teacher handed back their quizzes. In my view, students' preference for speaking English was a sign of being closer to American culture and western behaviors. My traditional Chinese education perspective made me take as a norm the students' behavior of asking others' grade. But American researchers think that the content of students' conversation and their ways of interacting

in the classroom are still closer to Chinese culture. Asking what grade another student received is interrupting others' privacy according to American cultural norms. My limited knowledge and experience about the American educational system and American parenting limited my ability to see departures from American norms.

## **CHAPTER IV DATA ANALYSIS**

In this chapter, I employed the political analysis method to conduct the data analysis. The analysis is based on the interview transcripts, the observation journals, and some written documents about history and certification of the Chinese school. I use the five elements of Gold, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth to represent my five research participants.<sup>61</sup> This chapter is made up of two sections: one section is about learning experiences of those Chinese American adolescents in Chinese school, and the other is about their cultural identities.

### **LEARNING EXPERIENCE OF CHINESE AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS IN CHINESE SCHOOL**

In this section, I focus on my participants' learning experiences in Chinese school. The Chinese school is just one part of these students' rich learning experiences. They attend public schools, and on the weekends, they go to informal schools such as Chinese school, Japanese school, etc. Besides that, they have private tutors to learn swimming, drawing, playing piano, playing tennis, and so on.

In the Chinese school, learning Chinese is a very important part of the school experience. The students are mainly taught how to write Chinese characters and

---

<sup>61</sup> In Chinese traditional culture, everything in the world is made up of five elements: gold, wood, water, fire, earth. The body of the people is also made up of the five elements. If somebody is lacking some element, it will be shown in their first names as a complement. For example, if somebody is lacking the element of fire, then there is some fire sign in the Chinese character of his or her first name. Here I just name those five participants randomly to protect their privacy.

some Chinese words. They are also told some Chinese stories or about everyday life in China, but students felt they were not very related to Chinese culture.

All five participants thought they could learn more Chinese speaking at home than in Chinese school because they had more chances to speak Chinese with their parents. From the interviews with Gold and Wood, they think learning Chinese in Chinese school is somewhat boring because most of the work focused on words and writing. Gold said that:

What we learned is mostly the Chinese characters and the words. It is kind of boring. We learned some Chinese words in the Chinese school, and I did the homework at home. We usually talk in Chinese at home. I also think I learned a lot of Chinese and Chinese culture when I went back to China during my summer holiday.

Wood felt that he learned more Chinese from the Chinese proverbs at home. He thought some stories in Chinese textbooks were too childish for him:

In Chinese school, I learned how to write, and some Chinese characters. But some poems, like we learned last Sunday, I do not understand very well. We learned some words, some stories. It is important. But some stories, it is sort of childish.

Water even quit Chinese school for a short time last semester because she thought she could learn more Chinese at home.

I quit Chinese school sometime before. You know, I went skating, learning Japanese on the weekends. If I have some time conflicts, I quit learning Chinese for a while. Because I do not think it is really helpful for me to learn a lot of Chinese. I also can learn some at home.

In addition to learning the Chinese language, inheriting Chinese culture is one of the primary goals of the parents who designed the Chinese school. The students though, did not think they were provided with more opportunities to learn Chinese culture in the Chinese school than at home. For example, though Fire describes herself as closer

to Chinese cultures compared to other students, she learned about Chinese customs and holidays at home rather than at Chinese school.

Basically my parents told me a lot of stuff about Chinese culture. Like in Spring Festival, my parents gave me Ya Sui Qian [parents put some money in a small red envelop and gave them to the children on Chinese New Year's Day, which means bringing good luck for them in the coming New Year]. And we ate a lot of Chinese food...

Wood said that he mostly learned culture from the Chinese proverbs taught by his parents and through visiting Chinatown.

My parents always told me some Chinese proverbs. I learned a lot of Chinese proverbs from my mom and dad. I remember that one of the proverbs says, I should work hard when I am young, otherwise I will regret when I am old. From some stories, we learned sort of Chinese culture. I visited the Chinatown in New York.

Gold commented on the percentage of access to Chinese culture in Chinese school and compared what he learned about Chinese history from his mother:

I do not think we learned a lot of Chinese culture from the school. I would say 15 percent to 20 percent. I feel that I learn more from my parents at home. My mom sometimes told me some Chinese history and traditions.

Earth thought it difficult to master the Chinese language. He also thought there was not enough to access learning about culture in school but he still presented a cultural example:

Well, Chinese is a hard language. I learned a lot of writing there. I just remembered some stories like Sun Wu Kong in Xi You Ji [the monkey king in *Journey to the West*.]<sup>62</sup>

---

62 Wu Cheng'en [Ming Dynasty], *Journey to the West* [Chinese classical novel: Xi You Ji], translated by W. J. F. Jenner. (Published by Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 2000) *Journey to the West* is a mythological novel based on many centuries of popular tradition. It was probably put into its present form in the 1570s by Wu Cheng'en (1500-82). Six volumes, 960 x 640, 1/16, Hardcover, 3,375 pages; ISBN: 7119024108. "This lively fantasy relates the amazing adventures of the priest Xuanzang as his travels west in search of Buddhist sutras with his three disciples, the irreverent and capable Monkey, greedy Pig, and Friar Sand. The opening chapters recount the earlier exploits of Monkey, culminating in his rebellion

The school was an important contributor to students' experiences of learning Chinese language and culture. But the students thought that they could learn more at home or from visiting China during their holidays. Their traveling experience in several Chinese cities gave students the concrete images of contemporary China and Chinese people rather than abstract pictures and concepts. Gold traveled to China three times:

The first time was when I was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, I was 8 years old, and I stayed in China around 1 month. The second time was in my 5<sup>th</sup> grade, I was 11 years old, and I stayed there about 2 months. The third time was in my 7<sup>th</sup> grade, I also stay there for about 2 months. I learned a lot of Chinese at that time. My mom lived in Shanghai, so I can understand Shanghai dialect, but I cannot speak it. For the mandarin, I can understand a lot and I can speak it.

Wood also made three trips to China. The first time he stayed for a year with his grandparents. He visited again for a month in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade and for the summer in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

Earth and Water also visited China, spending time in large cities. Water described her

---

against Heaven. We then learn how Xuanzang became a monk and was sent on his pilgrimage by the Tang emperor who had escaped death with the help of an Underworld official. The main story, the journey, takes the priest through all kinds of entertaining trials and tribulations, mainly at the hands of monsters and spirits who want to eat him. Most, like the ferocious Red Boy, want to devour him. Some, such as the scorpion spirit of Pipa Cave, take the form of beautiful women in the hope of seducing him. Only the courage and powers of his disciples, especially Monkey, save him from death. Monkey has to use all his connections in the supernatural world to find the help that will enable him to defeat these and other formidable enemies, such as the Bull Demon King and Princess Iron Fan, or the imitation Monkey who is indistinguishable from himself. On the last part of the journey the demons come in a wide range of shapes and kinds. Among them are spider-women who spin webs from their navels, a pride of lion monsters and a terrible female spirit who carries the Tang Priest down into her bottomless cave to marry him. These and all the other fiends test to the very limit Monkey's ingenuity, supernatural powers and connections throughout the universe. Monkey is the hero of the fantasy, and the reader will soon learn why he has long been so loved in China. Will the pilgrims reach the Vulture Peak and obtain the scriptures? The answer will only be found at the end of the 100-chapter novel. The story is as full of imagination as Monkey is of magic, and packed with incident and down-to-earth humor. The illustrations are from 19th-century Chinese edition. ”

journey to China:

I went back to China last summer with my mom. We visited several relatives there. We went to Beijing and Sichuan. In Beijing, we visited the Great Wall. We visited Chengdu, Chongqing. I know more about Chinese cities. We also ate a lot of Chinese food. We'll be back there again for about two weeks this summer.

In light of the interview data, students thought the Chinese school primarily taught writing and Chinese words. The learning of Chinese culture happened more at home or during travel to China. When they are exposed to the contexts of more/only Chinese language or Chinese culture, students can practice their listening and speaking with the Chinese.<sup>63</sup> Social contexts of more/only Chinese language or Chinese culture also can help students to understand Chinese culture and traditions and develop interests through first-hand experience.

From the classroom observation data, the students' reaction to Chinese school is directed by their normal American school schedules. In other words, how much time they spent learning Chinese depended on how much time was left over from their public school activities. One reason why most of the students thought they were closer to American culture was because the American school schedule played an important role in their life. They knew that Chinese school was just an informal Sunday school.

Students still held that there were many positive points in Chinese school though they criticized some parts of their school experiences. For example, they thought the school provided more chances to interact with other Chinese American children.

---

<sup>63</sup> I mean two situations by using "more/only". The "only" situation means that the Chinese American adolescents went to China, they may meet some people cannot speak any English and they only can communicate in Chinese. The "more" situation means that the adolescents may meet some Chinese people who can speak English, then they can communicate in both English and Chinese, and Chinese American adolescents will speak more Chinese than in America.



Earth thought the Chinese school provided an opportunity to meet a Chinese friend. When asked why he went to the school he stated: “my parents want me to do that [go to Chinese school], and also, I can meet a lot of Chinese friends in Chinese school”.

This interaction is an important dimension influencing both the acculturation of these children and their ability to maintain their partial Chinese culture and identity in a more “American” mainstream school. The school experiences in the Chinese school provide the Chinese American adolescents with chances to know and meet with each other. This social life contributes to maintaining their Chinese cultural heritage.

In addition to learning about Chinese and Chinese cultures and the social experiences in Chinese school, participants also offered their opinions about the school textbook. According to the school website, the curricula and content being taught in the classroom are very important. The textbook series is made up of 9 books edited by JiNan Province publishing house. Students are supposed to learn a book every year. The books start with everyday Chinese phrases such as “hello, how are you?” and aim to convey Chinese culture. The series is designed for learners born in America and presents the content in the form of conversations. The books focuses on the Chinese language and new words are set up very systematically.

However, based on my interview and observation, there is insufficient evidence to show that the book is well suited to Americans. Some of my participants complained that some of the contents were boring or hard to understand. Fire made a comment about the textbook when we talked about the school: “Some stories are interesting; some of them are pretty boring. Like the story about the Sydney Opera house,

who cares how many seats are in the opera house? ” Wood thought some content too complicated for students although he is fourteen year old: “I don’t understand the poems that we learned today. It is pretty hard for me.”

I also found that there are gaps between the schools’ goal of instilling the students with Chinese cultural and language heritage and the schools’ teaching practice. The Chinese school is supposed to be a setting for studying Chinese language skills including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. But most learning activities focus on reading and writing and ignore the importance of speaking. Speaking another language is a skill learned through practice. More activities for practicing speaking would better reflect the goals of the Chinese school.

I argue that the trans-generational cultural education is not only telling children Chinese traditions, customs, and language but sharing ways of thinking between parents and students. Without a doubt, the lack of an introduction to Chinese culture is inconsistent with the first generation Chinese immigrants’ and Chinese American community’s goal of second and future generations keeping their cultural roots. Sharing ways of thinking promotes better communication. For example, parents could tell their children why they want them to have a Chinese cultural inheritance rather than simply asking them to do so. Parents could also help clarify the confusion and misunderstanding of their children when they are exposed to Chinese culture. I suggest that parents who are nurtured in Chinese culture share their perspectives with their second generation who have been nurtured in American culture for better trans-generational cultural understanding and cultural respect. The more sharing between two generations, the more it will help the Chinese American children in balancing between the Asian/Eastern and

American/Western cultures. This trans-generational and bi-cultural communication also helps Chinese American adolescents clarify their cultural identities.

### **CULTURAL IDENTITIES OF THE CHINESE AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS IN CHINESE SCHOOL**

Four of the five student participants said that they feel closer to American culture than Chinese culture. This is understandable given that most of the students attending the Chinese school were born in the U.S. or left China at a very young age with their parents. Most of their American identities are shaped by their participation in the American public school system.

According to my observation data, their classroom behaviors at the Chinese school follow what they did in American classrooms rather than a traditional Chinese classroom. For example, sometimes they ate food or drink in class, talked with classmates without getting permission of teachers, and talked to teachers without raising their hands. When there was a conflict between Chinese school and their public school responsibilities, they gave up the Chinese school activities or homework. Their classroom behaviors are more consistent with American educational system which has appreciation of individualism. Students also like to do something different from each other to express their “sense of self” and to show other students their “self” in the Chinese classroom. For example, Wood liked to eat snacks in class and Gold and Earth liked to talk a lot in the Chinese classroom.

Based on observation data, I argue that the Chinese school puts more emphasis on collective identity than the American public schools that the students

attended. In the Chinese school classroom, the Chinese teacher always tried to train students to cooperate more and share their experiences with other students. This focus reflects the traditional Chinese appreciation of cooperation and group-orientation. In Chinese traditional culture, a person is more likely to be regarded as a part of the whole group rather than one single person. Specifically, if someone did something wrong or broke the laws, it was not only his or her stigma but the whole family or the whole race who were shamed.

Education plays an important role in these students' lives. Both of these are important traditions in Chinese families and cultures. Most Chinese American children are successful in the American school system because their parents seriously emphasize the importance of education. As a Chinese traditional perspective, Confucians argues that all different walks are inferior to the intellectual. One Chinese proverb says "parents expect their sons to be dragon", it presents clearly Chinese parents' strong expectations for their children.<sup>64</sup> In Chinese traditional cultures, education or higher education is always highly valued because people think it can help them to maintain or change their social status.

Following traditional Chinese educational concepts, the students in Chinese school were required by parents to do extra learning in addition to their American public school schedule. Students attended math classes and martial arts classes besides the regular Chinese language learning class at the Chinese school. From flyers of the Chinese school and my interview data, the Chinese school designed math classes to help students acquire good credits in state or national math competitions and to score well

---

<sup>64</sup> In Chinese culture, the image of dragon is the positive symbol of wealth, intelligence, and power.

on the SAT math section. The math teachers were faculty members from the nearby university or research labs. According to my observations and informal conversations with parents, parents sacrificed their weekends to send their children from one class to another one.

Beside the academic activities, parents also asked students to participate in after-class activities to improve their performance in physical exercises, musical instruments, and so on through hiring private tutors or sending them to other Sunday schools in addition to the Chinese school. Students are heavy-loaded during dealing with the regular school coursework and different after-school activities. Some students participated in the martial arts class in Chinese school. Their performance of martial arts in the city's annual Dogwood Parade was a means of representing the Chinese community in local events. From my interview data, Water attended Japanese class, Chinese class, Math class, drawing class, swimming, and skating in addition to her regular public school classes. Earth attended classes in Chinese, drawing, tennis, and violin. Gold attended classes in Chinese, piano, drawing, and tennis. Fire told me that she needed to go to Chinese class, play piano, martial arts class, and so on. Wood is the only one who earned pocket-money by helping wash dishes at his mother's restaurant, but he still attended Chinese class and track team.

In addition to hiring private tutors and spending the weekends bringing children to classes, parents informed me that they moved from one town to another access to better schools. For parents, the inconvenience of a longer commute to work or changing job was thought to be worthwhile if students might have a better future. Sacrifice to promote their children's education was a strong theme in parents' discussions.

From the aforementioned data, it suggests that in the development process for most Chinese American children, the traditional Chinese educational concepts and measures play a big part in their lives. Emphasis on education is a very important feature for the traditional Chinese because they are willing to sacrifice everything, for greater educational opportunities.

The Chinese American students are immersed in the Western educational model, but Chinese culture is already rooted in their lives because of the impact of their family life. Their understanding and closeness to Chinese culture result from their families intentionally keeping the Chinese culture and traditions in their everyday lives. Therefore, Chinese American students' success in study or future career orientation is not only because they are Westerners, but also because they are the product of a combination of eastern and Western cultures and educational models. Their cultural identities in schools are a bi-cultural product. Their characteristics of competitiveness were nurtured by the American culture while their characteristics of cooperation were nurtured in the traditional Chinese culture. Their competitive ability was shaped more in the American educational system's appreciation of individualism. Their characteristics of cooperation and group-orientation were shaped more in the Chinese school or the Chinese cultural appreciation of communitarianism.

In addition to stressing educational achievements, families used food as a means of maintaining Chinese tradition. Continuing to cook and eat Chinese food was one way to keep their Chinese cultural heritage. All of the families cooked Chinese food regularly. All the children emphasized their preference for Chinese food and became

excited when we talked about Chinese foods such as tofu, egg rolls, and dumplings. I found that their Chinese ethnic identities became more apparent in this area.

When participants were asked to make a comparison about Chinese food and American food or talk about their preference in food, Gold said: “most American food is the breads or something else, I like Chinese food. For the traditions or customs, I like both. Maybe I like Chinese part more because I really like Chinese food. ....” Wood informed me of his mother’s maintaining cooking Chinese dishes: “I like both. My mom cooks Chinese dinner every day.”

Because of living experiences in Japan, Water talked about her interest in Japanese food in addition to Chinese and American food:

I like Japanese Sushi. American food, I like spaghetti...Basically, I like light food and salty food. I like Chinese Liang Mian [cool noodle] very much. And my dad cooks Chinese food for us almost every other day.

Among those participants, Fire is the girl who is closer to Chinese cultures, and both of her parents made Chinese food at home. She said: “I like Chinese food. My mom usually cooks Chinese food every day. Sometimes my dad cooks, too.” Earth informed us of his experience of eating Chinese food in California: “Well, I like Chinese food more. You know, I went to California this spring break. We ate a lot of Chinese food in California. It is really cheap and delicious.”

Besides the preference for Chinese food instead of American food, family also plays a very important role in shaping these Chinese American students’ personality. One goal of the Chinese school is nurturing the students within an atmosphere of Chinese cultures and language. Most parents require their children to study in Chinese schools even if they move from one city to another. From my interview data, some students

moved from another state several years ago. They went to Chinese school there and continued to attend Chinese school when the family moved to their present location. The parents also brought their children back to China during their holidays to know everyday life in China or brought them to visit states or cities where Chinese culture is fairly strong, like California. They also speak Chinese to keep a Chinese language environment at home and cook Chinese dinners. The parents used food, language, and travel to provide their children with “Chinese culture cues.”<sup>65</sup> Creating a Chinese learning atmosphere encourages Chinese American adolescents to remain close to Chinese cultures.

Family influence could also be seen in students’ future career plans. Earth wanted to be involved in scientific work even though she enjoys drawing and has won art awards, because her mother is a research scientist in a lab. Water told me that she planned to go to law school. Wood had an interest in business and he took the course of Future America Business (FAB) at his high school. The other two participants said that they needed more time to consider their future career. The students’ answers suggest family expectations play a role in students’ career orientation. Most students’ career interests were white-collar jobs and consistent with their parents status as middle class professionals. For example, Water’s plan to choose a scientific job was influenced by her mother’s profession. Although women are underrepresented in many scientific fields, water still wanted to be involved science. Wood’s interest in business may have been developed through his work experiences in his mother’s restaurant.

---

65 Martínez V. Benet, J. Leu , F. Lee and M.W. Morris, “Negotiating Biculturalism: Cultural Frame Switching in Bicultural With Oppositional Versus Compatible Cultural Identities,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* (Vol.33, No: 5, SAGE Publications, 2002.):492 – 516



In addition to education and the role of the family, language flexibility is the third factor that influences students' cultural identity. Chinese American adolescents switch between two languages and cultures—a behavior known as “code-switching”. During communication, speakers of more than one language (e.g., bilinguals) are known for their ability to code-switch or mix their languages. This phenomenon occurs when bilinguals replace a word or phrase from one language with a phrase or word from another language. Traditionally, code-switching is viewed as a strategy to make language fluent because bilinguals do not know either language completely. But according to recent developments in psycholinguistic research, code-switching is regarded as the natural product of the interaction of the bilingual's two languages. Another current view suggests that language dominance (i.e., which language is used more frequently) plays an important role in code-switching.<sup>66</sup> For these Chinese American adolescents, English is the dominant language, and Chinese is a secondary language.

As a part of dealing with two cultures (Chinese culture and American culture), students were adapt at changing their language patterns. In traditional Chinese culture, it is rude to address by the name people who are older than you. It is expected for one to preface the name with titles such as aunt, uncle, elder brother, elder sister, etc. But in American culture, it is common to show closeness between people by using the first name. In my case, the Chinese American adolescents knew that I came from China mainland, and they called me “Aunt Cao” instead of “Yan” to show their respect for me.

---

66 Monica Heller, “Code Switching and the Politics of Language,” in *One speaker, Two languages: Cross-disciplinary Perspectives on Code-switching*, ed. Lesley Milroy and Pieter Muysten, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995):158-174.

I also observed that they called other women of my age by their first name if she was Chinese American or of another ethnicity.

Students' ethnic identification, gender, and age also influenced their ethnic identity. Their responses on ethnic identification are fit for from within the framework of the perspective of critical multiculturalism, which holds that people identify themselves to be a specific ethnicity. The adolescents I interviewed identify themselves as Chinese Americans. From the interview data, when the children were asked to describe the race demographics in their school, they referred to themselves as Asian Americans or specifically Chinese American. In my interview, I asked them whether they wanted to tell their own son or daughter about the Chinese culture. Their positive answers showed willingness to inherit Chinese culture but resistance to learning the Chinese language. But when they were asked about issues in their Chinese American community in town, they were not very clear about the Chinese American community that their parents established and the missions of the organizations. They participated in some activities held by the community like Spring Festival Party, Mid-Autumn Day party, etc., but they went to the events accompanied by their parents without knowing about the organization's design and work.<sup>67</sup> Students' responses on ethnic identification are fit for my assumption that

---

<sup>67</sup> <http://asiarecipe.com/chispringfestival.html>, Spring Festival is Chinese New year's day. "To the Chinese people it is as important as Christmas to people in the West. The dates for this annual celebration are determined by the lunar calendar, so the timing of the holiday varies from late January to early February. Preparations for the New Year begin the last few days of the last moon, when houses are thoroughly cleaned, debts repaid, hair cut and new clothes purchased. Houses are festooned with paper scrolls bearing auspicious antithetical couplet (as show on both side of the page) and in many homes, people burn incense at home and in the temples to pay respects to ancestors and ask the gods for good health in the coming months. On New Year's Eve, all the members of families come together to feast. Jiaozi, a steamed dumpling as pictured below, is popular in the north, while southerners favor a sticky sweet glutinous rice pudding called nian gao. Mid-Autumn day is a holiday is the lunar calendar the fifteenth day of the eighth month each year; the Chinese celebrate Mid-Autumn Day (Full Moon Festival). It is a very fun and meaningful holiday for family fathering. In the evening of Mid-Autumn Day, people played in the park or

they claim themselves as Chinese Americans. More explanation about the role of the Chinese American community would contribute to students' cultural identity as Chinese American. Rather than simply bringing students to Chinese holiday celebrations, parents and teachers could use these events to inform students about the role of the Chinese community in American society and the relationships between the Chinese community and the Chinese American individual.

According to my interview and observation data, the younger adolescents and female student's identity more closely with Chinese culture. Fire, who is one of the two girls, told me that she is closer to Chinese culture compared to other Chinese American adolescents. Water also showed stronger interest and more knowledge about Chinese cultures. Earth, who is the youngest among the participants, knew more about Chinese cultures than Gold and Wood. Comparatively, those youths who had weak sense of ethnic identity, which means who had strong connections with American culture rather than Chinese culture, are less likely to engage in ethnic activities.

In my opinion, family plays a large part in impacting children's inheritance of their parents' cultural ethnicity. Parents created the Chinese school to continue Chinese culture through their children. For maintaining a Chinese cultural heritage in their children, parents created the opportunities for their children to learn about Chinese culture. Compared to older Chinese American adolescents, most Chinese American girls and younger children are more likely to be impacted by their parents and/or more open to their parents requested. The fact girls and younger children showed

---

sidewalk. They sat in the park, ate moon cake, fruits, and enjoyed the full moon. Children carried their lanterns and walk around the park. Some people made paper boats and put candles in the paper boats, then made their wishes before letting the boats float in the pond."

stronger ethnic identities may be explained by the greater influence of the family in their lives. Girls show higher ethnic character than that of boys. Also, younger youths showed stronger association with ethnic salience in the study than older youths.<sup>68</sup> Their closeness to their ethnicity is naturally developed in the family atmosphere.

The preceding section described images of Chinese American's cultural identity and analyzed the factors shaping the cultural identities of Chinese American adolescents. First it introduced social factors such as the mixture of eastern and western educational patterns and the role of Chinese school in shaping and promoting a collective identity more than an individual identity. It then discussed family influences on food preferences, career orientation of students, and parental efforts to create a Chinese language and cultural environment. Finally, it analyzed the language features of bilinguals and cultural ethnic identity using the factors of gender and age. In conclusion, the two sections in this chapter explore the learning experiences of Chinese American adolescents in Chinese school and their cultural identities on the social, family, and individual level.

---

68 Tiffinay Yip and Andrew J. Fuligni, "Daily Variation in Ethnic Identity, Ethnic Behaviors, and Psychological Well-being among American Adolescents of Chinese Descent," *Journal of Child development*, (Vol.73, No.5, Sep.-Otc. 2002): 1557-1572

## **CHAPTER V CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I will discuss factors influencing bicultural identity and emphasize differences such as gender and age in shaping the images of cultural identity for Chinese American adolescents. Then, some alternatives will be suggested for improving the quality of the Chinese school and attracting more Chinese American children to attend by including more access to Chinese culture. Finally, I will address alternate images of Chinese Americans in American society.

### **FACTORS IN SHAPING CULTURAL IDENTITIES OF CHINESE AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS**

The former chapter answered my research question about what are the cultural identities of students. I also presented students' learning experiences in American school and Chinese school, family experience, traveling experiences in America, mainland China, and other countries. Then I will discuss what factors in shaping students' identities by answering my research questions. The shaping of ethnic identities is influenced by multiple social factors. As stated by Baumeister, "Gender and ethnicity aside, race, religion, occupation, political affiliation, sexual orientation, and peer group can all create important sources of social identity, and each can create oppositional demands that individuals have to negotiate and integrate in their socially categorized lives."<sup>69</sup> The complex interplay of social factors is helpful to shape students into social

---

<sup>69</sup> R Baumeister, D. Gilberts, S. Fiske, and G. Lindzey "The Self," *Handbooks of Social Psychology* (Vol. 1, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998):680-740

beings. Scholars as diverse as John Dewey and Emile Durkheim argue the importance of developing children as “social beings” in addition to his/her intelligence ability.<sup>70</sup> As a contextual social being, the multiple cultural identities of the Chinese American are impacted by different social contextual factors that contribute to their social identities.

The identities of bicultural people are always shifting: they are more individual in some situations but more collective in others; they are more independent in some situations but more interdependent in others. Benet-Martínez, Leu, Lee, and Morris demonstrated that “biculturals possess dual cultural perspectives, which can be “tried on” and applied at different situations and times.”<sup>71</sup> In my study, students were more individual and independent in American public school but more collective and group-oriented in Chinese school. All participants were able to take notes and finish homework individually in American public school. But in the classroom of Chinese school, they frequently cooperated in reading Chinese, speaking Chinese, doing Chinese drills, etc. They also made phone calls to each other or went to classmates’ home to finish Chinese homework together. Most children also asked for help from their parents to help them finish their Chinese homework. There are two reasons for this more collective/cooperative behavior. One is because Chinese culture helped shape their sense of collective identities and the other is students’ weakness in Chinese made them have to ask for help from each other, teachers, and their parents.

---

70 Joan H. Strouse, *Exploring Social-Cultural Themes in Education: Readings in Social Foundations*, (2nd edition, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 2001):76

71 V. Benet-Martínez, J. Leu ; F. Lee and M.W. Morris, “Negotiating Biculturalism: Cultural Frame Switching in Bicultural With Oppositional Versus Compatible Cultural Identities,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* ( Vol. 33 No.: 5,SAGE Publications, 2002): 492 – 516.

Family socio-economic background also played an important role in shaping the participants' cultural identity. The fact that all participants came from middle-class families provided them with a strong financial and social foundation for educational opportunities. Their family socio-economic status also impacted their future career orientation. All of the parents had completed higher education and many had graduate degrees. This contributed to the high value placed on education in the families. The parents also all came from the China mainland and were successful in passing on the Chinese educational model to their children.

Difference in gender and age also shaped the bicultural students' cultural identity and how they developed the meaning of their cross-cultural life experiences. Individual difference is an important factor about how this meaning system was expressed and used.<sup>72</sup> Most adolescents are close to American culture, but one girl still stated she was closer to Chinese culture. The younger were closer to the Chinese culture than the older children. My findings also confirm Leung and Clack's study that girls and younger children are more close to their ethnicity.

Students also developed their view of globalization according to their life experiences. Besides the experiences dealing with two cultures, several of my participants had chances to access multiple cultures. They had the opportunity to travel and live abroad. Most of the adolescent participants were born in America, but they lived in other countries such as Japan, England, and Germany. These traveling and living abroad experiences made them open to different cultures. Their life experiences also

---

<sup>72</sup> Leung Triandis, Clack Villareal, "Allocentric Versus Idiocentric Tendencies: Convergent and Discriminate Validation," *Journal of Research in Personality* (1985):395-415.

made them develop more skills and confidence in bi- or multiple language learning. Individual identity dynamics and situational relevance made the cultural identity of the students to be a dynamic process. The cultural identities of these students kept shaping as they grew up because of different social contexts and different life experiences.

## **MY SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CHINESE SCHOOL**

As the product of using a critical paradigm, I offer my suggestions for making changes in the Chinese school based on the following two reasons. First, as a part of the social context shaping students' cultural identity, the Chinese school helps to maintain the ethnicity of Chinese American adolescents and provides them with social and cultural knowledge. In this way, the voices of Chinese Americans in the U.S. society won't gradually decay through assimilation but instead will be empowered. The school should not only be a pure "ivory tower", focusing on academics. I suggest that some social and reflective content such as Chinese American's history in the U.S. and the students' relationship with the Chinese American community be included in the school teachings. Second, there are two cultural theories in ethnographic studies. One is ideational theories, which suggests some change is the result of mental activities and ideas; the other is materialistic theories, which holds that material conditions such as money, and resources are prime movers.<sup>73</sup> I employed the ideational theories and provided my suggestions of transformed change of the Chinese school.

---

73 J. W Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research: Choosing Among Five Traditions*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998)



As described in chapter IV, the Chinese school was designed to teach Chinese language and Chinese cultures for the second generation of Chinese immigrants. Most teaching and learning activities in the Chinese school, however, focused on writing and reading and comparatively ignored speaking practice. The main teaching and learning methods were limited to classroom learning. Furthermore, the classroom activities relied on textbooks that did not adequately introduce students to Chinese culture.

Therefore, I argue that culturally relevant pedagogy, which encourages students to make connections between their communities, national, and global identities, should be incorporated into the Chinese school.<sup>74</sup> The creating of a cultural atmosphere, which is referred to as “culture cues” in the field of psychology, is effective for second generation immigrants to develop interests in learning the cultures of their parents. Benet–Martinez et al. suggest that “Chinese American bicultural people emphasize collective duties in their spontaneous self-concepts when primed with East Asian cues and emphasize individual rights when primed with American cues.”<sup>75</sup> My study’s documentation of different student behavior based on cultural norms at the Chinese school compared to their public schools supports Benet-Martinez’s emphasis on cultural cues. It also suggests that students’ collective identity is shaped more when students’ are exposed to the Chinese-only cultural environment of China. Thus, for shaping a stronger collective identity to keep Chinese American ethnicity, more exposure of

---

74 Gloria Ladson-Billings, *The Dream-Keepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, (Jossey-Bass: A Wiley Company, 1994):34

75 V. Benet-Martínez, J. Leu, F. Lee, and M.W. Morris, “Negotiating Biculturalism: Cultural Frame Switching in Bicultural With Oppositional Versus Compatible Cultural Identities,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* (Vol. 33, NO. 5, SAGE Publications, 2002):492 – 516

Chinese American adolescents to Chinese culture to is suggested within the Chinese school setting and family.

I recommend replacing textbooks sections that are unconnected or loosely connected to Chinese culture. There is a shortage of representations of Chinese history and culture in the textbooks. Instead some of the textbooks talk about stories like Snow White, King Midas, etc. that student can know from their public schools or other resources such as mass media. Some stories relate little to Chinese culture, such as stories about the Sydney Opera House or Darwin's evolutionary theory. According to my own volunteer teaching experiences in the school and my informal conversations with teachers (they are also parents of students), incorporating content that focuses on would improve students' motivation to learn. I argue that the methods of imitating a language environment benefits students who learn Chinese as a second language. Some chapters need to be revised or improved by adding more content about Chinese conversational topics, cultural traditions and customs, Chinese geography, Chinese history, Chinese American immigrants' history, and stories about current Chinese children. In doing so, it can increase their knowledge of the Chinese American community in American society and their ethnic pride in being Chinese American. It also could contribute to students' cultural understanding of their parents' home country, their peers in their parents' home country, and their curiosity and interest about Chinese language and culture.

I also recommend designing more cultural activities such as watching movies, making presentations, playing games, singing Chinese songs, making traditional Chinese crafts, etc. to supplement the singular classroom teaching. If the weather allows,

outdoor teaching would also be a means of increasing students' interest. Students requested to study outdoors several times during my observations but were denied.

## **SOME OF THE NEW IMAGES OF CHINESE AMERICANS**

In addition to the aforementioned factors about cultural identities and my suggestions about the Chinese school, more fair and ample study of Chinese Americans is needed. Most Asian-American research has called for greater inclusion of the Asians in American history, diversifying the homogeneous representation of America, and challenging white hegemony. As stated by Liu in his review of Chinese American studies, "In the past two decades, Asian American scholarship has done path-breaking work in deconstructing and rejecting racial discourses against Asian immigrants and their American descendants."<sup>76</sup> Liu, however, rejects the focus much of this literature places on assimilation. He states, "In their discussion of the identity formation among Chinese Americans, most scholars underscored the willingness of the Chinese to embrace American values and their desire to be accepted as Americans".<sup>77</sup> He points out Asian American's gradual assimilation by American dominant culture and moving away from their ethnicity. My study also supports Liu's perspective of calling for rejecting cultural assimilation by American dominant culture. In my study, I am against being culturally assimilated by dominant culture and argue that Chinese American adolescents keep their own ethnicity. I believe in a critical multicultural perspective that keeps each race claiming his/her own ethnicity. In my literature section, I specifically introduced the

---

<sup>76</sup> Haiming Liu, "Transnational Historiography: Chinese American Studies Reconsidered," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (Vol.65, No. 1, January 2004) :135-153

<sup>77</sup> Ibid

metaphor of the “hot pot”. This perspective values cultural and ethnic differences and challenges the traditional “melting pot” scholarship.

In conclusion, students’ successful combination of two cultures based on family social-economical background and efforts to keep their ethnicity are mentioned in the image description. Although some suggestions are raised for further improving cultural inheritance, overall Chinese American adolescent participants dealt with two cultures well. The experience of dealing with two cultures is an important factor in shaping their identities. The experience of embracing bi-cultures will likely prepare them to be more open to embrace multiple cultures in their adult life. Their lives were impacted by their parents’ expectation of furnishing them with an inheritance of Chinese cultures. The students’ educational experience is the product of combining western culture and eastern culture. Their life environment is an intentionally bilingual and bicultural setting that their parents created to promote understanding of two cultures. In this sense, biculturalism is not a phenomenon only relevant to immigrants or people with multiple ethnic identities.

Given the trend of globalization, understanding the role of cultural differences in shaping identity is meaningful for acquiring a just and comprehensive world-view. How the Chinese American adolescents shaped their cultural identity is meaningful to the research of adolescents, of Chinese American study, of the study about the children in Chinese mainland, and especially of bicultural study. It is also helpful to putting theory of social justice into praxis by relating to the Chinese American students’ everyday life. This study calls for the eradication of racial and cultural prejudice, the

establishment of sound environment, and equality of opportunity for better personal and social development.

## **Bibliography**

Amos J. Hatch, "Narrative Research: Telling Stories of Stories," *Journal of Tennessee Education* (2002): 7.

Amos J. Hatch, *Doing Qualitative Research in Research in Educational Settings*, (State University of New York Press, 2002):3

A. Banks, *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives*, (2004): 40-45.

A Brief History of Chinese Immigration to America, American Heritage Project:  
American Immigration Law Foundation,  
[http://www.aifl.org/awards/ahp\\_000\\_essay0.htm](http://www.aifl.org/awards/ahp_000_essay0.htm)

Barbara Thayer-Bacon and Charles S. Bacon, *Philosophy Applied to Education*,  
(Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1998):9

Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford, Cambridge:UK,  
Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1997).

Eeva Jokinen, "Sexual Difference in Marriage in the 1970s. Interrogating Women's  
Magazines," September and October, 2000, a paper to be presented at the 4th European  
Feminist Research Conference, Bologna.

Gloria Ladson-Billings, *the Dream-Keepers: Successful Teachers of African American  
Children*, (Jossey-Bass: A Wiley Company, 994):34

Handel Wright, "Qualitative Research in Education: From an Attractive Nuisance to a  
Dizzying Array of Traditions and Possibilities," *Journal of Tennessee*, (2002): 7-6

Haiming Liu, "Transnational Historiography: Chinese American Studies Reconsidered,"  
*Journal of the History of Ideas* (Volume 65, No.1, January 2004):35-53

<http://www.umich.edu/~eng499/concepts/power.html>

<http://asiarecipe.com/chispringfestival.html>

Israel Zangwill, *the Melting Pot*, (New York: Macmillan, 1990)

Joe L. Kincheloe and Shirley R. Steinberg, *Changing Multiculturalism*, (Open University  
Press: Buckingham, Philadelphia, 1997): 20.

John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, choosing Among Five  
Traditions*, (Sage Publications, International Educational and Professional Publisher,  
Thousand Oaks, London New Delhi, 1998)

Joan H. Strouse, *Exploring Social-Cultural Themes in Education: Readings in Social Foundations*, (2nd edition, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 2000):76

Jonah Goldstein and Jeremy Rayner, "The Politics of Identity in Late Modern Society," in *Theory and Society* 23 (1994), pp. 367-384

James E. Marcia, "Adolescence, Identity and the Barnardo Family," *Journal of Identity* (, vol.2 issue 3, Jul.2000, AN 684366):99

James A. Banks and McGee R.C. Bogdan and S.K. Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*. (Allyn & Bacon, Boston, 1992)

J. Leu Benet-Martínez, F. Lee; M.W. Morris, "Negotiating Biculturalism: Cultural Frame Switching in Bicultural with Oppositional Versus Compatible Cultural Identities," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, (Vol. 33 No.5, SAGE Publications September 2002): 492 – 516.

Kobena Mercer, "'1968': Periodizing Postmodernism Politics and identity," in *Cultural Studies*, Ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula A.Treichler with Linda Baughman and assistance from John Macgregor Wise (New York: Routledge, 1992): 424

Monica Heller, "Code Switching and the Politics of Language," in *One Speaker, Two Languages: Cross-disciplinary Perspectives on Code-switching*, ed. Lesley Milroy and Pieter Muysten, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995):58-74.

McIntosh Questionnaire: <http://www.mdcbowen.org/p2/rm/mcintosh.html>

Maxine Greene, The Passions of Pluralism: Multiculturalism and the Expanding Community, *The Journal of Negro Education* (summer, 1992) pp250-261

N. K. Denzin and Y. Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2000)

N. K. Denzin, *the Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods* (2nd Ed., New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978)

Lynda Stone, *The Education Feminism Reader*, edited with the assistance of Gail Masuchika Boldt., (New York: Routledge, 1994).

Leung Triandis, Clack Villareal, "Allocentric versus Idiocentric Tendencies: Convergent and Discriminate Validation," *Journal of Research in Personality* (1985):395-415.

Ruth McKoy Lowery, "Reading 'The Star Fisher': Toward Critical and Sociological Interpretations of Immigrant Literature," *Journal of Multicultural Education* (Vol. 0, No. 3, spring 2003):9-23.



Robert Jensen, *Black Directory Archive: White People Need Acknowledge of Unearned Privileges*, (1998)

Race and Ethnicity, spring, 03, Lecture Outline,  
<http://sobek.colorado.edu/~crosbyt/REidentitynotes.PDF>

R. Baumeister, D. Gilberts, S. Fiske, and G. Lindzey "The Self," *Handbooks of Social Psychology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998):680-740

Stuart J. Foster, "the Struggle for American Identity: Treatment of Ethnic Groups in United States History Textbooks," *History of Education*, (Vol. 28. No.3, 1999):25-278

Saskia E. Kunnen and Harke T. Bosma, "Fisher's Skill Theory Applied to Identity Development: A Response to Kroger," in *Journal of Identity*(Vol. 3 Issue 3, Jul 2003):247

Shawn Matheis and Gerald Adams, "Family Climate and Identity Style during Late Adolescence," in *Journal of Identity*, (Vol. 4, Jan 2004, AN 94586):77

Saul-ling Wang, "Promise, Pitfalls, and Principles of Text Selection in Curricular Diversification, The Asian-American Case," in "*The Freedom's Plow: Teaching in the Multicultural Classroom*", ed. Theresa Perry and James Fraser (New York: Routledge Press, 1993):109-203

Shehong Chen, *Being Chinese, Being Chinese American* (University of Iloilo's press, 2002)

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Ruth Evans, (New York: Manchester University Press; New York: Distributed in the USA by St. Martin's Press, 1998).

Terese M. Peretto Startta, "Using Ethnographic Methods: in Cross-Cultural Research," *Journal of Tennessee Education*. (2002/2003):32-39

Tiffany Yip and Andrew J. Fuligni, "Daily Variation in Ethnic Identity, Ethnic Behaviors, and Psychological Well-being among American Adolescents of Chinese Descent," *Journal of Child Development*, (Vol.73, No.5, Sep.-Otc. 2002): 557-572

W. Bishop, *Ethnographic Writing Research: Writing It Down, Writing It Up, and Reading It*. (New Hampshire: Boynton/Cook. 1999):100

Wing Tek Lum, "Chinese Hot Pot," *Expounding the Doubtful Points* (Honolulu, HI: Bamboo Ridge Press, 1987):105.

## **VITA**

Yan Cao was born in Hunan Province, China on July 09, 1976 and graduated from Xiangtan University where she received her Bachelor degree in English Language and Literature in 1998. She worked as an ESL teacher in the public Universities in China mainland from 1998-2001. In 2002, she entered the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and acquired the Master of Science degree in Instructional Technology and Educational Foundations in fall, 2004. She started her doctoral study at the same university in August, 2004.