NEGOTIATING MY CHINESENESS IN COLLEGE: THE COMPLEXITIES AND UNIQUENESS OF BEING CHINESE AMERICAN

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NEGOTIATING MY CHINESENESS IN COLLEGE: THE COMPLEXITIES AND UNIQUENESS OF BEING CHINESE AMERICAN

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education at the University of Kentucky

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Lexington, Kentucky
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Chinese Americans are historically perceived as “perpetual foreigners” in the American political, cultural and racial discourses. People of Chinese descent have long been conceived as sharing a same ancestor as those in China. Situated in the global context of China’s rise in the world, culturally, politically and economically, this research looks at how Chinese American college students negotiate their ethnic identity in the Midwest of the United States. The current Coronavirus outbreak brought new waves of anti-Chinese/Asian sentiment into American political and cultural life. This rhetoric makes the discussion of Chinese American college students’ ethnicity construction crucial.

Using qualitative research methods, this research followed thirteen Chinese American college students who enrolled in their heritage language class in college to explore their ethnicity construction. It explored how their Chinese identity was developed over time, how higher education contributed to their understanding of who they were and how their literacy in heritage language told us about their ethnicity. In-depth interviews with primary participants along with secondary participants (their friends, siblings and parents) were conducted; language class observations and informal socialization were also documented for data analysis.

Results showed that how Chineseness was understood and performed by Chinese American college students was the result of their negation of differences between and within groups. It reflected their constant and active negotiation against the hegemonic whiteness, which was the norm of the society they resided in, and the hegemonic Chineseness defined by China and its people. For all Chinese Americans, higher education provided an opportunity for their understanding of Chineseness to be renegotiated and modified; they have learned to develop a hybrid identity, which incorporated both their Chinese and American identity together. Heritage language literacy facilitated their ethnicity understanding, but lack of it did not necessarily prohibit their ethnicity development for some participants.

With the integration of their ethnicity and national identity, this research also observed the intersectionality of their other multiple identities with their ethnicity, such as gender identity, disability, religious identity and regional identity. The lens of intersectionality opened up new perspectives to understand the complex yet unique
experiences as Chinese Americans. It also revealed how their unique experiences were structured by the system of privilege and oppression.

China, as a country, remained distant yet immediate to them. It was distant because it was the country of their parents and grandparents. It was not their country of birth; America was. It was immediate because the opportunity to visit China facilitated by the convenience of transnational movement as well China’s rise in the world allowed them to increasingly see the importance of incorporating China/Chinese language into their future development. Implications on how to address Chinese Americans in higher education, how to understand Chinese Americans both by American and Chinese public are discussed.

KEYWORDS: Ethnicity, higher education, Chinese Americans, intersectionality, hybridity, heritage language

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To my father
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

My investigation of Chinese American college students’ performance of Chineseness derived from my own identities as an international student from China and as a mother of two young children, who were either born in the U.S. or came at a young age. I never thought of myself as different from other people when I lived in China; I have the same traits as Chinese people: yellow skin, black hair, and black eyes. I speak Chinese and celebrate Chinese festivals like the rest of the population. However, when I arrived in the United States, I immediately noticed my difference from the people around me, especially in appearance. However, I haven’t felt particularly foreign in the city where I have lived. This must have had to do with the presence of the university, which attracted thousands of international students from all over the world. People in this city were used to being around diverse groups.

In 2015 summer, my family went to explore the state we live in; we wanted to see what people’s lives were like in the rural areas of the United States. I have always been interested in that; as a girl coming from a small village in China, I was eager to see how people in rural areas in China differed from those in similar locations in the United States. We drove for three hours to the east part of the state. The eastern area of the state was believed to be its poorest area, and people there were considered more conservative than in other places. The scenery was really beautiful; high and green mountains lined the roads; houses were scattered among the green farmland. It was like a fairyland to me. I was born and raised in the middle of China, where there are mostly plains crowded with people. I had had few opportunities to be close to mountains, let alone be familiar with
people’s life in the mountains. Thus, the huge and beautiful mountains and the luxury of being far away from crowds were great attractions to me. On the way, we stopped at a local MacDonald’s for lunch. Our presence produced a subtle but perceivable disturbance. After we went into the MacDonald’s, we immediately felt that people’s eyes were on us; it seemed as if we were aliens from the outer space. Our later experience at the local store was similar; people were very surprised to see us; their praise of my then four-year old daughter, “She is so adorable,” gave me the wired unspoken impression of not really being sincerely appreciated. It gave me the feeling as if my daughter was exotic in their eyes. The experience we had in the eastern part of the state reminded me of the too familiar picture of a “foreigner” walking in one of China’s big cities in the 1980s and perhaps even now in rural areas of China. It was the foreigner’s whiteness or foreignness that attracted so much attention in China.

While we felt uncomfortable being stared at, my daughter had an experience at school that was even more disturbing. After she started public kindergarten, the media in the U.S. were occupied for a while with China’s air pollution, which transmitted the message that China was not a safe place to live. One day after school, my daughter told me that one of her classmates told her “Your country is dirty. Why did you come here to our country?” He made this remark based on my daughter’s facial features, and my daughter did not understand the implications of his remark. But upon hearing that, I was so furious that I wanted to talk to the teacher to educate students about diversity. But then I questioned my anger. Indeed, America is not our country, but what about the discrimination that other Asian-looking children may experience, those who were born and raised here and know only the US?
I began to think about the Chineseness I brought with me as well as that embodied by my daughter. This reflection led me to think about what is the Chineseness embodied in Chinese American students, born in the United States, which was dominated by white values and belief. What are their experiences, what are their strategies to cope with the situations my daughter has experienced, and how do they perform their Chineseness? These are the questions that I could not get out of my mind.

In academia, the differences between Eastern and Western people have long been discussed. Edward Said’s (1979) *Orientalism* exposed western representations of the East and Asia as backward and different from the West. China, especially, has long been considered as “the other,” exotic, and different by Western society. The recorded first Chinese woman arriving in the United States in 1834, Afong Moy, sent a clear message: “China and the Chinese were exotic, different, and as Moy's bound feet further illustrated, degraded and inferior” (E. Lee, 2015, p. 32).

However, in the twenty-first century, China has gradually emerged as a major world power economically, politically and culturally. The May 2006 issue of *Newsweek* described the twenty-first century as “China’s Century,” featuring China’s emergence and growing influence as a main player on the world stage in politics, economics, and even culture. In this so-called “China’s Century,” the examination of the transformation of Chineseness is crucial to our understanding of the transformation of Orientalism in the age of globalization (Chu, 2008, p. 184). Along with China’s rise in the world, the quest for flexible citizenship (Ong, 1999) and the transnational movement makes the study of performance of Chineseness important.
When people think of Chineseness, they may have an archetypical image of what constitutes a Chinese person, such as the person with black hair and yellow skin. However, the meaning of Chineseness is changing constantly for people living within China, and this is certainly true for the people of Chinese descent living abroad. People of Chinese descent living abroad have a different understanding and performance of the Chineseness they embody due to their localization in their host society. The dual domination of the United States and China argued by L. Wang (1995) (racial exclusion or oppression from the US and extraterritorial pull from China) experienced by Chinese Americans is not only applied to Chinese Americans but perhaps to any people of Chinese descent living abroad.

As a Chinese national who came to the US to pursue graduate degree, I am very interested in how Chinese American college students understand their Chinese identity, what is Chineseness in their mind, and how they perform it in their daily life. I am also interested in how college influences their perception of their Chinese identity and how China, an emerging world power, has an impact on how they perceive their ethnic identity. Though I acknowledge that Chinese American college students do have other identities, my focus is on their Chinese ethnic identity, and I allow participants the freedom to bring in whatever they consider important in their ethnic identity negotiation process.

Through an intensive study on Chinese American college students, I argue that in negotiating their Chinese ethnicity, Chinese American college students struggle between and within groups. They battle against the differences between themselves and their American peers and within the Chinese population. In defining who they are between
groups, they are struggling with whiteness, the dominant cultural belief in the society in which they reside. The whiteness that is constantly used as standard, interprets their experience as “others.” When socializing with people within Chinese communities, especially those from China, they are deemed as “foreign” based on the commonly understood and perceived Chineseness by contemporary Chinese people. Thus, in negotiating the differences between and within, and in navigating the imposed whiteness and Chineseness, Chinese American college students learn to develop a hybrid identity that embraces both parts of their identity. Their different perception of and performance of Chineseness is a strong evidence of the hybrid identity they develop.

1.2 Overview of the Dissertation

For the students who participated in this study, this hybrid identity resulted from both family dynamics and the college environment. Families’ different strategies in transmitting and maintaining heritage culture laid the foundation for their later exploration of who they were in college. College’s diverse student population, ethnic studies courses, and various student organizations and co-curricular activities allowed students to engage in finding who they were. They reported a renewed understanding of themselves in college. Their Chinese identity was either rediscovered, strengthened or modified in college. However, students’ agency in this identity engagement varied from one another, and the general white campus climate also prevented some from embracing their Chinese identities. Thus, college education provided an arena for students to participate in identity exploration but had limited role for some students’ growth in terms of identity development. Chapter 3 and chapter 4 present Chinese American college students’ ethnicity negotiation and the college’s role in it. Participants’ different
understandings and performances of Chineseness are also presented in these two
chapters. On the one hand, these students further challenge Chineseness essentialism just
as scholars Ien Ang (2001/1998) and Shih et al (2013) argued; on the other hand, their
performance of incorporating Chinese values and American beliefs together demonstrates
how hybrid identities are manifested. How their Chinese identity and American identity
interact with each other emerges in chapter 3 and chapter 4. The support they gained from
their extended family and ethnic community to maintain their ethnicity along with their
active exploration of their identity in higher education enabled some Chinese American
college students presented in chapter 3 to own the hybrid identity they developed.
Students presented in chapter 4, for practical reasons, gained little support from their
family and community to preserve their ethnicity; this, along less exploration of their
identity in college, led many of them to consider being Chinese American as an imposed
identity.

Participants’ assertions of the existence of their other identities pushed the
researcher to investigate deliberately the intersectionality between their multiple
identities. In chapter 5, these analysis demonstrate that while ethnicity/racial identity has
been typically imposed on Chinese American college students by the larger society due to
their physical appearance and cultural practice, the intersectionality between
ethnicity/racial identity and their other identities –such as gender, physical disability,
religion, region and being a child of immigrants –enables their experiences to be unique
and not to be essentialized.

In response to China’s increasing importance in the world economy, chapter 6
discusses how China, as a country, plays a role in the students’ ethnic identity
construction. The U.S. public mass media’s response to China as well Chinese American college students’ own understanding of China along with their parents’ views are discussed. The underlying meanings of being Chinese including cultural and political connotations are also considered. While the majority of the participants considered China as their heritage country, embracing its cultural values but not its political implications, some participants chose to embrace both the cultural and political implications of Chineseness. China can be their country in addition to America. This “flexible citizenship” suggested by Ong (1999) is reinterpreted based on participants’ views of the relationship between citizenship and nation-state. Chapter 7 provides a closing discussion on how this research speaks to current immigrants and higher education administration in terms of heritage culture maintenance and diversity on campus.

The chapter arrangements also reflect my analytic journey. I started with an interest in investigating Chinese American college students’ understanding of their Chinese identity living in the United States. Therefore, the hybridity of Chinese and American identities is the focus of chapters 3 and 4. However, in my analysis of this hybridity, intersectionality of their Chinese identity and American identity with other dimensions of identity also emerged as significant. This intersectionality is alluded to in chapters 3 and 4 and then developed more fully in chapter 5. Though I expected to find that China’s global rise would influence Chinese American college students’ ethnicity construction, the rich date generated during this research complicated my initial expectations. This complex relationship with China is presented in chapter 6. But first, chapter 2 provides the theoretical framework for the study, discusses previous studies on this topic, and presents the research design employed for this research.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Student Identity Development Theory

Chinese descendants’ understanding of Chineseness and how they choose to perform that Chineseness is related to how they identify themselves. According to Josselson (1996), “Identity is what we make of ourselves within a society that is making something of us” (p. 28). Identity is a self-perception and understanding of oneself within a society. Identity development is central to student development theory, and it is especially important for college students. McAdams and Guo (2014) stated that college years was a time when young people struggle to find out who they were and how they would lead lives that mattered (p. 15). Hanson (2014) also proposed that one goal of higher education should be students’ identity development.

Erik Erikson, a founder of identity development theory, addressed identity development across the life span of a person (1959/1963). He believed that individual development was influenced by internal dynamics and external environments. He proposed eight stages of identity development. The first four stages of development occurred during childhood, and the remaining four stages took place in adolescence and adulthood. While Erikson paid more attention to the internal dynamics of identity development, Arthur Chickering (1969) emphasized the environmental influence on the identity development of college students. The environmental influence included institutional objectives, institutional size, student-faculty relationships, curriculum, teaching, friendships and student communities, and student development programs and
services (Evans et al., 1998, p. 38-41). Therefore, for college students, Chickering posited that the campus environment influences how they see their ethnic identity.

In his 2010 book *Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us*, Claude Steele, a social psychologist who has studied how stereotype threat influenced academic achievement gaps, argued that the biased or stereotyped environment that people lived in could seriously affect people’s identity negotiation. Acknowledging the prevalence of stereotype threat, Steele (2010) wrote,

I believe stereotype threat is a standard predicament of life. It springs from our human powers of intersubjectivity—the fact that as members of society we have a pretty good idea of what other members of our society think about lots of things, including the major groups and identities in society (p. 5).

He demonstrated how society’s negative stereotype of African American students’ intelligence detrimentally influenced their achievement in academia. Negative stereotypes linked to social identities in a society affected how people interacted with each other. Steele (2010) stated,

[B]y imposing on us certain conditions of life, our social identities can strongly affect things as important as our performances in the classroom and on standardized tests, our memory capacity, our athletic performance, the pressure we feel to prove ourselves, even the comfort level we have with people of different groups—all things we typically think of as being determined by individual talents, motivations, and preferences (p. 4).

Steele’s work provided insights into how to understand Chinese American college students’ ethnicity negotiation in contexts in which their identity contingencies put them into negative stereotyped situations.

Furthermore, gender also calls for attention in students’ identity development studies, though scholars hold different attitudes toward gender difference in identity
construction. Kroger (1997), both in her review of research on gender difference in identity structure, content and context and in an empirical study on gender difference, found minimal difference between males and females in these factors as associated with their identity formation process. However, as early as 1979, Hodgson and Fischer already found gender differences in identity formation. They found that males focused on intrapersonal aspects of identity, while females focused more on interpersonal aspects. To be more specific, late-adolescent males tended to discover their identity through issues of competence and knowledge. They strove for competence by settling on a career path and thereby projecting to themselves and others a stable sense of their future role in society; and they used knowledge to develop a sense of ideology, or a firmly held belief about the nature of the world. Women, on the other hand, found their identity through relating to others and had the capacity to experience higher levels of intimacy than men (Hodgson & Fischer, 1979, p. 47). The discovery that women’s identity was mostly relational was further supported by Josselson’s (1996) longitudinal work on how women became who they were from college life to midlife. It fully captured the identity construction process unique to women. For women, identity was fundamentally relational (Josselson, 2000. p. 114). Women constructed their identity by relating themselves to their husbands, their children, their parents, their siblings and their friends; this was different from males’ occupational aspirations or their ideological positions, things central to identity described by Erikson.

Bem (1981) investigated a different perspective on gender differences in identity construction. The gender schema theory proposed by her illustrated that individuals constructed and experienced their self-concept within a framework of gender-based
categories. Children learned which elements of their environment and cultures belonged in male and female categories, and then linked those elements to themselves based on the category in which they felt they belong, leaving behind elements that did not fit into the “appropriate” gender category. In other words, gender behavior is socially constructed.

Not only have psychologists studied identity development, sociologists, postmodernists, post-structuralists, and researchers from human and developmental ecology also studied identity development intensively (Torres, Jones and Renn, 2009). These researchers were more concerned with the social context and environmental influence on identity development. Sociologists usually considered identity by placing individuals in a given social group. Within higher education, sociologists emphasized the role of higher education institutions in creating contexts for the development of “felt” identities, which was a person’s thoughts and feelings that did not necessarily find expression in actions (Torres et al., 2009, p. 579). Human and developmental ecology, represented by Bronfenbrenner (King, 2011), emphasized the interactive process between the individual’s identity and the environment. These included: Person (personal experiences and characteristics of students), Process (interactions with others), Context (microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems), and Time (historical influence, or chronosystem). These theories in student identity development enabled the current research to explore how Chinese American college students’ ethnic identity was developed overtime and how contextual factors such as higher education institutions, family, community, peer group and gender interacted with each other and contributed to students’ ethnic identity development.
Building upon the studies of student identity development, Jones and Abes proposed The Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI). This model was elaborated in detail in their book, *Identity Development of College Students: Advancing Frameworks for Multiple Dimensions of Identity*, in 2013. The MMDI explained that the reason why some identities were more salient than others was that this connected to “structures of inequality and systems of power and privilege” and salience was also related to the experience of difference and feelings of "otherness" (Jones and Abes, 2013, p. 85). This model explained that people’s identity had different dimensions and what made one dimension of a person’s identity salient compared to other dimensions of identity for that same person. According to Jones and Abes (2013), this model Examines identity through a prism of difference and privilege illuminates the influence of contextual factors that both shape and press, or push and pull on, multiple dimensions of identity, and contributes to an understanding of identity development as a dynamic, evolving process continually shaped by these many contexts (p. 86).

The Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity, which is from a sociological perspective, enables us to understand the interactions of a person’s dimensions of identity and to make sense of the importance of their ethnic identity relative to other dimensions of their identity. It also allows us to see how environmental context affects the experience and salience of these dimensions.

Ethnicity, which is one type of identity, is defined as a feeling of belonging and commitment, the sense of shared values and behaviors, and attitudes towards one’s group (Phinney, 1990, p.501). Ethnicity has also been used to refer to distinction based on national origin, language, religion, food—and other cultural markers (Mittleberg and
Waters, 1992, p. 425). I anticipate that the theories on student identity development would be applicable to ethnicity development as well.

2.1.2 Intersectionality

The term intersectionality, coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, underscores the “multidimensionality” of marginalized subjects' lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139). It can be defined as the “relationship among multiple social dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations” (McCall, 2005, p. 1771). It can also be defined as the processes through which multiple social identities converge and ultimately shape individual and group experience (Shields, 2008). In arguing the importance of using intersectionality in investigating identity development, Jones (2009) argued that an individual’s sense of self can be based on many groups with which he or she identifies, and people can be defined simultaneously by their race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, religion and other aspects of their identities (Jones, 2009).

In their Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI), Jones and Abes (2013) explained the reason why some identities were more salient than others was it connected to “structures of inequality and systems of power and privilege” and salience was also related to the experience of difference and feelings of “otherness” (Jones and Abes, 2013, p. 85). This model explains that people’s identity has different dimensions and what makes one dimension of a person’s identity salient compared to other dimensions of identity for that same person. While the experiences within groups are distinctive according to the extent to which they are members of other marginalized or privileged populations, but the goal of intersectional analysis is not to develop a hierarchy
of oppression (Berger and Guidroz, 2009), though intersectionality suggests the multiple overlapping systems of oppression that shape our lives and experiences in complex ways (Griffins and Museus, 2011). Intersectionality asserts that the confluence of one’s multiple marginalized and privileged identities is an interaction that creates a unique experience, distinctive from those with whom they may share some identities but no others (Choo and Ferree, 2010; Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality pushes beyond reliance on singular social groupings (e.g. races or genders) to richer, more informative analyses that can concurrently account for multiple systems of oppression (Hancock, 2007a).

The significance of applying intersectionality into study of a college student population has not been widely acknowledged. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), those who studied college students were increasingly disaggregating samples by singular social identities. Museus and Griffin (2011 stated “In many ways, research focusing on the unique experience of individuals who belong to two or more social groups is still in its infancy in the field (p.9). Though this study focuses on Chinese American college students’ ethnic identity development, the intersectionality with their other dimensions of identity provides a richer and fuller understanding of this group of population.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Changing Meaning of Chineseness

Many scholars have studied the performance of Chineseness by people of Chinese descent. As a renowned scholar in Chinese studies, Tu (1994b) rejected Chinese essentialism, which relates Chineseness to a certain group of people and a certain

A focus on the Han race would inadvertently marginalize over ninety million members of Chinese minorities; requiring birth in the Divine Land excludes most of the 36 million or so overseas Chinese; emphasizing proficiency in spoken Mandarin, which is unintelligible to millions of Han Chinese, may make speakers of Cantonese or Fujianese feel inadequate; and the parochialism of imposing a "patriotic" code of ethics, no matter how broadly defined, is too obvious to need elaboration (p. vii).

Tu (1994b) was trying to detach the meaning of being Chinese from Han essentialism and include other ethnic, lingual, and regional people into the bigger picture of being Chinese. This intended inclusion of people of various backgrounds in the concept of Chineseness is undoubtedly right, as people of Chinese descent living inside and outside of China do come from different backgrounds.

Even within the Chinese state territory, the meaning of being Chinese varies, as demonstrated by Yang (1997). Yang traced the meanings of being Chinese across historical times for Mainland Chinese through the lens of the mass media in Shanghai; her description of the change of the content in Shanghai’s mass media illustrated that being Chinese varied across time. The meaning of Chineseness was influenced by political and cultural forces inside and outside of China. Chinese people’s active political and cultural participation had also changed from being restricted by the state to an embrace of popular culture influenced by Hong Kong, Taiwan, and later America in the 1990s.

Other scholars have also delineated the different performances of Chineseness in various parts of the world. Blanc (1997) compared the construction of Chinese identity
for people of Chinese descent in Thailand and the Philippines in the early 1990s. People of Chinese descent in Thailand enjoyed more freedom to be involved in the social, political and economic events of Thailand and they were more at ease in demonstrating their Chineseness than people of Chinese descent in Philippine; Chinese Philippines were more restricted in the participation in society and had to conceal their Chineseness in order to be accepted. Through these observations, Blanc argues that people’s different demonstration of Chineseness in the two countries is under the influence of each country’s policy toward immigrant groups.

While Blanc argued that people’s performance of Chineseness was related to their host country’s political and economic situations, Yao’s (2009) definition of the Chineseness embodied by college students was individually specific. Yao surveyed a group of Chinese Malaysian college students about what they think makes them Chinese. The survey results were summarized into three categories: I am Chinese because my ancestor was Chinese, I am Chinese because I do certain things, and the government identification card says I am Chinese. Yao found the different meanings of being Chinese for people of Chinese descent in Malaysia. Chineseness can be imposed or can be a willing choice for Chinese Malaysians.

The changing meaning of Chineseness was also described by Quah (2009) from the perspective of popular culture in Singapore. Different versions of obituaries from the three generations of the Liu family from 1973 to 1993 illustrated the changing performance of Chineseness in terms of language use, format of the obituaries and family numbers included in the obituaries. The first generation wrote obituaries in traditional Chinese characters and included their immediate and remote relatives; the second
generation used simplified Chinese characters and only included immediate family members; the third generation wrote the obituary in English and only the immediate family members are included, most of whom were abroad. The Singapore ballad “Ah Ben Ah Ben” demonstrated that the Chinese identity was nothing significant for the protagonist, Ah Ben. His name, which signified his ethnic identity, was merely a label that he can “wear or dispose whenever he likes” (Quah, 2009, p. 230). Quah (2009) argued that the changing meanings of Chineseness for Chinese Singaporeans were under the influence of their multicultural society, the global trend of migration, and especially the ideological, psychological and economic presences of China.

While people of Chinese descent living in Southeast Asia, which is geographically close to China, have demonstrated their adaptations in performing their Chineseness, people in the Western hemisphere have a different strategy in performing their Chineseness. Mitchell (1997) described how Hong Kong people, especially those rich people, performed their Chineseness in Canada. Mitchell argued that Hong Kong people in Canada were making every effort to blend into the host society by changing some of their Chinese “traits,” such as overt manifestation of wealth and prosperity, to obtain cultural citizenship. This place-related perception of Chineseness was also depicted by L. Wang (2013/1995). His comparison of Chineseness in four places: Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore and San Francisco illustrated that “Each city faces its own unique set of practices” (Wang, 2013, p. 141). It further points to the fluidity of Chineseness.

Scholars’ studies on the fluidity of Chineseness speaks to the unaccountability of claiming an essential representation of Chineseness. Ien Ang (1998) went one step further
to argue that in addition to the fluidity of Chineseness, people of Chinese descent should say *No* to Chineseness. Ang argued against the metaphor, “the living tree,” proposed by Tu (1994a). Ang (1998) pointed out that “The metaphor of the living tree dramatically imparts the ultimate existential dependence of the periphery on the center” (p.232). In other words, Ang criticized Tu’s (1994b) advocacy that there was a root for Chineseness. Ang (1998) agreed that Chineseness was changing and not fixed, but she pushed the concept forward, stating, “Being Chinese outside of China cannot possibly mean the same thing as inside. It varies from place to place, molded by the local circumstances in different parts of the world where people of Chinese ancestry have settled and constructed new ways of living” (p. 225). Ang (2001) also argued, “Chineseness is a category whose meanings are not fixed and pregiven, but constantly renegotiated and rearticulated, both inside and outside China” (p. 25). Not satisfied to recognize that the performance of Chineseness differs by locality, Ang in her article, “Can One Say No to One’s Chineseness,” pushed the argument further to question the validity of imposing Chineseness on Chinese overseas whose ancestors emigrated from China centuries ago. She stated,

> Contained in the diasporic perspective itself, therefore, are the seeds of its own deconstruction, which provides us with an opportunity to interrogate, not just the different meanings Chineseness takes on in different local contexts—a limited anti-essentialism which still takes the category of Chinese itself for granted—but, more radically, the very significance and validity of Chineseness as such as a category of identification and analysis (Ang, 1998, p. 227-228).

In other words, Ang questioned the validity of imposing Chineseness on people of Chinese descent who have long removed from China. This had to do with her own experience and her identity development, which is discussed next.
2.2.2 Sense of Identity for Chinese Americans

Intensive studies on the changing meaning of Chineseness enable us to not assume a unified version of being Chinese. However, in many western people’s eyes, no matter how changing and fluid Chineseness embodied by people of Chinese descent is and no matter how hard they have tried to assimilate into the host societies they reside in, they are not viewed as “one of them.” E. Lee (2015) argued that Asian Americans will always be “seen as Asians, not Americans, and come to embody whatever threat the land of their ancestry allegedly poses to the United States” (p. 381). The Covid-19 has brought renewed racial discrimination against the Asian American community in the US today.

This imposed perception of Chinese Americans was also discussed in depth by Tuan (1998) in her in-depth study on later generation Chinese/Japanese Americans. Furthermore, the feeling of not belonging was also manifested in various studies. Li’s (1994) personal reflection on being a Chinese American, *From Qiao (僑) to Qiao (橋)*, revealed a sense of rootlessness and homelessness. He reflected that living in the United States, he couldn’t blend in with his surroundings due to his physical appearance, religion, language, and even values. But when he returned to China, he felt “out of place” (p. 219).

In Gabriel’s (2011) interview of renowned professor in cultural studies, Ien Ang, they explored issues of identity and Chineseness for people of Chinese descent. Ang’s personal narrative revealed that it was hard for people like her to identify which country they belonged to and which country they called home. For her, “Hybridity, creolization, and syncretism are… the living realities that are urgently needed to break down barriers of understanding between center and margin, black and white, Asia and the West”
Ang was born as a *Peranakan* in Indonesia – an Indonesian of distant Chinese descent. Her family was not accepted by the majority Javanese and did not socialize with the *totok* Chinese (the more recent migrations from China after the late 19th century) either. In fact, for her, Chinese was “just a legacy of the past, to be regretted in some way” (Gabriel, 2011, p. 124). Ang expressed “a deep resistance to the determinism that is assumed by this huge emphasis on ancestry, as if you are forever chained to it” (Gabriel, 2011, p. 131). In fact, she would choose a diasporic attachment to Indonesia not China (Garriel, 2011, p. 129).

How do Chinese American consider their identity in relation to China and to their country of residence? According to L. Wang (1994), people of Chinese descent have developed various strategies to cope with this. Wang utilized the Chinese word *gen* (root) to categorize five mentalities for Chinese overseas. *Luoye guigen*: the sojourner mentality, described that Chinese overseas were like leaves fallen to the root of a tree and must eventually return to their Chinese homeland soil; *zhancao-chugen*: total assimilation, described Chinese overseas who sought to assimilate to their host culture by erasing and uprooting all traces of their Chinese cultural heritage; *Luodi shenggen*: accommodation, was the mentality adopted by Chinese overseas who settled down in a foreign land and accommodated themselves to certain aspects of the host culture while ignoring others; *xungen wenzu*: ethnic pride and consciousness, was the mentality of Chinese overseas who formed ethnic communities cultivating their heritage and demand a rightful place in the host country; *shigen qunzu*: the uprooted, was the identity adopted by Chinese overseas who have lost faith in the ability of China to achieve modernization and decided to move abroad voluntarily without the intention of returning.
Young adulthood is an important time for identity negotiation (Erikson, 1959/1963). College provides students with opportunities and challenges in searching who they are. How do Chinese American college students negotiate their Chinese identity? What strategy do they choose to cope with their being Chinese? Illuminated by the previous study, this research aims to discover the nuances of the identity search for second generation Chinese Americans, who are not far removed from their heritage culture.

2.2.3 Family Influence on Ethnic Identity Development

Family environment has an impact on children’s ethnic identity development. Juang and Syed (2010) focused on the influence of family cultural socialization practices on college students’ ethnic identity. Based on a larger sample of students from various ethnic groups (African Americans, Asian American, Latino Americans and White), they found a strong link between family cultural socialization practices and students’ ethnic identity exploration but not the identity commitment. It means that parents' socialization practices may be effective in prompting their children to explore their ethnic background, but may not necessarily instill a sense of commitment. Umaña-Taylor and Guimond’s (2010) research aimed at exploring the role of familial ethnic socialization, warmth-support and adolescents’ perceptions of discrimination experience in Latino adolescents’ predicted ethnic identity growth. In in their longitudinal research, they found a similar relationship between familial ethnic socialization practice and Latino adolescents’ ethnic identity growth. Familial ethnic socialization is a significant predictor of further levels of ethnic identity exploration, resolution and affirmation. Brittian (2013) also found the same relationship between family ethnic socialization and ethnic identity exploration but
not ethnic commitment among biracial students. More recent research on the relationship between Asian American college students’ family socialization and ethnic identity and psychological well-being further showed that family ethnic socialization practices was positively and significantly related to Asian American college students’ ethnic identity (Nguyen et al., 2015).

Thus, previous research demonstrated that the family environment had an influence on students’ ethnic identity. The current research will further address how family socialization contributes to students’ ethnic identity development. However, we also know that ethnic identity is shaped by more than just family.

2.2.4 Gender Difference in Ethnic Identity

Studies have not reached a consensus on how gender matters to students’ ethnic identity. Tasi and Huligni (2012) found no gender difference in ethnic search and belonging for college students from various ethnic groups. Nguyen et al. (2015) found that for Asian American college women only, higher levels of family ethnic socialization were positively related to stronger ethnic identity, and after controlling for the effects of family ethnic socialization, ethnic identity was positively related to psychological well-being for women, but not for men. Juang and Syed (2010) also observed that the link between family cultural socialization and ethnic identity was stronger for college females compared to males. In their longitudinal research on Latino adolescents’ ethnic identity, Umaña-Taylor and Guimond (2010) also observed the gender difference in ethnic identity development. They found that the association between familial ethnic socialization and ethnic identity exploration, resolution and affirmation was significantly stronger for female adolescents than male adolescents, confirming the previous study that
females were typically viewed as the carrier of culture and expected to pass on cultural traditions, though their participants were high school students. They also observed that familial ethnic socialization practice predicted the rate of growth in ethnic identity resolution for male adolescents, but not for female adolescents, meaning ethnic identity resolution may not grow uniformly during middle to late adolescence for male adolescents as it did for female adolescents, but rather, growth for male adolescents may be heavily dependent on what their families are doing to socialize them about their ethnicity. Familial ethnic socialization experiences may ignite a process of ethnic identity for male adolescents, whereas for female adolescents this process is already in progress. Gender also matters when perceived discrimination experience in relation to ethnic identity was addressed. Umaña-Taylor and Guimond (2010) found that male Latino students who reported higher level of perceived discrimination tended to report higher levels of ethnic identity exploration, which indicated that discrimination may serve as a type of crisis that engages and/or increases adolescents' curiosity regarding their ethnic group membership. But male adolescents who reported higher levels of perceived discrimination also tended to report fewer positive feelings about their ethnic group membership. This pattern was not observed for female Latino female students.

In Surez-Orozco and Qin’s (2006) review of research on studies of gender in immigrant families, they observed that immigrants’ families did adopt different strategies in socializing their daughter from their sons in many areas, such as housework, dating. In the area of ethnic identity, they also observed that girls tend to have a stronger sense of ethnic identity than their male counterparts. Yip and Fuligni (2002) in their research on
Chinese American high school students revealed that girls tended to have a more salient ethnic identity than boys.

Thus, though more research, mostly quantitative research, tends to find gender differences in students’ ethnic identity development, there is still a debate. This research, using a qualitative research method, hopes to contribute some insight on this issue.

2.2.5 Higher Education Environments and Ethnic Identity Development

Higher education institutions provide students with diverse environments for them to explore themselves. Inkelas (2004) found a strong and significant relationship between APA (Asian Pacific American) college students’ involvement in ethnic clubs and organizations and their heightened sense of awareness and understanding of APA issues. He also discovered that participation in university-sponsored diversity events appeared to directly influence APA students’ sense of ethnic awareness/understanding. Students’ participation in extracurricular student organizations in college was also believed to enhance students’ black identity (Harper and Quaye, 2007). This campus extracurricular participation, regardless of whether they were ethnically related or not, facilitated search about the meaning of one’s ethnic group membership during college, which was also observed by Tasi and Huligni (2012). They found that students at 4-year colleges were engaged in greater levels of ethnic search and exhibited marginally higher levels of ethnic belonging than did 2-year colleges. A qualitative research on how campus climate influenced students’ identity revealed that a diverse campus environment contributed to students’ sense of belonging and acceptance, which was, to some degree, due to the perceived ethnic similarity with peers attending the school (Santos, et. al., 2007). Though not specially situated in higher education setting, Steele’s (2010) study on stereotype
threat also demonstrated how the racialized environment influenced students’ identity negotiation. Participants in Santos, et. al.’s study also commented on the ethnic programs and courses offered by the university helped facilitate their ethnic identity development.

In addition to the effect of higher education campus climate and students’ participation in the co-curricular activities on college students’ identity development, curriculum in relation to ethnic studies also has an impact on students’ ethnic identity development. Ramirez’s (2008) dissertation on the effects of a specific Chicago/Latino American studies course on ethnic identity development among 11th and 12th grade Latino/Chicago high school students showed that the after students took the course, they had an enhanced understanding of their ethnic identity. The students were more aware of their cultural history and their diverse ethnic backgrounds, which led them to be more grounded in their identity (p. 108).

While Ramirez found the positive effect of ethnic studies on high school students’ ethnic identity awareness, Chan (2007) found more complicated results. Situating her research in a Canadian middle school that intentionally promoted cultural diversity, Chan found that the various cultural-sensitive curricula offered by the middle school contributed to shaping students’ ethnic identity in ways not anticipated by teachers and administrators. It revealed ways in which balancing affiliation to their home cultures while at the same time abiding by expectations of their teachers and peers in their school context could be difficult. It raises questions on how to incorporate culture into the curriculum in ways that are relevant to the students involved.

Vasquez (2005) studied how a Chicano literature class and ethnic identity mutually influenced each other for both Latino and non-Latino college students. Through
class observation and interviews, the researcher found that for Latino students, the offering of a minority literature class gave them a sense of ethnic legitimation and empowerment. They gained an insider perspective of their own heritage and were equipped to express their ethnic identity confidently. Their own background also enabled them to gain ownership in reading the literature. For non-Latino students, learning the minority literature gave them a world-travel experience and their sentiment of cross-cultural empathy also led to an understanding of the unfairness of the stilted social hierarchy. Thus, the non-Latino students gained more understanding of the Latino students. This research highlighted the importance of ethnic studies on one ethnic group’s development of identity. It fostered their attachment of and pride in their own heritage.

While the effectiveness of ethnic studies on students’ ethnic identity was found in previous studies, Jessop and Williams’s (2009) research situated at a small and mainly white campus in the United Kingdom found otherwise. The black and minority ethnic (BME) students, the main subjects of Jessop and Williams’s research, found that their curriculum was limited, and their ethnic group’s voice was not fully articulated. These BME students, though they saw curriculum as a space for exploring and nurturing their ethnic identity, didn’t necessarily attach to their heritage, as most of them were second and third generation BME students; they admitted that they had more in common with ethnically different friends than with ethnically similar students. Studying in this small and predominately white campus, though they noticed their “otherness,” they didn’t report having experienced overt racism, but subtle discomfort. The ethnic courses were limited in enhancing their ethnicity attachment.
Through studying White students’ understanding of bias, privilege and structural inequality, Puchner et al. (2012) used the “White Students’ Racial Identity Attitude Scale” (WRIAS) to measure change in a pre- and post-test for undergraduate and graduate students who took race related courses for a four-week summer session. They found that both undergraduate and graduate students who took the race related courses had an increased understanding about race. Their research further showed the importance of curriculum in changing students’ perception on identity.

College curriculum’s influence on students’ identity was also investigated by Halagao (2004). Focusing on Filipino American college students’ learning experience of one course, Pinoy Tech, which was a course on Filipino Americans, the author found that the course problematized Filipino American college students’ conceptions of their ethnic and racial identities in that it introduced something that was contradicted with their previous conception of being Filipino Americans. This conflict led them to further explore their ethnic identity. However, all the participants expressed a sense of empowerment after learning about their ethnic history.

In addition to the influence of ethnic courses on students’ ethnic identity, students’ understanding of their ethnic identity and major choice can also mutually influence each other. Syed (2010) provided an insightful picture of this. Using mixed methods, Syed interviewed 90 college students from ethnically diverse backgrounds at five time points of their college life about their choice of major and their understanding of the role their ethnicity played in their major selection. He found that ethnic identity did play a role in students’ major choice though in a varying degree. The importance that ethnic identity played in their major selection increased as they moved along in their college life.
Dividing students into different groups depending on their ethnic awareness (low awareness, consciousness-raised, high awareness, integrating and compartmentalized), Syed found that except for the students in the low awareness group, students in other groups gradually integrated their ethnic identity into their major choice by either switching their major from science/engineer to humanities/social sciences, or by declaring a minor or major in relation to their ethnicity. They gradually incorporated their ethnicity into their career passion.

Thus, previous literature has shown the positive effect of ethnicity related courses on students’ ethnic identity development. Research also demonstrated that this positive effect increased in college years, but was not salient in secondary schools. This further demonstrated that students’ ethnic identity was developmental and fluid; it also reinforced the crucial role of higher education institutions in students’ identity development.

2.2.6 Heritage Language and Ethnic Identity

The urgency of maintaining heritage language is constant on researchers’ agenda. Maintaining heritage language is not only a great national resource—enabling ethnic groups to learn their heritage language with less effort, which contributes to multilingualism — but also helps ethnic groups’ ethnic identity formation (Peyton, et al., 2001). However, despite the great benefits of maintaining one’s heritage language, the societal influence of assimilation and formal education’s emphasis on the importance of English have led to heritage language loss (X. Wang, 1996). Research has shown that heritage language loss occurred quickly; the second generation was less likely to speak
their heritage language as smoothly as their parents did (Cho, 2000; Fishman, 2001; J. Lee 2002).

Though the loss of heritage language does not necessarily indicate the loss of ethnic identity, the ability to speak the heritage language is believed to relate closely with ethnic identity awareness. Oh and Fuligni’s (2010) found that among high school Latino and Asian American adolescents, heritage language proficiency was closely related to students’ ethnic identity. This relationship between heritage language proficiency and ethnic identity was also observed by J. Lee (2002) among Korean American college students. Yip and Fuligni (2002) also reported that Chinese language use was an ethnic behavior that was closely related to participants’ ethnic identity salience.

However, despite the positive relation of heritage language proficiency with ethnicity development, the relationship between language and ethnicity is not lineal. Fishman (1998) argued that the nature of

Ethnicity [is] to signify the macro-group belongingness or identificational dimension of culture, whether that of individuals or of aggregates per se. Ethnicity is both narrower than culture and more perspectival than cultures… The perspectival quality of ethnicity means that its specification or attribution is fundamentally subjective, variable and very possibly non-consensual. Some of the individuals who are defined as Xians by others (who consider themselves as Yians) may actually not consider themselves to be Xians at all. And some of those who do not consider themselves Xians now, may come to consider themselves Xians five or ten years from now, or in the next generation. Finally, for some of those who do consider themselves Xians, their Xianship may be much more central or salient in consciousness and self-identity than it is for others. The variability in perceived and experienced ethnicity also leads to variability in its association with language (Fishman, 1998, p. 329).

Therefore, due to the fluidity of ethnicity, imposing heritage language proficiency on ethnicity identification seems inadequate. In fact, Tuan’s (1998) participants strongly
dissociated heritage language ability as well as other cultural practice with their ethnic pride. Based on the previous research, it is important to keep a critical attitude toward how heritage language proficiency influences Chinese American college students’ ethnicity development.

2.2.7 The Meaning of Whiteness and Its Hegemony

Living in the United States, Chinese Americans’ ethnic identity construction is inevitably influenced by the racial relations in America. The way that how racial minorities are perceived and treated by the American society is centered around the concept of whiteness, which is associated with beliefs and values embraced by the white ethnics. Bush (2011) has coined the term “sincere fictions of the white self” (p. xi) with Hernan Vera to illustrate that how whiteness was viewed as a norm and that American identity was associated with a white identity. The establishment of white race as a privileged status, however, is achieved not ascribed. According to Cox (1948), the initial emergence of notion of pan-European racial superiority and the system of racial hierarchy, exploration, and oppression did not start until the appearance of capitalism. The colonial expansion and the beginning of the slave trade enabled racial notions to take hold. The racial notions were seen as expressions of pan-European hegemony and were used to justify the subordination and exploitation of large number of people who formed the labor pool (Bush, 2011, p. 17-18). The notion of the privilege of being a white took additional practical meaning when it was deliberately used to quell the potentially dangerous alliance of slaves, the native population and white indentured servants in the United States (Zinn, 1995). Zinn argued that as a way of control, the plantation
bourgeoisie offered the European laborers a variety of previously denied benefits to entice them to join the slave patrol militias. Thus, white race was used explicitly as a tool to divide and conquer, and its privileged position was established. Racism, from then, was implemented to control, and the structure of social organization was thus established and maintained (Bush, 2011). Thus, race played a critical role in providing a justification for the unification of whites racially as a notion in the process of nation-state building in the United States (Marx, 1998). This pattern continues to “impact national identity, notions of whiteness, and formulations of race in society today” (Bush, 2011, p. 19).

However, the evolution of whiteness is more than that. Jacobson (1998) in his book, *Whiteness as a Different Color*, vividly described the inclusion and exclusion of who was considered white for European immigrants. He documented the ambiguity and shifting nature of racial categorization and how it served divergent political purposes at different times. In other words, who was included as white and the meaning of whiteness varied in different historical and political situations. Works on how Jews and Irish became white, such as written by Karen Brodkin (1998) and Noel Ignatiev (1995), also shed light on the transformation of these groups who were not initially accepted into the white, Anglo-Saxon society. These works contribute significantly to our understanding on the changing meanings of whiteness and how whiteness was deliberately employed as a hegemonic device for control.

Of the many works that deconstructed the privileges of whiteness, Peggy McIntosh’s (1992) “Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack: White Privilege” has been reprinted extensively because it challenged how the advantages of whiteness, which
white people considered ordinary, is structured into everyday living. Comparing
whiteness privilege with male privilege, McIntosh said,

Through work to bring materials from women's studies into the rest of the
curriculum, I have often noticed men's unwillingness to grant that they are
overprivileged, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. They
may say they will work to women's statues, in the society, the university, or the
curriculum, but they can’t or won’t support the idea of lessening men’s. Denials
that amount to taboos surround the subject of advantages that men gain from
women’s disadvantages. These denials protect male privilege from being fully
acknowledged, lessened, or ended. Thinking through unacknowledged male
privilege as a phenomenon, I realized that, since hierarchies in our society are
interlocking, there are most likely a phenomenon of while privilege that was
similarly denied and protected (p.1).

She argued that as males were not taught to recognize their male privileges,
neither do white perceived how privileged they were for being white. The fifty privileges
that white people considered “neutral, normative, [and] average” (McIntosh, 1992, p. 1)
described vividly how these taken for granted experience were actually a luxury for non-
white. Some of these privileges described in McIntosh’s work conveyed a sense of
belonging (“I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race
represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural
traditions, into a hairdresser’s shop and find someone who can cut my hair”); some
expressed a sense of entitlement (“I can criticize our government and talk about how
much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider”); and
some articulated a permission to dominance or to not listen to people in less powerful
positions (“I can choose to ignore developments in minority writing and minority activist
programs, or disparage them, or learn from them”). McIntosh’s work opened a door for
us to see how white privilege has been normalized in the U.S. society and how it made it
This assumed normativity of whiteness was captured by Bush’s (2011) study on investigating white college students’ understanding of their everyday experience of race in the U.S. society. By examining the way white people racialize both themselves and everyone else, his argument pointed to the “perpetuation of patterns of systemic racial inequality” (p. 36). In other words, white people’s reluctance and inability to perceive the privileges they enjoyed due to their race perpetuated the inequality between white and non-white. Furthermore, it emphasized how people’s everyday life experience was governed by whiteness. Bush’s research, from the viewpoint of the dominant race, who either believed the social inequality was derived from “culture of poverty” (Lewis, 1961) or asserted that “Racism is something that bad people do overtly, not a relationship of power” (Bush, 2011, p. 57) proved strongly the dominance of whiteness in U.S. society. Their testimony illustrated white college students’ masking of “systemic patterns within an individual-centered framework” (Bush, 2011, p. 64). Though white students denied race in their everyday experience, they nevertheless acknowledged its impact on them when they were perceived “discriminated” such as by affirmation action or were excluded from particular scholarship available to people of color. Bush (2011) sayd, “In this way, discrimination is recognized when it disadvantages, but not when it advantages” (p. 53).

In studying minority population’s identity construction, this dominance of whiteness in structuring race relations was also alluded in Tuan’s (1998) study of later generation Asian Americans in California. As racialized ethnic minorities, their experience was judged and interpreted through the lens of dominant whiteness, by which
they were perceived as forever foreigners despite their longtime settlement in the United States. Stacy Lee (2005), studying Hmong American students’ racial identity construction in high school setting, also argued that “Hmong students have to negotiate the racial hegemony of the school and the larger U.S. society…Hmong American identities are constrained and limited by racial barriers” (p.2). How Chinese American college students construct their ethnicity in the United Stated is speculated hard to go around the battle against whiteness.

2.3 Methodology

This research focused on thirteen Chinese American college students’ performance and understanding of Chineseness and how they construct their ethnic identity in the college environment. The research used qualitative research methods for this exploration. Qualitative researchers endorse constructivism. Constructivists believe that multiple, individually constructed realities exist and see the knower and information to be known as inseparable (Griffin and Museus, 2011. p. 18). In identity studies, quantitative research method is limited in addressing the integrative, intersectional, and complex nature of identity (Bowleg, 2008; Dhamoon, 2011). Qualitative research methods, on the other hand, commonly conducted through interviews and observation, artifact collections, is better able to capture the nuance and complexity of individual experience.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), qualitative research was a situated activity that located the observer in the world. It used interpretive and material practices to make the world visible. Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people
bring to them. My research interest was to study how Chinese American college students, who enrolled in the Chinese language class in the university, construct their ethnic identity and perform their Chineseness in their daily life. Qualitative research methods provided a means to understand participants’ individual lived experience, including personal stories about their Chinese language learning experience, experience of growing up as a Chinese American, and how they understood their Chinese heritage. Thus, qualitative research method was a good fit for the purpose of this study. Among various approaches used in qualitative research, case study is chosen for this research. According to Yin (2009), case study research began with the identification of a specific case. This case may be a concrete entity, such as an individual, a small group, an organization, or a partnership. A case that is identified should be bounded or described within certain parameters, such as a specific place and time (Creswell, 2013, p. 98). This research studies a defined group, Chinese American college students who have enrolled in Chinese language class at the university, to understand their beliefs, behaviors and how their heritage language learning is intertwined with their perception of their heritage and ethnic identity. The cases in this study are the individual students who are Chinese American college students and have enrolled in the Chinese language class at the university.

2.3.1 Who are the Participants?

This study looks at Chinese American undergraduate students who enrolled in the Chinese language class at a Midwestern flagship University. They were recruited through the Chinese language class offered by that university from 2014 to 2018. How they were recruited is discussed in the next section. They were either born in the U.S. or came to the
U.S. at a young age (before 10) and have at least one parent of Chinese descent. While participants who have two parents were of Chinese descent were natural to be included as potential participants, how students, who have only one parent of Chinese descent, perceive their Chinese identity will provide more nuances about how Chinese identity is constructed. College students who have at least one parent of China descent but are/were not enrolled in the Chinese language classes at the university or who are under age 18 were not eligible for this study. Therefore, this study on Chinese American college students’ ethnicity construction is conditioned by their willingness to enroll in their heritage language. Chinese American college students’ enrollment in the language class is set as a research criterion due to the relationship between heritage language learning and ethnic identity construction. Studies have shown that students with higher level of heritage language tended to embrace more of their ethnic identity (J. Lee, 2002). In my case, students’ willingness to enroll in their heritage language class, to some extent, indicates their identification with their heritage. This method of recruiting is one of the limitations of this research, as it chose participants who had already shown some inclination toward their ethnicity. The findings, therefore, cannot be generalized to the larger Chinese American college student population. Nevertheless, focusing on this particular group of students’ understanding and performance of Chineseness is important as it can provide some insight for the relationship between heritage language learning and ethnic identity negotiation in college. In total, thirteen participants agreed to be observed and interviewed. These ten women and three men will be introduced individually in chapters 3 and 4.
Secondary participants in this research were adult family members and/or friends of the primary participants. They were referred to by the primary participants and then contacted by the researcher for interviews. Friends and family members were included to provide additional perspectives about primary participants’ performance and understanding of Chineseness. Altogether twenty-two secondary participants were interviewed, including thirteen family members and nine friends.

This research was situated in the Midwest in the United States. The research site was chosen because its Chinese community is relatively smaller than in other areas in the U.S., such as in the coastal areas and major cities. According to the demographic data of the state, where the research was conducted, white constitutes 87% of the population, while Asian only consists of 2.25% of the population. This small Asian population indicates Chinese Americans limited exposure to Asian culture. Larger Chinese communities can expose Chinese American students to their culture and heritage in a profound way and thereby have a direct influence on their ethnic identity. California, for example, is the primary receiving state for Asian immigrants, a situation that may actually reinforce a sense of ethnic identity among Asian ethnics. Immigrants breathe new life into ethnic communities by providing fresh reminders of ethnic cultures and practices. Asian ethnics may find themselves participating more often in ethnic activities in response to the increased availability of Asian groceries and stores, cultural celebrations, educational programs, and restaurants (Min, 1995). Participants in this research did not have that luxury compared to their peers in California, for example. Their understanding and perception of ethnic identity are speculated to be different from those living in larger Chinese communities. Tuan’s (1998) study of later generation
Chinese/Japanese Americans have proved this, as her participants demonstrated a strong pride in their ethnic identity despite their generational status. Thus, deliberately situated in a small city in the Midwest, this research aims to investigate how Chinese American college students negotiate their ethnic identity outside major centers of the Chinese diaspora.

A particular university in that state was chosen because it was one of the few public universities in its state offering Chinese language classes. It had a relatively larger Chinese American student population compared to other universities in the state. According to the university website, there were altogether 31,000 students enrolled in Fall 2019, and more than two thirds of them identified as white. Asian students constituted 3% of the student population and around 11% of the students identified as Underrepresented Racial Minority (Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders). The majority of the students who identified Asian were from that same state. This indicates that the majority of Asian students enrolled in this university grew up in predominantly white neighborhoods, given the general demographic of the state. Of the 1660 international students enrolled in Spring 2019, one third of them were from China and 9% and 5% of international students were from India and South Korea. Thus, though the campus was considered a predominantly white institution, it also provided students with some exposure to diversity in terms of student demographics. It is against this backdrop that Chinese American students’ ethnic identity is studied.

2.3.2 Data Collection
In addition to the researcher’s personal connections, research flyers (Appendix A) was distributed by the Chinese language instructors in class. Interested participants emailed the researcher if they wanted to participate in the research. Most of the cases, the researcher emailed the potential participants to inquire about their willingness, given the previously established relationship. Their participation was voluntary. They may choose to end the participation anytime they wanted without any consequence. They were asked to choose a pseudonym for the purpose of protecting their identity. Of the thirteen participants, two of them had Chinese first names in their official documents, though they preferred to be called by their Anglicized first name. The rest of the participants all had Anglicized first names. When asked for suggestions for pseudonyms, all but one left the freedom to me. Therefore, I also chose Anglicized names to go with their preferences. One participant allowed me to use the Chinese first name given by her parents for research because she said that name did not appear on her birth certificate and therefore was fine with her to be used in public.

Once each participant agreed to take part in the research, a research consent form (Appendix B) was signed both by the researcher and the participant. Secondary participants identified by the primary participants were invited to participate in the research. Once the secondary participants agreed to participate, a similar research consent form (available in English and Chinese versions, Appendix C) between the researcher and the secondary participants was also signed. Secondary participants also had the right to withdraw from the research any time they wanted to without any consequence.
The majority of the data came from the in-depth interviews with the primary and secondary participants. The researcher followed a similar interview protocol (Appendix D) with slight variations to ensure the interviews were as conducted as naturally and smoothly as possible. The primary participants were interviewed twice\(^1\). The first interview questions asked about the Chinese language learning experience, family values, family friends circle as well as students’ friends circle, experience of growing up as a Chinese American, involvement in the campus activity, academic foci, and how they identified themselves. After the first interview, the researcher followed up with another interview to clarify questions left in the first interview and asked more questions emerged in the first interview. The second interview protocol was specific to each participant. Each interview lasted from around 1 hour to two hours.

The researcher conducted one in-depth interview with each secondary participant, ranging from forty minutes to two and a half hours. The interviews of the secondary participants followed a similar procedure. The interview protocol differed based on their relationship to the primary participant, friend or family member (Appendix E). The interview questions for friends included how they got to know each other, their activities together, and their friend’s perception of them being a Chinese descent. The interview questions for family asked about family values, family socialization practices, participants’ growing up experience, and family member’s expectation of them in terms of their heritage. Altogether fifty-seven interviews were conducted.\(^2\) The language used in

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\(^1\) Some participants, who showed great interest in this research, came to talk to the researcher about their identity, their experience as Chinese American multiple times and their conversation was also recorded permitted by the participants.

\(^2\) Some participants were the only child at their household. Therefore, sibling interview did not apply to them; some participants were not comfortable to have their parents/friends interviewed. Detailed information is provided in the following chapters.
the interview was either English or Chinese\textsuperscript{3} preferred by each participant. The interviews were audio recorded under the participants’ consent and then were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. All interviews were conducted in a quiet place, such as a quiet coffee store, participants’ home or any place convenient to the participants.

Other data came from the heritage language/culture class observations, social interaction with participants, and home visits during the same time period from 2014-2018. Once the participant agreed to join this research, the researcher worked with the participant to observe their language classes three to four times per participant. The researcher observed the primary participants’ performance in class and during the brief time before and after class, such as their interaction with their teacher and their classmates, and their participation in the language class. In addition, participants’ class projects, such as essays, were also voluntarily shared. Home visits occurred when the researcher and the participants had formed a relationship to a degree that participants were willing to have the researcher visit their home and meet their families. That was when the parent interview was conducted. Furthermore, the researcher also socialized with the participants informally through having dinner/coffee together, attending their class project presentations, and going to their graduation ceremonies. The informal socialization provided invaluable information to understand who they were. However, this rapport between the researcher and the participants was mostly available to female participants, but not to male participants. This was perhaps due to my age and female positionality, which will be discussed later. Most of the female participants gradually saw me as an elder sister instead of a researcher, while the male participants continued to see me as a

\textsuperscript{3} For the purpose of this research, Chinese refers to Mandarin, the language the research is fluent in.
researcher. The social interaction was recorded in field notes throughout the years. Hymes (1996) argued that it was of vital importance to validate what the ethnographic researcher has interviewed with what they observed in the ethnographic research.

Ethnography indulges in an infinite regress of personal subjectivity and idiosyncratic worlds. It has to be open to that dimension of social life, because that dimension affects the reality of social life, and the success or failure of social programs. The point is to stress the necessity of knowledge that comes from participation and observation, if what one thinks one know is to be valid (p. 9).

The informal interaction indeed provided an important source of triangulation to the interviews.

2.3.3 Ethical Considerations and Researcher’s Positionality

Half of the participants (seven) were recruited from the classroom where I once worked as a language teaching assistant. Thus, my identity as their former teacher intertwined with my researcher identity. To avoid ethical issues, the participants were invited to my research only after I was no longer their current language teacher. This consideration was to erase the power relationship between the students and the teacher and also to ensure that their participation in this research was voluntary without any academic pressure. Still, my positionality as their former language teacher, to some extent, could have some effect on the research. Being their previous instructor helped me gain access to them. The power imbalance between the participants and myself was still there subtly.

Being their language teacher also put me at an authority position. Some of the participants, who had enrolled in my class, were not confident to assert their understanding of Chineseness; they would ask me for validation. This obviously deviated
from the purpose of the research, which was to portray participants’ understanding of and performance of Chineseness. When that happened, I would insist that they should articulate whatever was true to them. Reading the literature on the changing meanings of Chineseness indeed helped to restrain me from inserting my understanding of Chineseness or judging their assertions of what constituted being Chinese.

Behar stated that the ethnographic relation was based on power (Behar, 1993, p. 6). Even though this research is not ethnographically based, the researcher’s interaction with the participants was influenced by the power relationship. My position as their previous Chinese language teacher put me in a position that, to a certain degree, may have prevented the participants from expressing their understanding of Chineseness without hesitation.

My identity as a Chinese national also influenced the research. Knowing my affiliation to the Chinese state and Chinese culture, some participants may have deliberately chosen to say or withhold certain things to satisfy my national/cultural identity. As a Chinese national, I have strong beliefs about what constitutes China as a nation. I find it hard to accept the rhetoric that positions Hong Kong and Taiwan to be independent countries—a rhetoric that is prevalent in the western mass media and among some people of Chinese descent, especially those whose heritage links them with Hong Kong or Taiwan. While this research did not explicitly inquire of the Chinese American college students about their opinion of this, their responses in the interviews indicated their stance on this international dispute about nationhood, which was similar to that posited by the western media. This further positioned them as Americans. This observation and the implications of it are discussed in the later chapters.
In addition, my national identity also pushed my interest to be more focused on Chinese American students’ Chinese identity and less on their American identity, though this was another important part of who they were. This limitation brought by my own positionality revealed itself more obviously when I did the data analysis. Though many participants used their American identity as a backdrop to lay out their Chinese identity, it would have been better to directly include the question, “What does it mean to an American?” in the research design. This focus on their Chinese ethnicity also limited their articulation of their other identities that mattered to them. Despite this, the open-ended interview allowed many participants to share the importance of their identities other than being Chinese with me, for which I am grateful.

The fact that I am a middle-aged female had an influence on the research as well. It was reflected not only in the unbalanced numbers of male and female participants (which was also partly due to the lower number of males Chinese American to female Chinese American enrolled in language classes), but also in the depth of bonding developed between the participants and the researcher. As a female, I found it easier to connect with female participants than with male participants. I was more comfortable to ask a potential female participant’s willingness to join the research. But I had a great deal of uncertainties when I inquired about male participants’ opinions. Even though the three males I inquired about eventually participated in the research, our relationship didn’t grow as the research progressed. I always found it hard to connect with the male participants outside of the research. Even scheduling a time for interviews was not easy for us. My only way to schedule an interview with male participants was to ask them in person when I met them in person during class observations. Two males were not willing
to have their friend, sibling or parents interviewed. One male only introduced his friend to me, but not his sibling nor his parents. Thus, my research yielded much more information for the female participants than for the male participants. However, these different interaction patterns with males and females provided valuable insight on their attitude toward their ethnicity.

2.3.4 Origin of the Research

I started this study for a class project on qualitative method in the Fall semester 2014, which was to study the Chinese learning experience of the Chinese American college students. I interviewed one Chinese American student, Emma, from my previous class. Amazingly, I found the participant’s Chinese language experience was related to how she saw herself as a Chinese American. Thus, in the following semester, I decided to see how this particular group of students, who enrolled in Chinese language classes, perceived themselves. I ended up interviewing four more participants, John, Jack, Sophia and Amy in the Spring semester 2015 and the Fall semester 2015.

Results showed that these five participants had very different understandings and performances of Chineseness. Though they were all identified with values, such as emphasis on study and filial piety, to be Chinese values, they acted on these values very differently. I was informed that their families had an important influence on how they understood and performed their ethnic identity. This class project led to the dissertation. I decided to interview participants’ friends, siblings and parents to see their understandings and performances of Chinese ethnicity from as many perspectives as possible. In addition, more participants were recruited to ensure a comprehensive picture of how this group’s ethnic identity was developed over time. Therefore, nine additional primary
participants were interviewed from the Spring 2016 semester to Spring 2018 semester. Some of the previous participants were re-contacted for follow-up interviews with their friend, siblings and parents.

2.3.5 Data Analysis

Interviews, field notes and classroom observations were analyzed thematically using MAXQDA software. According to Creswell’s (2013) summary of three authors’ frameworks of qualitative data analysis – Madison (2005), Huberman and Miles (1994), and Wolcott (1994) – central steps in data analysis are coding the data (reducing the data into meaningful segments and assigning names for the segments), combining the codes into broader categories or themes, and displaying and making comparison in the data graphs, tables, and charts (p. 180). In analyzing the data, open and axial-coding procedures were used to identity emergent themes and the properties of these themes (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). First, I read each transcription or set of field notes multiple times to reduce it to meaningful segments based on interview questions. Each segment was given an open coding. Open coding refers to the process of identifying, labeling, categorizing, and describing phenomena found in the interview transcripts (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Coding such as “parents’ attitude,” “experience before college” and “China in their mind” was identified. After the open coding was established, a careful reading within each coding allowed coding such as “concerted cultivation,” “alienation,” and “sense of home” to emerge. Then axial coding, which is focused on identifying relationships among codes (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) was identified through comparison between and among participants. The axial coding allowed the relationship between the previously identified opening coding to appear.
It was during the comparison and the counting of coding, that a pattern in what ethnicity meant to participants surfaced. It became clear that participants’ heritage language proficiency functioned as an important factor in how axial coding emerged. This confirmed my impression when socializing with participants during data collection. Huberman and Miles (1994) stated “Data analysis is not off-the-shelf; rather, it is custom-built, revised, and choreographed” (Creswell, 2013, p. 182). The process of data collection, data analysis, and report writing are not distinct steps in the process—they are interrelated and often go on simultaneously in a research project. Qualitative researchers often “learn by doing” (Dey, 1993, p. 6, as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 182). This also supported the previous researchers’ argument that heritage language proficiency can be an indicator of ethnic identity attachment (J. Lee, 2002). This finding also pushed the presentation of the data to reflect the importance of heritage language proficiency. Participants who spoke Chinese were presented as a group and participants who spoke English were presented as another group. Though heritage language proficiency mattered in their ethnicity development, this division did not suggest a clear cut between the two groups. On the contrary, many nuances and complexities emerged between and within the two groups. In addition, when presenting the data, the language selected by the participants for their interviews, Chinese or English, was carefully attended. If the quote was in Chinese, English translation is provided.

During the data analysis process, some segments that were not directly related to the interview questions and were considered outliers turned out to be keys to understanding the intersectionality of multiple dimensions of identity. After presenting the struggles participants experienced as being an ethnic Chinese and an American living
in the United States, which was the initial interest of this project, I returned to the data carefully attending to how their other identities were addressed in relation to their ethnicity, which was deliberately shared by three participants. This pushed me to delve deeply into the story of other participants, who often times blurred the boundary between their ethnicity and other identities. Thus made the inseparable, interwoven nature of their other identities and their ethnic identity surfaced. Codes, such as gender identity, religious identity, socioeconomic identity, were identified as significant.

How China plays a role in Chinese American college students’ ethnicity negotiation was one of the research questions. Students’ responses to such interview questions, such as “What is the public portrayal of China in the American society?” “How do you think of China?” and “Have you traveled to China? What was your experience in China?” were analyzed. Codes such as comfort, alienation were identified as salient.

2.3.6 Validation and Reliability

Creswell (2013) asserts that validation in qualitative research is the attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants. The strategy to strengthen validation is through extensive time spent in the field, detailed thick description and the closeness of the researcher to participants (Creswell, 2013, p. 249). I developed very close relationship with all the female participants during the research; as mentioned before, they gradually saw me as their elder sisters instead of a researcher. I had dinner/coffee with each female participant twice on average, some of them visited my place frequently for socialization. Different sources such as classroom observation, informal socialization, friend/sibling/parents’
interviews were also used for triangulation. In presenting the data, rich and thick
descriptions were also employed to allow readers to make decisions regarding
transferability (Erlandson et al., 1993, as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 252). My dissertation
advisor and other peers, who attended the many presentations/updates of my research
during the process, asked hard questions about the methods, meanings, and
interpretations. They served as “devil’s advocate” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251) to keep the
researcher honest. This peer review or debriefing strengthened the validity of the
research. In addition, during my multiple socialization with the participants, I constantly
updated them on my research and my interpretation of their stories to make sure my
understanding was an accurate reflection of their experience.

Reliability can be enhanced if the researcher obtains detailed field notes by
employing a good-quality tape for recording and by transcribing the data (Creswell, 2013,
p. 253). For the purpose of this research, I purchased a professional recorder, which is
typically used for big conference recording and thus it provided high quality interviews.
In qualitative research, reliability also means intercoder agreement (Creswell, 2013),
which is based on the use of multiple coders to analyze transcribed data. Unfortunately,
due to the nature of this research, multiple coders were not available, so the reliability of
this research was to be maintained through the integrity of the researcher.
CHAPTER 3. CHINESE AMERICAN: MY OWNED IDENTITY

3.1 Introduction

Of those five students who chose to speak Chinese with me, one was a male, and the other four were females. Their willingness to speak/practice their heritage language, though Chinese was not their language of comfort and some had to switch to English to make themselves understood, demonstrated, to some extent, their embrace of their Chinese ethnicity. They took the research as an opportunity to practice their Chinese and consciously avoided English. They took the time to find an appropriate phrase in Chinese or explained themselves using lengthy sentences rather than using an English expression, which might have saved them all the troubles. The women each demonstrated pleasure in socializing with me, a Chinese national, by having dinners and hanging out together. Considering us as friends rather than as only a research-participant relationship further indicated their willingness to explore and commit to their ethnicity.

This chapter argues that in their negotiating identities between multiple cultures, these five students not only had to fight the hegemonic whiteness that defined them as others, but also the hegemonic Chineseness that alienated them from identifying as Chinese. The proficiency of Chinese language ability, which was fostered, for the most part, by their parents’ conscious efforts, played an important role in negotiating their ethnic identity in college. It provided them with an adequate and symbolically important tool for them to connect with other students of Chinese descent. Importantly, the Chinese heritage language also enhanced familiarity with the heritage culture by enabling them to renegotiate and modify their understanding of being ethnic Chinese in college. The campus space, including ethnic courses, student organizations and the presence of a
diverse student population further facilitated their ethnic identity development. Chinese American college students’ familiarity with their heritage together with their active exploration of who they were in college enabled them to develop an ownership of their identity.

3.2 Basic Information of Participants

Emma

Emma was my first participant when I started the class project about Chinese American college students’ heritage language learning in Fall 2014. Emma had enrolled for three years in Chinese language classes at the university. She never had any formal Chinese language education before college. Her spoken Chinese was good enough for daily communication, but she could barely read and write in Chinese before taking Chinese in college. She majored in history focusing on the Chinese Cultural Revolution and minored in Chinese. By the time I finished this research, Emma had earned her master’s degree in history. While in college, she was awarded a Critical Language Scholarship to study Chinese in China. We had many informal conversations and I interviewed her 6 times over the years from 2014 to 2018. Each interview lasted on average one and a half hours. The first interview was conducted in English due to my underestimation of her Chinese proficiency. Emma was disappointed at the end of the first interview that “可惜没有说中文” (it’s a pity that we didn’t speak Chinese). The rest of the interviews and all of our informal conversations were in Chinese, though sometimes she would pop out some English; she referred this mixture of Chinese and English as Chinglish. In addition to the formal interviews, we hung out together many times, such as having dinner and coffee together. Emma loved to talk to me whenever
she had thoughts that were relevant to my research. She also sent me articles that she
deemed important to my research.

Emma came from a relatively large city in the Midwest state, though she had
lived in Houston during her childhood, where her father got his PhD degree. Her parents
came to the United States in the late 1980s from a southern city in Mainland China to
pursue graduate degrees and they subsequently secured researcher positions in a
university. Emma was born with disabilities (physical and some cognitive) due to her
premature birth. She has an older sister who was born in China; they are ten years apart.
Her sister, however, was not fluent in Chinese. I interviewed her sister in English though
we occasionally spoke Chinese. Her parents spoke Chinese with a southern accent. The
home language was mostly Chinese. Emma grew up in the Chinese church, as her parents
were pious Christians and were very active in the community. Most of Emma’s friends
were Chinese people in the Chinese church.

I visited Emma’s family several times and her family also visited mine once. They
lived in a well-off suburb of the city. Upon entering the house, there was a little sailboat
(帆船) made with shells standing on a desk in the entrance foyer, which, especially in the
coastal southern China, is a symbol of good wishes, as the meaning of the phrase 一帆风
顺 (smooth sailing) indicates. On the wall hung several scrolls with Chinese paintings
and Chinese characters. Several family pictures were also on the wall and on the table.

Amy
I met Amy in the Fall of 2015 at the Intermediate-Advanced Chinese class when I did a class observation for another participant. At first, I did not realize she had Chinese heritage, since she had blond hair, a white complexion and blue eyes. It was through her speech and writing in the Chinese writing and speaking contest held by the university in December 2015 that I discovered she had a Chinese mother and a white Caucasian father. Amy talked and wrote about her experience in Hong Kong, where her mother came from, and her confusion about who she was in the contest. She enrolled in the Intermediate-Advanced Chinese class as a freshman; she had never taken any formal Chinese classes before college, but her mother spoke Cantonese with her on a daily basis. She also taught herself Chinese by watching films produced in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Mainland China before coming to college. She could speak fluent Cantonese and read and write some in Cantonese. Her spoken Chinese was good enough for conversation. Her written Chinese improved dramatically due to the language class such that she could compose essays in Chinese of relatively good quality. She studied abroad in China with the Chinese department in the summer of 2016 for eight weeks, her first-time visiting Mainland China, though she visited Hong Kong quite frequently. She was also selected to participate in the speaking competition held by the Chinese National Hanban, the higher-level administration of the Confucius Institute, for foreign college students in 2016.

I interviewed Amy four times, each around one and a half hours. She made use of the research to practice and improve her Chinese. She said “先用中文开始呗，如果我说不清楚了，就转到英文呗” (let’s start with Chinese. If I cannot make myself understood, I can switch to English). I reflected in my field notes that Amy tried very
hard to express herself in Chinese during the interviews. If she couldn’t find an exact word, she would go around to explain it using phrases she knew instead of jumping to English right away. Amy was also very expressive. She was willing to elaborate more in order to make me understand her. We had some informal interactions with each other, such as having dinners and coffee together. Amy continued to enroll in the advanced Chinese class the following year. When there was no Chinese class offered, she was recommended by the Chinese department to do peer tutoring for students in the lower level Chinese class. Her major was Foreign Languages and International Economics, a combination of Chinese (in her case) and economic studies.

Amy’s mother came from Hong Kong to the US to pursue a graduate degree in the 1990s and married an American Caucasian. She could speak fluent Cantonese but could barely understand Chinese. Therefore, my interview with Amy’s mother was in English, the only language we had in common. The family lived in a small town in the Midwest state with a very small Asian population. Amy’s father worked in an automobile company; her mother chose to stay home after Amy was born and returned to work as an elementary school teacher when Amy was in fourth grade. Amy was the only child. She spoke Cantonese with her mother but English with her father. I did not get to visit Amy’s family, but Amy showed me a lot of the souvenirs that she had bought from Hong Kong every time she visited, such as little fans, qipao (traditional Chinese clothes for girls), and decorations.

Cindy

Cindy’s parents were from Taiwan. They came to the United States through Cindy’s aunt who had American citizenship. Her parents opened a Chinese restaurant in a
small rural area in the Midwest state. Cindy’s hometown, though very small, had people from different races and ethnicities due to the establishment of an American military base there. Her parents could not speak much English, only enough for business. The home language is 国语 (Taiwan style Mandarin). Cindy has two older sisters. As the youngest, her Chinese was the best of the three. She had helped out at her parents’ restaurant since she was young. Her extended families were all in the vicinity of her hometown. When the family members were together, the adults always communicated with each other in Chinese. But the language among the younger generation was English. Her parents’ friends were mostly their relatives, some other Asian restaurant owners and people in Taiwan.

Cindy never took any formal Chinese class before college. She was dedicated to learning Chinese in college; she enrolled in Chinese as a freshman and continued to take Chinese classes until she was a senior, when her schedule no longer allowed her to be in the class. Instead, she did an independent Chinese study with a professor in the Chinese program and went to the beginning level Chinese class as a tutor. Cindy’s major was biology with the goal to be a doctor, which was closely tied to her observation of the difficulties her parents experienced in the doctor’s office due to their linguistic and cultural barriers. Cindy was determined to be a doctor so that she could help people like her parents. She ended up doing a PhD degree in the medical school to do research on cancer treatment. Cindy minored in Chinese, with the purpose of utilizing the language ability to help more people in her career.
Cindy participated in the research in the Fall of 2015. I interviewed her twice, each around one and a half hours. Since then we have developed a close relationship with each other. Her Chinese was relatively good. She spoke better than she could read or write. Cindy always spoke with me in Mandarin. Her Mandarin has a Taiwan accent with some Taiwan idioms that I occasionally could not understand. In the interviews, she would occasionally switch to English if she did not know how to express herself in Mandarin. She was willing to learn those phrases she did not know in Chinese. She came to me to talk about her family, and her studies. She brought me food from her family. I invited her to my home for Chinese food, as she loved authentic Chinese food. I also interviewed her parents (2 hours), her oldest sister (one hour) and her Caucasian boyfriend (one hour).

I did not visit Cindy’s family nor their restaurant. But from Cindy’s descriptions, I know that there were representations of the Buddha, some scrolls of Chinese painting and Chinese characters, and pictures of Chinese Warriors at her house. Her father also bought various souvenirs every time they visited Taiwan to put up at their restaurant and house. From the picture Cindy showed me of her family’s restaurant, it was East Asian style; the restaurant had a wooden hollowed out screen; there were some decorations like a big red fish, which symbolized surplus, the meaning of which is derived from the homophone of “fish” (yú) in Chinese “abundance” (yú). There was a little red scroll with a Chinese character “福” (prosperity) hanging on the walls, which is a common decoration in the families in China.

Linda
Linda was introduced to me by Amy. They became best friends in the first week of college during new students’ orientations. Linda came to the United States at eight from a northern city in Mainland China where her father had worked as a tourist guide. Later, her father brought Linda and her mother to the United States. Her parents lived in a relatively big city in a Midwest state with a large Chinese population. But her parents consciously avoided interacting with the Chinese community because they did not like the ways some Chinese behave, for example when they compared each other’s children. They socialized more with their American colleagues. Her parents both worked as managers in factories. Linda was the only child in the family. She had near native fluency in Mandarin; she could read and write quite well in Mandarin. Her Chinese proficiency was perhaps the best among all the participants. The home language was mostly Mandarin, though some English expressions would pop out in their conversations.

Linda enrolled in the Intermediate-Advanced Chinese class for only one semester to meet the foreign language requirement during her second semester in college. Her major was biology. She wanted to go to medical school to become a plastic surgeon. She was indeed admitted to a medical school by the time this research finished. I interviewed Linda three times, each time for around one hour. We chose to speak Mandarin with each other. We also had some informal socializations, such as having dinners together. I interviewed her parents, which lasted two and a half hours, and her Chinese friend she got to know in college for about forty minutes.

I went to Linda’s family for her parents’ interview and her family also visited my family once. As described by Linda in the interview, her family had a big painting of a dragon with a woman on top of it hanging above of a big flat screen TV. On the other
side of the wall, it hung some cross stitch embroidery panels made by her grandmother in China, including a peony, which is a national flower in China. Some traditional Chinese paintings painted by her grandfather also hung at their house. The paintings portrayed a Chinese style pavilion, mountains, creeks, bridges, and people drinking, which was the typical portrayal of how the Chinese poets in ancient time socialized. Linda said her father was into antiques. He bought several jades, blue and white porcelain, and some Japanese jugs.

Jack

Jack was in the same class with Amy, which I had observed in the Fall of 2015. He was already a senior at that time. His major was chemistry and he wanted to be a researcher in chemistry. He took Chinese mainly to meet the foreign language requirement. He finished that one semester of Chinese and graduated the next semester in the Spring of 2016. Therefore, I was not able to interview his parents nor his friend, and he had no sibling as he was the only child in his family. I interviewed him twice in the Fall of 2015, each time for around one and a half hours.

Jack’s parents came to the United States from Beijing to pursue graduate degrees in the late 1980s. They both secured professional jobs in the US after graduation. Jack’s father also worked in the chemistry field, but his father’s English was not good. He did not have a lot of American friends but mostly socialized with the people in the Chinese community. Jack’s mother, on the other hand, was very social and had a lot of American friends in addition to her Chinese friends in the community. They lived in a large northeastern city with a sizable Chinese population. But they lived in a school district, called “the land of rich and white kids” in Jack’s words. A lot of Chinese people
clustered in that area drawn by the quality of the district’s schools. Jack had a lot of Chinese American classmates before college and he hung out with both Chinese American friends and white American friends. Jack’s home language was Mandarin. Jack’s fluent Beijing-accent Chinese often made people think he was actually born and raised in China. In the Chinese speaking contest, the judge thought Jack was a “Chinese” and refused to award him the prize, given the contest was held for “American” students. Jack described his parents as well-off and very active in the Chinese community in their city. I did not get the chance to interview Jack’s parents or his friend. He graduated the next semester after I got to know him.

3.3 Growing Pains in High School

Though research has demonstrated that the college years are a crucial time for students to negotiate their identity (Inkelas, 2004), experiences during their adolescent years are also vital in affecting how they view themselves in college and later in life. Studies have demonstrated how the imposed hegemonic whiteness students experienced in K-12 education significantly shapes their ethnic identity development (S. Lee, 2005). Participants in my research group also reported struggles negotiating their Chineseness against Whiteness. The incongruences between their home culture and the dominant culture that they were involved with on a daily basis contributed to their incessant struggles over being ethnic Chinese and being American. Their experience reflected further the hegemonic mechanism of whiteness as a standard against which their ethnicity was negotiated. As for other minoritized students, the racialized environment can contribute to Chinese American students’ identity struggle when they are susceptible to stereotypes due to their identity contingencies (Steele, 2010).
Amy reported a stronger sense of alienation from her peers than the rest of the four participants due to her Chinese heritage. Growing up in a predominately white small town as one of the few Asians, Amy endured a lot of the racist remarks and was alienated by her peers. Her peers called her “是个怪物” (an alien), commented “她比我们聪明” (she is cleverer than us) or “So Asian” or judged her appearance “你的鼻子为什么会那么不高?” (how come your nose is not pointed?). The struggle of being the only one Asian living in the predominantly white neighborhood is not unlike the agony felt by the few white males studying in the African American political science class that enrolled predominantly black students described in Steele’s (2010) study. While the particular setting led that while male in Steele’s study to question his “smartness,” the racialized environment Amy lived furthered her “Otherness.” Her emphasis on academic performance was another source of alienation. Her peers could not understand her devotion to study and she could not relate to their casualness about studying and grades. Amy shared that her peers would worry that “她跟我们这么不同，聊什么话题呢?” (she is so different from us. What could we talk about?). Amy’s experience mirrors the fact that Asian American students are too often categorized as foreigners by their peers based on their phenotype or physical appearance and their Americanness is challenged (Museus and Park, 2012)

When Amy visited Hong Kong, her American identity became another source of alienation. People in Hong Kong addressed her as “老外” (a foreigner) or they said “哇，很鬼啊” (wow, you look like an alien) due to her appearance and they criticized her for

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4 This expression is actually popular among people speaking Cantonese, not Mandarin though.
not eating certain local food. Amy ridiculed herself: “所以，哇，两地地方都没办法去，怎么办?” (So, wow, I am not belonging to any place. What can I do?). Amy expressed this sense of confusion in the Chinese writing contest held by the Chinese department at her university, “有時候，我是個雞蛋，別的時候是個香蕉。當我照鏡子，我看到一個中國人，美國人，或者一個誰都不知道從哪裡來的人。我只知道做個沒皮的香蕉或者沒殼的雞蛋是不可能的” (Sometimes, I am an egg; other times, I am a banana. When I see myself in the mirror, I see a Chinese, or an American or a person no one knows where she is from. The only thing I know is that it’s impossible for me to be a banana without its skin or an egg without its shell). The hegemonic Chineseness imposed on people of Chinese descent in determining who is Chinese who is not depending on how they should look and what they should eat questioned Amy’s Chinese identity. Finding that she was perceived as an alien in both cultures, Amy concluded that she needed to construct a hybrid identity that existed in the third space and could incorporate her multiple cultures together. This understanding was realized after a long period of uncertainty and discomfort during her teenage years.

This same identity crisis was reported by Cindy, too, who understood at a very early age that she stood between two cultures. This motivated her to question who she was. She reflected this in her essay in the Chinese language class.

This is directly from Amy’s writing. She was more comfortable writing in traditional Chinese characters than in simplified characters.
When I was a little kid, I had thought this question: am I American or Chinese? My parents are from Taiwan. They want me and my two older sisters to know their culture as well as American culture. We knew when we were young that we had two identities: we were Taiwanese, and we were also Americans. But in America, because the food I eat is different from other Americans, my eyes are different from them and my culture is different from that of my classmates, Americans don’t think I am American. In Taiwan there is the same issue. Because my Chinese is not very good, I listen to different music and my culture is different from the culture in Taiwan. I am not Taiwanese).

Stuck between the two cultures, Cindy found she was not accepted in any culture. She concluded that she was neither an American not a Taiwanese. This struggle would further motivate her to find who she was in college.

Linda, who came to the U.S. at early elementary age understood American culture as lenient on students’ academic performance. The conflict between her home culture and her perceived dominant white culture in terms of school achievement pushed Linda to almost deny her Chinese identity. Commenting on her parents’ continuing pressure to increase her ACT score in high school when she already got a 32 twice, Linda said “那一段心情特别不好, 觉得要是你是美国家庭吧，你要是考个 32, 他们就觉得够了，就不会逼你非得更高, 我觉得要是美国人就好了” (During that period, I was very frustrated, thinking if you were born to an American family and got a 32 [on the ACT], they would be ok with it and would not force you to get a higher score. I hope I can be an American). The fact that being Chinese caused her difficulties was further illustrated by her parents’ reaction when Linda was admitted to a university that was not a prestigious one.

我的父母就让我觉得就是比较, 我不知道是父母让我觉得, 还是我自己觉得, 就是比较失败的那种, 就是不知道该想全奖应该高兴啊, 还是只能上这儿,
只能上这比较失败，所以那时候觉得，就，就，就是，就，要是中国人来看我的话，就是觉得 XX university 呗就是不够，不是像 Ivy League，但是美国人看，要是给他他们同事说啊，XX university 全奖，他们就，啊，这幺厉害。然后我就觉得我四不像，到底高兴还是不高兴。

(My parents made me feel I was a loser, I don’t know if I should be happy that I got a full ride or if I should consider myself a loser for coming here because it was my only option. So at that time, I felt, er, that from a Chinese perspective, XX University is not, is not like prestigious like an Ivy League university. But in American’s eyes, if they told their colleague [that their kid got a] full ride, their colleague would be like “wow, great!” so I felt like I was neither a fish nor a fowl, should I be happy or not [for coming to this university]).

Linda’s parents’ high expectation of her academic performance, which she perceived as unique to Chinese families, posed significant psychological burdens for her. This not only lowered her self-esteem but also put serious challenge on how Linda negotiated her identity. The Chineseness, which symbolized itself in higher academic achievement, imposed by her parents and influenced by the model minority stereotype prevalent in the larger society, pushed Linda to a form of subtle resistance and avoidance. Instead of hanging out with students of Asian descent in high school, which would have reinforced this stereotype, Linda deliberately chose to socialize with her American Caucasian peers, who, she believed, were less oriented toward academic performance, to resist the overwhelming Chineseness imposed on her. Linda’s choice to resist the model minority stereotype, despite that stereotypes positive aspects, also echoed the detrimental effect of stereotype threat on identity studied by Steele (2010). This resistance to the model minority stereotype, which functioned as a hegemonic device to define Asian American students, was also studied intensively by S. Lee (1996, 2005). She found that it was the opposition to authority that attracted some Americanized youth to hip-hop culture, and that hip-hop style was a form of resistance to race and class exclusion (p. 69).
Therefore, hip-hop style represented a “political choice” for many Americanized youth (S. Lee, 2005, p. 70). However, Linda did not go further like the New Wavers in Lee’s study to identify with African American culture to resist the hegemony; rather, her deliberate choice to avoid students of Chinese descent in high school could be viewed as a “political choice” to fight against the imposed “nerd” stereotype of Asian Americans.

In addition, Linda understood American parenting as an equal relationship between parents and children. Her father’s authoritarianism, which she considered to be Chinese style, conflicted with her belief in parenting and affected how she perceived her Chinese identity. She said “这我会改，就是得听小孩那面，让他们说完，就是 at least听他们怎么解释” (I will not be like him when I am a parent. I will listen to the kids. Let them finish, at least see what is their explanation). In negotiating her identity in the American context, where whiteness is the norm, Linda demonstrated her struggles in negotiating multiple cultures and, more importantly, agency in defining how she wanted to be perceived and how she perceived herself.

Jack shared very similar pains with Linda in terms of academic expectation and parenting. Jack also complained about fighting against parental academic pressure and demanding obedience from his parents. S. Lee (2005) said, “Intergenerational conflict is related to differences in acculturation” (p. 83). Both Jack and Linda were second generation Asian Americans, and their parents’ acculturation were certainly different from theirs. This is fairly common among immigrants. Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) also found that Latino immigrant parents may “over- restrict the activities of children and attempt to minimize the host country’s influence” (p. 65). This mindset, I suspect, applied to both Jack’s and Linda’s parents.
However, while Jack also socialized with Caucasian Americans, he identified strongly with his friends of Chinese descent. Fighting the discrimination he experienced in elementary school and middle school, he teamed up with his Chinese American and/or Asian American friends to fight for respect of his Chinese identity from his peers; his constant conflicts with his father, on the other hand, reflected Jack’s demands for respect of his American identity from his parents, when they expected absolute obedience and exclusive emphasis on academic performance. The tension between his double identities pushed him to explore how he understood who he was in college.

While the previous four participants’ growing pains of being an ethnic Chinese came from their negotiating Chineseness against whiteness and against stereotype threat (Steele, 2010), Emma’s pain mostly came from her physical disability in addition to being Chinese; this double minority status affected significantly how Emma perceived herself (which will be discussed at great length in a later chapter). Emma discussed her embrace of her Chinese identity when the curriculum included her heritage in high school,

The world history was about 50% Asian history. So it was my first time you know, Chinese history all the way from 秦始皇帝 (Qin Emperor) to 满族清朝 (Manchu Qing Dynasty). So it’s like “oh, China has this history. It’s so cool, something I could be proud of. So I have to learn Chinese.

Emma discovered the beauty of her culture and the urgency to learn her heritage language. The school curriculum validated the importance of her heritage and her pride in it motived her to explore more of it. The importance of the relevance of school curriculum to minority students’ culture was also observed by S. Lee (2005). Hmong American high school students in her study, who were truant frequently, admitted that they would attend class more if their school included their culture in the classroom.
Through watching Chinese films and TV dramas with her parents’ help, Emma’s Chinese language and her knowledge about China improved dramatically. Her parents commented: “发现她中文进步了，就是说原来我们不光是家里讲的一些话，但是后来看了电视连续剧后，她基本上都懂得一半的，我们家不讲的话她也懂了很多，真的是有进步啊” (We found her Chinese improved. After watching the dramas, she understands half of the conversation in the drama and also the conversations that we don’t usually have at home). This sparked interest in China, especially about China’s history, and continued to motivate Emma to explore who she was in college.

All the participants (except Emma) had grown up struggling – at times painfully - between their Chinese and American identities. This resulted from the clash between the Chineseness embodied at home and the hegemonic whiteness that marginalized them. They were negotiating identities between the two different cultures. The pains they experienced contributed to their uncertainty about their ethnicity in secondary education. This confusion would follow them when they entered college and motivated them to find meanings of their identity in the wider university context with its newer level of freedom and opportunities for heritage exploration.

3.4 Feelings of Comfort in College

College was vastly different from secondary education. Escaping from parental surveillance—though not entirely— the availability of multiple academic courses, the existence of various student organizations and clubs, such as sororities and fraternities and ethnic student organizations, and the presence of students from diverse backgrounds and nationalities, opened a new world for these students to negotiate who they were. Researchers (Inkelas 2004; Chan, 2007) have demonstrated that college was indeed an
arena for students to explore identity, be it ethnicity, be it sexual identity. These five participants arrived in college and found themselves negotiating their identity not only against the hegemonic whiteness but the hegemonic Chineseness that brought by Chinese international students. In navigating the multiple cultures, they actively engaged in college life to explore who they were. Through active interactions with their peers and engagement in their curricular and co-curricular activities, these students renegotiated and modified their understanding of being Chinese and learned to own the hybrid identity that was unique to them.

3.4.1 Peer Interactions

Peer interaction was one of the foremost aspects that pushed and pulled the five participants to renegotiate their ethnicity and to confront their conflicted feelings in new ways. This is not surprising, as research has demonstrated that peer interactions have a major effect on negotiating one’s ethnicity (Phinney, Romero, Nava and Huang, 2001). Research on identity formation suggested that groups defined their identities in relation to those they identified as others (Barth, 1969; Hall 1996; Proweller, 1998). Proweller (1998) notes “Identities are constituted along borders that separate who one is from who one is not” (p. 62). It is through the interaction with others that one learns to define who one is. Going to college pushes individuals to get out of their “comfort zone” and to seek out friendship that enable them to negotiate their identity. All of the five participants actively sought friendships with Chinese international students, Asian Americans and other students with hybrid identities in addition to their American peers on campus. The renegotiated identity and the comfort of finding who they were emerged through the various interactions with these different groups of people. This comfort validated the
sense of ownership in terms of their identity.

Jack started to ignore his peers’ racist jokes, such as laughing at his small eyes, in college due to his increasing knowledge about the varieties of societies. He even joked around this with his peers in college. He said, “可是现在你觉得这些东西是有点true. 所以你就会拿它当笑话。因为你能笑你自己，那别人也不会欺负你” (But now you will feel that this is kind of true. So you would take it as a joke. If you can laugh at yourself, others would not laugh at you anymore). Jack employed a strategy of what the scholars called “self-mockery” (Omi and Winant, 1986; Watkins, 1994). S. Lee's (1996) study also reported that many Asian American students also rarely challenged the racial busting. Some tried to laugh the jokes off and some reported that the jokes actually hurt their feelings. According to Lee, Asian Americans’ refusal to challenge the busting indicated that they accepted that whites were at the top of the social hierarchy and that they were eager to gain acceptance of whites. This self-mockery, humor, and clowning were self-protective and resistant strategies that racial minorities used to deal with the dominant group (Omi and Winant, 1986; Watkins, 1994). It was interesting to note that while in elementary and middle school, Jack fought furiously about this racial busting, but in college, he chose to laugh it off. Jack chose not to combat these “unnecessary” fights. This change, to some extent, demonstrated ways that Asian American population normalized the oppression they experienced as being ethnic Chinese. It also manifested their powerlessness in fighting against whiteness, which is prevalent in society. The self-mockery pushed by the whiteness dominance was a survival strategy to live by. Higher education, instead of equipping them with the right tool to challenge racism, perpetuated the inequality.
Despite adopting self-mockery to laugh off his physical differences from his peers, Jack was very proud of his heritage country, which he did not allow his peers to mock. The knowledge he gained about China and Chinese society from his father provided him with different perspectives to view the world around him and thus empowered him to renegotiate his ethnicity in college.

我就跟美国人说，你看，你学过美国历史，Rockefeller 美国一九二几年或者一九十几年那会，就是 industrial revolution 刚起来的时候，刚 industrial revolution 以后，有好多这些 corruption 有好多这些，有好多这些我有钱，政府我给你钱，你做。中国有好多这些事，可是你看不是中国的错，这就是 how society 就是这样来，你得。所以我是让他们你得，正经八百是我是让他们明白这个。

(I told Americans that “look at American history, Rockefeller, [in]1920s or 1910s, the beginning of the industrial revolution, there was a lot of corruption too. A lot of things were like the rich industries bribed the government and the government did things for them. China has a lot of these things now, but it is not China’s fault. This is how society develops. You have to… So I want them to…My real purpose is to let them understand this).}

The ability to contextualize China’s development in the human civilization process allowed Jack to help his American peers see objectively on China’s various social issues and thus defend his own heritage. Jack was willing to bridge the cultural gap between China and the U.S. to foster better understanding. He found his peers in college more open-minded and receptive, which gave him a sense of pride in being an ethnic Chinese.

However, his interactions with Chinese international students on campus made him acutely aware of the different Chineseness he embodied from that of theirs. He was akin to Chinese Americans but not to Chinese nationals. This pushed him to modify what being Chinese meant to him.
I prefer to socialize with ABCs, but I don’t socialize with students from China... I think the boys are too listless. They are not capable of many things, and they are mostly playboys. They don’t have the money but like to pretend they are rich... Girls from China are not mature enough. They love kids’ stuff, like stuffed animals. In my eyes, they are immature. If one girl finds out you are rich, her whole personality will be changed. This makes me feel weird, because it is not my money; it is my parents’. I don’t have the money. This is the mentality we ABCs grow up with).

The sharp contrast between the appreciated masculinity and femininity in China and in the U.S. pushed Jack to identify with that in the U.S. and drove him to rethink who he was. Chinese male international students’ non-academic orientation, being listless and female’s materialism, dependency on their parents contrasted dramatically with what Jack had believed to be Chinese and/or to be a man/woman. He became aware that he valued his own idealism, maturity and independence, and he also came to identify these as American traits he had acquired while growing up in the US. He found his values were more in line with those embraced by his American-born Chinese friends. Jack gained significant insight into himself through his efforts to befriend Chinese international students, whose attitudes he ultimately rejected. While he identified to an extent with China and its politics, he found his age cohorts who had grown up in China unappealing and, as a consequence, learned to embrace his American attitudes and behaviors more firmly. Through his exposure to peer interactions, Jack’s understanding of being Chinese was challenged and modified; he clearly saw the Chineseness he embodied as different from that in China –at least as demonstrated by Chinese international students.
Navigating within the multiple cultures, Jack’s understanding of his identity became far more sophisticated than it had been before he entered college.

Like Jack, Amy also found her American peers in the college Honors program more open-minded and more appreciative of her heritage than her peers in high school.

可能我住的地方都是 Honors, 他们对这种事情有兴趣，因为他们也知道中国跟美国的，international affairs, 也很重要，所以他们说 “哦，很厉害啊，说多一点吧。”因为他们也学新的东西，他们有很大的兴趣啊.. 他们问我也觉得很 好啊。因为以前没有那么多人对这种事情感兴趣。(Maybe because the people who live close to me are all Honors, they are very interested in getting to know me. They know the international affairs between China and US are important. They encourage me to speak more about China, because they can learn new things. They have a lot more interest in it… it’s good that they ask me, because previously in high school not a lot of people were interested in these things.)

Amy was not as alienated from her peers in college as in high school; in college her heritage attracted positive attention from her peers. She had the opportunity to talk about her culture to those who were interested in it. She felt talking about the food Chinese people eat, festivals Chinese people celebrate in front of her peers granted her a sense of validation. She sensed acceptance among her American peers. Her sense of belonging continued to increase when she socialized with international students from China. Amy actively sought out Chinese international students. She said,

每次我看到中国人呢，我就过去打招呼，觉得这里的美国人呢，可能已经有朋友了，还是[有]觉得，哦，我跟你个性不一样，就不能做朋友，…觉得找中国学生，国际生比较容易…觉得那种几率比较大我跟他们当朋友的几率会大一点 (I will come talk to them every time I see a Chinese student. I think American students here probably already have friends and that my personality is different from theirs. So it is hard to be friends. I think I am easily connected with Chinese international students. I think the chance of becoming friends with them is higher than that with American students).
The loneliness she experienced deeply in high school influenced how Amy perceived her American peers in college and whom she chose to be friends with. Worried about being rejected by Americans, Amy related herself with Chinese international students, with whom she had cultural, linguistic and minority status in common. Researchers also have found that Asian Americans easily identified with immigrants, who might share similar experiences adjusting to new cultures (Museus, Vue, et al., 2013). She felt an intense comfort with Chinese international students: “我觉得跟中国人在一起…不一定要谈一些中国的话题，可是那种感觉，互相了解的程度会高一点” (I feel like when I am with Chinese people, even though we don’t not necessarily talk about stuff related to China, we have a higher level of understanding of each other). In fact, Amy socialized with a lot of Chinese international students. My field notes showed that every time I ran into her, she was either by herself or with a Chinese international friend. I have never caught her hanging out with Caucasian American students. Amy said multiple times that she found Asian boys more attractive than Caucasian Americans and she had a stable, intimate relationship with a Chinese international student. Amy’s intense feeling of alienation and loneliness in high school were replaced by comfort and acceptance in college. Higher education provided her with the great resource to be empowered and accepted for being an ethnic Chinese. However, because this research focused more on her Chinese identity development, Amy’s American identity was less investigated.

Linda and Amy became friends immediately during the K-week orientation at the beginning of their freshman year when they found out they had so much in common, such as being the only child at their homes, loving similar types of music (K-pop), and being
able to speak another language other than English. Their bond increased when Amy’s Chinese heritage was revealed to Linda (Amy thought Linda was Korean and Linda thought Amy was a Caucasian American due to her appearance). Since then, they sought out Chinese friends together. Contrary to her experience in high school, where Linda consciously kept a distance from her Asian American peers, she took the initiative to get to know Chinese international students in college. Linda could not resist her temptation to get to know the group of Chinese international students in her biology class. She reflected “我最后终于受不了了，受不了得跟他们说话，我得接触一下” (I could not keep silent any more. I needed to talk to them and get to know them). Linda quickly became close to them. They socialized with each other quite frequently such as “一起吃火锅啊, 包饺子，一起出去吃饭” (eating hotpot, making dumplings or eating out together).

Linda also helped them academically by sharing her class notes with them given their English language limitations. She was thrilled to hear that they called her “学霸” (Brainiac), which changed her previous conception of herself academically in high school. Though socializing with Chinese international students initially connected Linda more to her Chinese identity, she later realized, like Jack had, that these students did not embody the kind of Chineseness she desired for herself. They were not academically focused in college, which was not what she had previously believed about Chinese people. This realization pushed her to ponder further about the Chineseness she embraced. It was not the same as demonstrated by those international students, but a modified form derived from her own experience in the United States. She came to the conclusion that she wanted to associate with those who were diligent and hard-working but at the same time maintained a Chinese mentality: “思维像中国人，对生活的追求...就是来大学那个最
终目标是要干什么比较一致” ([I prefer those who] have a Chinese way of thinking and have the same goals toward life and know what the purpose is of coming to college).

Emma also actively sought out international students from China in college in addition to her American peers, though most of her American friends were those interested in Asian culture. On the very first day of Emma’s move into her dorm, she got to know an international student from China; her parents initiated the friendship between the two, as her parents were very friendly to students from China and also wanted Emma to be friends with them. Emma later joined the Chinese student organization on campus during her first year and made a lot of Chinese international friends there. She always spoke Chinese with them. She wanted to know more about current China through socializing with them, because Emma believed “They are China’s future.” Emma believed in the importance of getting to know “China’s future” to enable her, “the future of the United States,” to better connect the two cultures. Emma’s close contact with Chinese international students demonstrated her pragmatic view toward China and Chinese people. Though socializing with students from China in college increased her familiarity and closeness to her heritage, she felt slightly alienated from her Chinese international friends. She admitted that she would not talk about her research or her opinions on Chinese social issues with them, given that her attitude would be much more critical than theirs. Despite that, whether Emma identified herself as Chinese or not was situation based, as demonstrated in the following scenes.

Scene One

Emma’s Caucasian friend, who returned from a nine-month study aboard program in Taiwan, told Emma when Emma was speaking English to her, that “You are Chinese. You should speak Chinese.” Emma said she felt strange upon hearing someone say she is Chinese and urge her to speak Chinese based on her Chinese appearance.
Scene Two
Emma met two Americans at her China-US politics class, who had spent several years in China. Emma took the initiative to talk to them. Here is the dialogue between them:

Emma: Wow, your Chinese is so good. I admire you.
Friend: Your Chinese is very good, too. You are from South (of China) right?
Emma: No. I’m an American.

In both these two scenes, Emma denied her Chinese identity in responding to American people’s assumption and expectation of her. She asserted her national identity over her ethnicity. She did not want them to assume her nationality based on her fluent Chinese and Asian appearance.

Scene Three
There is one time when I was buying lunch at… I ran into XX (Emma’s Caucasian female friend), and a male Japanese friend of hers (for whom XX was buying lunch but had trouble communicating with him). I thought that the Japanese friend was Chinese. I was like, “Oh, XX, do you need help with your friend? Can I help you?” and then he (the Japanese person) turned around and said, “Oh, you can speak Japanese to me.” He said that in English. And I said, “Oh, I’m Chinese” and then there was a complete misunderstanding, for he thought I was really from China. He thought I was an international student.

In scene three, Emma emphasized her ethnicity when socializing with that Japanese student. This was observed in S. Lee’s (1996) study that when Asian American students were with themselves, they began to stress on their ethnicity. Emma chose to identify herself differently in different contexts. This demonstrated the fluidity nature of identity.

Unlike the other four participants for whom peer interactions in college allowed them to embrace, modify and be comfortable with their Chinese identity, Cindy found herself hiding her Chineseness due to her discovered awareness of racism upon arriving on campus. She saw her university climate as subtly hostile to people of color compared
to that in her hometown, where people were from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. People in her hometown respected the diversity of each group and accepted each other as individuals. But in college, Cindy found the contrary.

(I remember one night I was driving [staying] with my sorority sister in a car. One black man walked by our car. My sorority sister began to lock the car. I asked “Why do you lock the car?” She said because he was black and she was afraid he would do something bad. He is a student I can tell, because he has his backpack. I think they (she) don’t understand, because they are white and they have never dealt with this kind of thing]

Her sorority sister’s subconscious reaction to consider Black males as potential threats transmitted a message to Cindy that there was a social barrier between the Caucasians and people of color, which was hard to cross. Cindy chose not to argue with or educate her peers about her understanding of people of color; she was taught from this experience that her peers didn’t understand those racial issues, because “他们长大的时候，他们城市没有很多黑的，... 他们比较不习惯看到黑的，他们比较，不懂这些问题” (When they grew up, they did not see a lot of Black people in their cities. They are not used to this. They don’t understand this). Her peers’ limited understanding of and hostility toward minority people worried Cindy, which pushed her to not share her heritage with them, such as the hardship of growing up as a child of immigrants and her obligation and responsibility to her family, which she believed her peers would never understand. This perceived stereotype of associating people of color with criminals from her sorority is
another example of how stereotype threat can affect Chinese American college students’ ethnicity negotiation. The uniform campus environment observed through her sorority alienated Cindy to some extent from her Caucasian American peers. Nevertheless, most of Cindy’s friends in college were white, most of whom were the sisters in her sorority. One interesting thing worth mentioning was that Cindy’s sorority was a predominantly white sorority, as reflected by the predominantly white institution she attended. She told me it was the network of the sorority for future career opportunity that attracted her to join, which was advised by her two sisters who were both members of that sorority. She continued to hang out with her Asian American friends from childhood. However, she did not socialize frequently with students from China, because she thought she was “我太像美国人，我穿衣服像美国人，全部我的朋友都是美国人” (I am very American. I dress like an American and all my friends are American). In addition, she was afraid that students from China would laugh at her Chinese if she spoke with them. However, Cindy developed a very close relationship with me, a student from China, through this study. She talked to me exclusively in Chinese and our conversation topics were all centered around family, study, food, and Taiwan.

Peer interaction facilitated ethnic identity development for some participants while inhibiting it for some others. When talking about their peers, most of the participants distinguished two sets of peers, American peers, by which they meant Caucasian Americans, and their Chinese friends, by which they meant students of Chinese descent. They juxtaposed the perceived whiteness embodied by their American peers with the Chineseness embodied by their Chinese peers when defining who they were. Friendship with other people of color was also believed to facilitate ethnicity
development (Benner and Wang, 2017). While I know that some of them were friends with other students of color, yet participants in this group seemed to overlook the importance of their interaction with other students of color in their ethnicity construction process.

3.4.2 Campus Space

Researchers have argued the importance of campus space, such as ethnic studies courses and ethnic student organizations, in enhancing minority students’ engagement in higher education and facilitating their identity exploration (Kiang, 2002, 2009; Museus, 2008; Museus, Lam, Huang, Kem, and Tan, 2012; Rhoads, Lee, and Yamada, 2002; Vue, 2013). Museus (2014) said “[S]uch sites can serve as spaces in which Asian American students can collectively learn about their Asian American histories and cultures, thereby experiencing identity development and the acquisition of a sense of purpose” (p. 77). The importance of such campus spaces has also demonstrated itself in the lives of the current participants.

3.4.2.1 Curriculum—Ethnic Courses

The research site offered Chinese major and minor studies, which included Chinese language learning and culture studies. It was from the Chinese language classes that these participants were recruited. Therefore, these participants have voluntarily chosen to connect themselves with their heritage, despite their relatively good command in spoken Chinese. Their motivations to participate in the Chinese language class varied. Three of them aimed to improve their Chinese language proficiency because they believed that it would enhance their careers (Emma, Amy and Cindy). Two of them
enrolled in the Chinese language class to fulfill the language requirement for graduation (Linda and Jack). Linda and Jack were already proficient in speaking Chinese before taking the class. In addition to the language class, several of the participants also took some Chinese culture classes on campus. It is to be noted that not all the students of Chinese descent in college choose to study Chinese or have an interest in taking Chinese culture classes. Therefore, the willingness of the participants to officially include their heritage language and culture in their academic study indicated a wish to embrace their Chinese identity.

These classes offered in college had a significant impact on how these five participants viewed their ethnicity. The positive effect of the campus curriculum on enhancing minority students’ ethnic identity development was also found by Vasquez (2005), Kiang (2002) and Museus, et al. (2012). Vasquez argued that minority students gained a sense of ethnic legitimation and empowerment through ethnic courses and were able to express their ethnic identity confidently. Participants in this group gained much greater understanding of their heritage, built on the familiarity with it that they brought to college.

All five participants reported the Chinese language class helped improve their Chinese proficiency greatly, especially their reading and writing abilities. The improved language ability empowered them to claim their Chinese identity, as Emma said, “在这里上中文课之后，我总是有点像中国人嘛，尤其是跟别的 ABC 比嘛，因为你有的 ABC 他们一点中文也不会说，对不对。所以我有的时候，我就会 oh, I am Chinese”
(After taking Chinese class here, I always say I am more Chinese now, especially compared with other ABCs. Some of them cannot speak Chinese at all, right? So I would sometimes have the feeling …that I am Chinese). They believed being able to speak the language was important to claim one’s ethnicity. The Chinese language class certainly helped them reclaim their ethnic association. Amy, who was proficient in spoken Cantonese before coming to college, especially aspired to acquire the standard Mandarin accent (like that in the China Central Television news broadcasting) in the language class. She believed mastering that would validate her Chineseness. Emma and Amy associated the ability to speak Chinese/standard Chinese accent with the authenticity of being Chinese. The hegemonic Chineseness, which defines being Chinese as speaking a certain language, coming from certain geographic locations and practicing certain rituals argued against by Tu (1994b), was internalized by the participants.

The Chinese culture courses –such as Chinese modern history, Chinese film and cultural studies, ancient China, and Chinese short stories—offered different perspectives on how participants viewed their heritage and how that contributed to their ethnic identity development in general. Cindy and Amy had little knowledge about Mainland China before college; their parents were from Taiwan and Hong Kong. Various cultural classes provided them with a more comprehensive understanding of China. Amy reported a sense of empowerment after taking these Chinese cultural classes. She said,

我会觉得不那么惭愧, 因为每一次如果我说,"我妈是从香港来的" 然后对什么历史都不了解…现在稍微好一点…之前对中国的了解没有很多，特别是政治，政治是最近开始感兴趣的，之前我都不知道。所以会觉得我突然那么 mental 上面的东西 broad in.
(I feel that I am not that guilty now, because previously when I told people my mother is from Hong Kong but I know little about China’s history, [I felt so guilty]. Now, I know a little bit more of it…previously I did not know much about China, especially the politics. I developed an interest in politics quite recently, which I knew nothing about it. So I feel that my horizon has been broadened [by taking these classes] ).

These ethnic culture courses legitimized students’ claiming of their ethnicity. Knowledge in their heritage granted them confidence and power when being questioned by others. College ethnic courses also helped to raise minority students’ awareness in political issues to allow them to be more apprehensive of the social issues such as oppression and inequalities. Cindy also expressed gratitude toward the culture classes, through which she finally understood the long-time tensions between Taiwan and Mainland China and that changed her perception toward Mainland China.

(I think I have a lot more appreciation [from taking these classes]. Because when I grew up, my mom is a typical Taiwanese, and she likes Taiwan very much. She thinks “oh, Mainland China is not as good [as Taiwan].” But when I read those literatures and got to know the reasons behind so many issues, I began to understand more, like why Mainland China is like this…I began to know a lot of the whys, like why it has that, like the steps that led to all the events, and I feel like I just had a better understanding. It kind of sparks more interest in wanting to learn more about what’s going on in Taiwan and China and how it is a comparison to live in the America.)

While participants’ direct exposure to China through ethnic courses increased their familiarity with their heritage and granted them entitlement in claiming their
ethnicity, the wide variety of courses available on campus that are directly or indirectly related to China and Chinese culture also impacted how those Chinese Americans negotiated their ethnicity. Emma developed an enormous interest in Chinese history and Asian history in general during college. She enrolled in a lot of classes in Asian history and politics. She updated herself regularly about the news of current China especially on politics. The information she gained through the college curriculum and her own study resulted in a “complicated feeling” about current China. She said she had an admiration of Chinese culture as she always did when she was in high school, but at the same time, she was very critical about China’s politics in college. She said she was “比较反共” (against China’s Communist Party). Because of her stance on the China’s Communist Party and her research focusing on a topic that was very sensitive in the Chinese history, she would rather not share her research interest with students from China. Emma’s critical attitude toward China stemmed from the fact that she held the American values of freedom of speech and democracy dear to her heart, but came to realize that China did not support these values. Emma said she “希望中国以后可以民主” (hoped China could be a democratic country). She called it a “tough love” toward China. This was also the major reason Emma refused to identify with Chinese nationals, because it indicated an identification with China, the country. How China, as a country, mattered to the participants will be discussed in detail in chapter 6.

Chinese American college students chose to major in programs that were directly related to money and prestige, which was the assumed foundation in the cultural model of success adopted by Korean Americans in Kim’s (1993) study. This reflected their Asian
identity and to some extent, reinforced the stereotype for being Asian. While a lot of the Korean American students considered majors such as doctors, lawyers, engineers as typical Koreans (Kim, 1993), students in this group also shared that their major choice in such areas were to conform to the expectations of their family and community. Four of the five students discussed here followed this imposed career identity. One aimed for a career in business, two wanted to be doctors, and one had chosen a career in science. Amy not only chose economics as her major but also incorporated Chinese language into her career development by choosing Foreign Languages and Economics as her major. Witnessing her parents’ difficulties in the doctor’s office pushed Cindy to be a doctor who could speak Chinese to help people like her parents. Linda decided early on to be a plastic surgeon. Jack’s choice of chemistry was also a reflection of his identification with his father, who worked in the chemistry field. Chinese American college students in this group have internalized their parents’ cultural model of success, which was developed from their experiences as immigrants in the U.S., or more accurately, as voluntary immigrants in Ogbu’s (1987) term, to secure better lives for their family, as typical Chinese or Asian.

Only Emma chose a major —history— that was not obviously related to a financially lucrative career. In fact, Emma was challenged frequently by Chinese people at her church, who raised their eyebrows and asked her “What are you going to do with a history major?” But, as Emma’s parents recognized, Emma’s disabilities precluded many other choices. In choosing history, her choice of major, though it deviated from the expectations of her community, nevertheless, linked her directly to her ethnic heritage as
well as to her family background, namely a study focused on the Chinese Cultural Revolution which both her parents had lived through.

3.4.2.2 Student Organizations

Researchers have demonstrated the positive effect of ethnic student organizations in enhancing college students’ ethnic identity development (Inkelas, 2004; Museus, 2008). The research site does not have a student organization that specifically targeting Asian American/Chinese American students. The various Asia-related student organizations on campus included Filipino American student organization, Chinese International Fraternity, Chinese Student and Scholar Association (most of which were Chinese international students), Indian student association, and Korean student organization. In addition to these student-run organizations, there was a Confucius Institute on campus, which was very active in engaging college students with Chinese culture. Among the five participants, two participants (Emma and Linda) reported some involvement in these ethnic student organizations, the Chinese Students and Scholars Association. Emma and Amy were involved in the various activities held by the Confucius Institute. Further, other campus spaces, such as the campus wide tutoring service, also provided opportunities for these Chinese American students to explore and negotiate the meaning of being ethnic Chinese on campus.

Emma attended the Chinese international student organization activities through the introduction of her acquaintance with Chinese international students in her freshman year. She was also one of the organizers of Project Pengyou, a student organization aimed to connect Chinese international students and American students interested in learning China in her graduate studies at the institution. Emma always positioned herself as a
bridge to connect American culture and Chinese culture. She said “我总是想当一个 bridge, 可以减少一些冲突, 多一些 understanding” (I always want to be a bridge to reduce some conflicts and contribute to more understanding).

Amy participated in a lot of activities on campus that were related to Chinese learning, such as Chinese writing and speaking competitions, the Chinese Bridge competition and other activities organized at her university. Though she was not a member in any student organization, Amy was deeply involved in the various activities organized by the Confucius Institute on campus, such as taking erhu, guzheng (traditional Chinese music instruments) and business Chinese classes, sharing her experiences as an ethnic Chinese and hosting various activities organized by the Confucius Institute as master of ceremonies. Due to her active participation, she won an award issued by Hanban (also known as Confucius Institute Headquarters) to honor those who contributed significantly to the spread of Chinese culture. Through the Confucius Institute, Amy visited China several times. Amy’s efforts in participating in these activities demonstrated her great investment in exploring her heritage and these ethnic related activities exposed to her enhanced her embrace of her ethnicity.

In addition to her participation in the Confucius Institute, Amy was also chosen to work as a Chinese tutor in The Study (Transformative Learning) for American students learning Chinese on campus due to her superb Chinese proficiency. She was promoted to be the manager after one year of working there. She enjoyed the job very much. She said “现在教的蛮不错的，不会常常看时间...不会有那种像工作的那种，必须去，...很
少有那种感觉“ (I am teaching pretty well now. I don’t constantly watch time…I do not have the feeling like I am working, the feeling like I have to do something…I seldom have such feelings). Working to promote her own ethnic language was not only rewarding to herself but also empowered her in her self-presentation as an ethnic Chinese. She said “所以我觉得蛮有趣的，我也不知道可以对别人有帮助” (I enjoy it very much. I did not know I could help people). This unexpected privilege as an ethnic Chinese was also confirmed by Linda when she worked as a tutor in the biology tutoring center on campus. Linda said “就是因为[我]有这个 additional, like language.这样，要是有中国人需要帮忙，那也可以来我这儿，要是是个美国 tutor 的话，她就不可可以” (Because I have this additional language advantage, if Chinese students need help, they can come to me. The American tutors could not be of any help in this case). This realization of the advantage brought by their ethnicity provided Linda and Amy with a great sense of pride in being Chinese.

Linda was also connected with the Chinese Student and Scholar Association through her many Chinese international students. Linda performed several of the activities organized by the Chinese student organization, such as the New Year Celebration; she performed a hip-pop dancing along with two other Chinese students. In fact, Linda’s hip-pop virtuosity surprised many of her peers, including both her American and Chinese friends. Linda chose to perform this African American style dancing when she was also good at Chinese flute, which she had taken lessons since childhood. While her choice of hip-pop dancing over Chinese flute could be understood as a de-
identification with her heritage. It could be also understood as a resistance to the dominant society’s perception of Asian Americans as socially awkward nerds and only interested in math (Espiritu, 2008; Museus and Park, 2012). It was her own efforts to speak up for people in her community. In this sense, through her own endeavor, she educated the general public about the diversity of her people.

Cindy joined the same sorority in college that her two older sisters belonged to. She was convinced that her sorority could provide connections important to her future career opportunities. Cindy was constantly aware of her Chinese identity in her predominately white sorority and in the activities organized by her sorority. Commenting on one of the funding raising activities for low income families during Christmas:

(I saw a family, a boy and his little sister [and his parents]. His parents were extremely happy that we could bring such excitements to him, but their English was too poor to communicate with us. They spoke Spanish to the boy and the boy translated it into English. When I saw this, it had a lot of meanings to me, because I was like that little boy when I was young and my parents could not speak English either…I understand, I understand why this little boy was like that, and he was going to do this probably later in his life, too).

Seeing the child act as a language and cultural broker for immigrant parents invoked important childhood memories for Cindy. She could relate to the little boy’s difficulties growing up in this situation. This role reversal between immigrant parents and their children where children must help their parents navigate new society was also prevalent.
in other racial minority families (S. Lee, 2005; Song, 1999; Waters, 1999). Museus, Vue, et al (2013) also asserted that Asian American identities were comprised of association with other race-, ethnicity-, and cultural based social groups. Observing the life in that Spanish-speaking family strengthened Cindy’s own ethnic identity. However, Cindy did not share this insight with her sorority sisters, with whom she could not relate, at least in this experience. She perceived them as women growing up as privileged whites, incapable of understanding the experiences of immigrants even though they had undertaken to bring joy to an immigrant family. She chose not to enhance her sorority sisters’ appreciation and empathy for an important aspect of American life, namely what it is like to be an immigrant or the descendant of an immigrant.

Cindy also distanced herself from the path taken by her own sister, who had been selected as the president of this sorority a few years earlier. She commented “[那]是一个很大的事情,因为好像没有过一个东方人当女生会的 president” (That was a huge thing, because there was never an oriental\(^6\) being selected as the president). Her second elder sister was, according to Cindy and Cindy’s Caucasian boyfriend, very Americanized and eager to fit in with her white peers. They described her refusal to speak her heritage language in public, her particular taste of clothing, her less orientation to her family as her ways of deliberately erasing her ethnicity in order to fit in with the predominately white culture. Cindy, by contrast, believed the “perpetual foreigner” stereotype that no matter what she did, she would be categorized as “other”. Therefore, she was comfortable performing her ethnicity and not caring about being othered.

\(^6\) This was a direct translation from Cindy’s quote. Her parents and Cindy all use oriental (东亚人) to refer to people from East Asia without any offensive implications.
我的二姐，她要跟这些人 fit in, 她是会 “我不要你看见我们，我不要你看到我是中国的，我跟你不一样”，可是我自己，我真的算没有…他们看到我，他们就知道我的父亲是中国，是别的国家，所以我没有，我很少会特别说…我比较随便。

(My second elder sister wants to fit in with those people. She would behave like “I don’t want you to see me with Chinese people. I don’t want you to know I am Chinese or I am different from you.” But myself, I don’t do that…When people see me, they immediately know my father is from China, a foreign country. So I don’t… I rarely specifically emphasize [I am an American citizen]. I do not care about it.)

Though Cindy’s refusal to blend in the predominantly white norm enhanced the awareness of her ethnicity, I would argue that Cindy’s ethnic identity was constructed in the backdrop of unequal racial hierarchies. She clearly understood the reality that unlike the ancestors of European immigrants, who can choose whether or not to identify as ethnics, non-white ethnics have always found ethnic labels imposed on them by the dominant group (Espiritu, 1992; Tuan, 1998; Waters, 1990). The hegemonic whiteness defines who is American and who is not, as S. Lee (2005) said, “[A] conflation of whiteness with American-ness has excluded Asian Americans from the category of American” (p. 8). Cindy’s acceptance of this “perpetual foreigner” stereotype and actually utilizing this to claim her ethnicity manifested her non-challenge to the social oppression and hierarchy.

For young Americans, their arrival at college typically opened a vastly expanded world compared to that of their high schools and home communities. Most of the five Chinese American students in this part of the study came to college with uncertainty on how to manage their identities as Americans and Chinese. In college they actively embraced the opportunities provided by the college environment to explore the meaning
of being ethnic Chinese. Their pivotal experiences were the encounter with other Asian American students as well as with Chinese international students, and with more open-minded American students. Moreover, curricular offerings; availabilities to incorporate ethnicity into future careers and opportunities to join student organizations further provided spaces for them to negotiate who they were. These five students engaged themselves quite intensely with the opportunities offered by their college to explore their Chineseness, and all gained significant understanding of the Chineseness they embodied. Their perception of who they were has been renegotiated and modified on campus through the various opportunities available to them. However, the predominantly white campus environment also posed some restrictions on their identity exploration, as the case of Cindy indicated. Nevertheless, college provided a more open and freer environment in which they learned to develop a third space hybrid identity, which will be further discussed in the following section.

3.5 Who Am I?

Experiencing struggles in high school and exploring who they were through active engagement in the college contexts led all the participants to realize the importance of integrating multiple cultures together to form a unique identity that was owned by them. Jack said,

因为我又是美国长大，我又是中国人脸，所以我觉得比较重要，就是两边都得明白...我觉得你得对...你得 understand 你的 heritage, 然后是...I take great pride in being Chinese, right? 因为中国你有那么多历史，乱七八糟的，所以我还是对中国，就是我的 heritage 比较 proud,可是我会 identify 自己是 American, 所以两边都有。 (Because I grew up in the US, and I have a Chinese face, so I think it is very important to know two sides... I think you have to... you have to understand your heritage, and then, I take great pride in being Chinese, right? Because China has
such a long history, I am proud of China and my heritage. But I would also identify myself as American, so I have both sides).

Identifying his citizenship to be American, Jack also valued highly his Chinese heritage. He was proud that he was both an American and a Chinese. This dual identity of identifying both with the country of birth and with their heritage was also found in the studies in S. Lee (1996) and Kim (1993). Kim argued that Korean American students considered the dual identity as “additive and complementary, not as oppositional and conflicting” (Kim, 1993, p. 230). This additive and complementary nature of dual identity was embraced by participants in this group too.

Emma, the girl with the physical disability, found comfort in being a 华裔 (a Chinese American). She said “就是华裔，华裔就是华裔啊…有机会的话就练汉语嘛…可能是受到我 CLS 项目同学的影响，我可能现在也不会说我是中国人了，就是说中国人跟华人还是不一样嘛” (I am a Chinese American, Chinese American is Chinese American…I will practice Chinese whenever possible…maybe under the influence of the classmates in the CLS [Critical Language Scholarship] program, I may not say I am Chinese now, because being Chinese is different from being people of Chinese descent). Emma was fully cognizant of the differences of Chineseness within the larger Chinese culture—that embraced by people in China and that cherished by people of Chinese descent living abroad. She was also apprehensive of the differences between herself and her American peers due to her ethnicity. Navigating these differences within and between cultures, Emma saw the importance of integrating her Chinese and
American identity together to form a hybrid Chinese American identity, which could better represent herself without losing either one.

Amy, the biracial girl, identified herself as a “half Chinese, 这边长大的 half Chinese, 这样可能会更容易懂” (a half Chinese who grew up in the United States. This will be easy for people to understand). She would tell people about her biracial background, “我妈妈是中国人，我爸爸是美国人，所以我两边都有” (My mom is Chinese; my dad is American, so I have both sides). As a biracial, Amy had learned to develop from a monoracial identity (Chinese) in k-12 education to multiple monoracial identity (a Chinese and an American) in college (Renn, 2000). She was able to see the importance of both sides of her identity. However, she found herself easily connected with people who are both familiar with China and America, such as Linda, who had lived in China and in the U.S. long enough to know the cultures of both countries. She insisted that “文化方面应该是中国人，教育什么的应该是中国化，比这边的很多 ABC 更中国化一点” (I am Chinese culturally and educationally. I am more Chinese than a lot of the ABCs here). Amy’s embrace of both Chinese and American on the one hand coincided with her biracial background, and on the other side, reflected her cultural embrace of both worlds.

Linda, who arrived in the U.S. at age eight, identified herself as a first-generation immigrant, who could get around in both cultures. She said, “我现在觉得挺好的， 就这样，就是一个混，就是管是中国人还是美国人，都能说的来，然后包括韩国人也能
说得来，我觉得这样就好”（I think right now is good. One word, mingle. Be it a 
Chinese or an American, I can both get along. I can even get along with Koreans. I think 
this is good enough). Linda really mingled well with both students of Chinese descent 
and other Americans. Linda was considered a “稍微亚洲人一点的美国人” (slightly 
Asianized American) in her American friends’ eyes, but a “待美国比较长的一个中国人” 
(a Chinese who has stayed long in the US) in her Chinese friends’ eyes. She was proud of 
possessing both cultural values and being appreciated by people in both worlds.

Cindy, whose parents were from Taiwan, came to the realization that “我是什么 
人跟我的皮肤和眼睛的颜色没有关系。因为我知道美国和中国的文化，我比较懂这 
两个世界。我的这些知识可以帮比较多的人懂得多样性”(Who I am has nothing to do 
with my skin color and eye color. Because I know both China and America, I understand 
both worlds. My knowledge can help more people understand diversity). Here, Cindy 
argued strongly against the “perpetual foreigner” stereotype that the dominant society 
imposed on her based on her appearance. She valued being both a Taiwanese and an 
American due to her familiarity with the two cultures.

Negotiating the differences between Chinese culture and American culture as well 
as that within the Chinese culture practiced by people in China and by people of Chinese 
descent living abroad, these participants developed a hybrid identity in college that 
belongs to a third space. They choose not to struggle with being a Chinese or an 
American as they did before college. Being a Chinese American was an identity that was 
embedded in them. Being a Chinese and an American were not to be separated in
defining who they were. It both connected and separated them from people in China and people in the US. The hybrid identity, Chinese American, for this group of participants is not an imposed identity by the dominant society but an owned identity that is unique to them. College environment enabled that social interactions and provided various opportunities and resources for them to explore. Students in this group actively engaged in these activities that enabled their identity to be fully developed. The knowledge of Chinese culture and the linguistic proficiency that their parents fostered during their childhood facilitated their agency in identity negotiation in college. It is this family cultivation that I will turn to in the following section.

3.6 Concerted Cultivation

While college provides Chinese American college students with various platforms for them to explore and define their identity, what they have brought with them to college in terms of the understanding about their ethnicity paves the way for their later identity construction. Family ethnic socialization and parents’ “concerted cultivation” (Lareau, 2011) plays an important role in the participants’ identity development. This term “concerted cultivation” originally referred to parents’ different strategies of bringing up their children in relation to their family’s social class. Lareau argued that parents from higher social economic class investigate much their time and energy to cultivate their children in terms of academic performance, and extra-curricular activities, the strategy of “concerted cultivation.” Parents from the lower social economic class adopted a natural growth strategy in bringing up their children. In this study, the concept “concerted cultivation” is borrowed to denote parents’ conscious efforts in instilling heritage culture to their children. It is important to note that parents of this group of students adopted the
“concerted cultivation” in fostering heritage culture understanding in their children, while parents for those who spoke English during the interviews adopted natural growth strategy. This will be discussed in the next chapter. In fact, parents’ cultural practice has been credited greatly in maintaining minority group’s culture and enhancing minority students’ ethnic identity development (Juang and Syed 2010; Umaña-Taylor and Guimond, 2010; Brittian et al., 2013; Nguyen et al., 2015).

I talked to every participant’s parents except Jack’s. But Jack’s interviews revealed that his parents paid considerable attention to cultivating his heritage; his parents sent him to Chinese school when he was young. His mother taught him Chinese whenever she had time. They chose to live in a community with a lot of Chinese people and Jack’s parents were very involved in the Chinese community. The Chinese community celebrated Chinese festivals together. They hung out and talked about their kids together. Jack’s father was a Chinese nationalist in Jack’s mind. He was very proud of China. He talked a lot about Chinese industrialization in the 1960s, the Cultural Revolution, and the Mao’s and Deng Xiaoping’s administration. Jack’s parents took Jack back to China frequently to visit his grandparents. Those frequent talks about China at home and the frequent visits to China had a big influence on how Jack perceived China and himself. Commenting on his white American peer’s experience travelling around the world, he said his parents only took him back to China, because his parents only wanted to spend their limited break in visiting China where they have relatives and friends.

While I cannot verify the reason behind Jack’s parents’ efforts, the other four sets of parents all stated explicitly that they aimed to maintain their children’s Chinese heritage. Emma’s parents were involved a lot in Emma’s life partly because of her
disabilities. Emma recalled that her mother took her everywhere when she was young, such as to the library and museums, to stimulate her brain development because “他们也总是怕有点，因为是脑损伤，所以总是怕 ur……没有那么聪明” (They always worried that I am not that clever, because I had brain damage when I was born). Emma had a lot of memories of her parents helping her with her Chinese. Her parents spoke Chinese with her at home. They would pretend that they could not understand her by saying “你说什么？我听不懂” (What did you say? I cannot understand) whenever Emma spoke English to them. Emma remembered that her parents tried to rename things around them in Chinese for her to learn the language. Her mother made up Chinese songs about different colors of cereals and sang to her and her sister so that they could learn the colors in Chinese. Her parents expected her at least to be able to understand and speak Chinese, because they thought “不管你走到哪里，别人都会看到你是中国人” (No matter where you go, people would see you are Chinese) (parents’ interview). Again, the perpetual foreigner stereotype on Asian Americans pushed Emma’s parents to teach her about her ethnicity. Being able to speak Chinese validates one’s Chinese identity in Emma’s parents’ minds. Her parents also insisted that Emma go to see the greatness of China whenever possible. They said “第一次是四岁的时候去的，然后第二次的话是她十岁的时候，我们就说要赶快带她去看长城，故宫，去看兵马俑，然后我们就想说这个时候我们还能陪得动她，还能抱抱她哦，所以就赶快带她去了” (We first took her back to China when she was four, and then the second time was when she was ten. We wanted to take her to see The Great Wall, the Forbidden City, and the Terracotta
Warriors as soon as possible. We thought we needed to take her there when we were strong enough to hold her. So we took her to see those things. The eagerness to present China to their daughter and the pride they took in China impacted Emma’s attitude toward her heritage. Emma’s parents were also consciously directing her interest to be China-related. Her mom said “她后来想搞历史，我就希望她能够朝着中国方面有关的来做，可能对她来说有一点 advantage” (Later she wanted to study history. I hope that she can do things in relation to China. She may have an advantage on that). Emma’s parents shared with Emma their experience during the Cultural Revolution which enabled Emma to finish her first research paper in high school on that topic. Later, Emma developed an intense interest in China-US relations. Connecting Emma with China culturally, linguistically and academically were what Emma’s parents strove for.

Amy’s mother chose to stay home to educate her daughter until Amy went to fourth grade. Amy’s mother wanted Amy to be able to communicate with her grandparents in Hong Kong, so she was very dedicated to teaching Amy Cantonese. She consciously spoke to her in Cantonese and developed games to play with her in Chinese. When Amy’s mother found watching TV in Chinese (Cantonese) was helpful to Amy for both language development and cultural awareness, she chose to be the guide.

I have to sit with her and explain to her. I said “ok, this is [a] teaching moment again.” So I thought “that’s good.” But the plot would just be all crazy, because I am gonna have to stop it and told to her and then just watch it a little bit again. I was fully intended to do that.

Seizing every opportunity to maintain her daughter’s heritage and being willing to spend the time and efforts to guide the process were crucial to Amy’s mother. She valued the
educational opportunity of watching TV with Amy and did not “let her watch it just by herself” because TV was not a “babysitter.” She shouldered the responsibility for her daughter’s learning by “pick[ing] responsible [appropriate] show[s] for the kid’s age” and “sit[ting] with her…and explain[ing]” what they watched. Amy’s mother also took Amy back to Hong Kong every other year and stayed one to two months there. She valued the opportunity for Amy to experience Chinese customs, manner of behaviors and traditions like “giv[ing] up your seats when you see people in need, what is acceptable, what is not [appropriate], like before you eat, …like respect for the older people things like that.” Her mother was ready to explain things to her whenever she had questions. Educating Amy to be fluent culturally and linguistically in her heritage was Amy’s mother’s goal.

Linda’s parents did similar things. They not only appreciated the importance of continuing her Chinese but also were cognizant of the foreignness embodied by her ethnicity. They insisted that because one look Chinese, one would have to be able to speak the language. They said “我们觉得学一种语言不容易哈, 而且不管怎么样, 你在哪里你还是中国人哈, 所以我们来以前就准备了一些, 比如说 她上二年级我们把三年级到初一的书能带来就带来” (We think it is not easy to master a language [therefore, it is better to keep it ]. No matter where you are, you are still Chinese no matter what. So we brought all the Chinese text books from second grade to middle school when we came here). They did not have concerns of Linda’s Chinese fluency, as she spoke fluent Chinese when she arrived in the US and the family spoke Chinese with each other. The crucial thing was to keep up Linda’s education with standards in China. But Linda’s parents didn’t have the time to teach her. Linda studied those textbooks by
herself during summer breaks and her parents checked her study when they came home every day. Her mother also helped her read Chinese and explained things Linda didn’t understand. They regularly updated themselves with the programs broadcasted on Chinese TV channels at home and discussed it with each other. When I interviewed Linda’s parents, they debated heatedly about China and US issues with each other, even though it was off the interview questions. They later also admitted that they had a lot of similar debates in the household. Growing up in that household, Linda’s Chinese was not limited to conversational Chinese and she got a lot more exposure to Chinese culture and current Chinese society. The family also kept in touch with their relatives in China via skype and other social medias on a daily basis and Linda was quite active in that communication. Transmitting and maintaining her heritage through daily living and communication were natural for Linda’s parents and it has been proved to be important for Linda’s heritage attachment.

Among all the parents, Cindy’s parents were the only ones who admitted that they had not put any pressure on their children to maintain their heritage except that they expected their children to speak Chinese to them at home because their English was not good. Though they also acknowledged the benefit of mastering Chinese for their children’s career opportunities, Cindy’s parents did not push them to learn the language formally. Cindy’s mother, however, provided the sisters with the right method to improve Chinese. She said “你们姐妹在外边也要讲中文，然后中文多讲就好了，就是要多讲嘛” (As long as you three sisters also speak Chinese outside of the house [your Chinese will be ok]. The more you speak Chinese, the better you will be at it. More speaking will
be ok). Unlike other parents, Cindy’s parents didn’t pressure them to enroll in Chinese class when they were in college. They let them to make the decision. The family dynamic, according to Cindy’s parents, was hands-off: kids do whatever they want to do. However, Cindy’s oldest sister revealed that her parents pushed her a lot harder on academics in order for her to set a model for her siblings to follow. Despite their busy schedule at their family restaurant, where Cindy’s parents work over ten hours daily, Cindy’s mother took her children back to Taiwan every two years to visit her parents and to renew her healthcare status in Taiwan. Cindy went with her mother most of the time before she attended college. The frequent exposure to her heritage enabled Cindy to improve her Chinese and her understanding of her Taiwanese identity. Participants’ parents all exhibited dedication in maintaining their children’s heritage. Parents in this group generally possessed a positive attitude toward China, though they have expressed their frustrations toward certain social and political problems in China, which will be discussed in detail in chapter 6.

One thing noted in this group is that three of the participants in this group were the only child. A fourth, Emma, was similar to the only child in the family as she and her sister were ten years apart and her sister moved away from home during Emma’s childhood, which allowed her parents to dedicate their attention to Emma. China’s policy to slow down population growth in the 1980s that restricted one family to have only one child created a “one child” generation. Considering them as the “only hope” for the family, parents of these “Singletons” dedicated themselves to the prosperity of their children (Fong, 2006). Parents’ investment on those “Singletons” has been intensively discussed by Vanessa Fong’s (2006) book, *Only Hope*. Parents in the city, internalizing
the cultural model of modernization, investigated intensively on their children’s education, despite gender, to prepare them for participating in the First World. Parents in my research belonged to the cohorts of parents of the “one child” generation, so the “singleton” phenomenon was not unfamiliar to them. They may continue that investment and efforts in raising their children when they were in the United States.

Also noticeable is that all these participants with the exception of Cindy came from middle class backgrounds, with parents holding professional jobs and living in the suburbs. The rest of the four parents came to the US to pursue advanced degrees. These professional parents exerted efforts to foster their children’s learning of their heritage culture, including the language, through “organized activities” to sustain this goal. This was similar to what Lareau (2011) has found that middle class Americans have done in child rearing. While she argued in her book that it was the parents’ social class and how they were enacted in family life and child rearing that shaped the way children viewed themselves in relation to the rest of the world, stories of this group of Chinese American participants implied that how parents’ social class and ethnicity enacted in family life had a strong impact on their determination to teach their children about their heritage culture. Their children’s proficiency in speaking Chinese, which was achieved through deliberately undertaken and consistently pursued efforts on the part of the parents laid a strong foundation for them to explore their ethnic identity later in life. Though these parents may have limited personal experience to guide their children to navigate education, their educational capital enabled them to guide their children onto the path of effectively exploring and finally achieving a dual identity.
Cindy’s family background differed from that of the other students in this group. While she, too, arrived at college with considerable proficiency in speaking Chinese, she came from a working-class family and her parents had made few deliberate efforts to instruct her in her heritage culture. They came to the United States under the sponsorship of their relative and ran a Chinese restaurant for a living. They did not have a college education and they did not speak good English. They worked in the restaurant more than ten hours a day. They did not have the time as the four other parents had to devote to their children’s heritage maintenance nor did they perceive it as necessary and important to their children. Nevertheless, Cindy had a strong attachment to her heritage. Cindy visited Taiwan more often than her siblings, always together with her mother. Even as a college student, she visited home and helped her family, including at the restaurant. She reported that she got along with her mother very well. The fact that being the youngest in a household where parents need regular and constant cultural and linguistic assistance from their children and staying with parents longer could have potentially contributed to Cindy’s higher level of heritage maintenance.

3.7 Chineseness Understanding and Performance

In addition to asking participants to express what they identify with, this research also specifically invited them to explain what it meant for them to be Chinese in the U.S. and what their understanding of Chineseness was and how they performed that Chineseness in their daily life. Their reflections not only further validated the Tu’s (1994) anti-essentialism of Chineseness, but also revealed in detail how Chinese Americans were caught between and within the differences in constructing who they were. It demonstrated the hegemonic whiteness and Chineseness in structuring their identity.
formation, as Jones and Abes (2013) argued, “[I]dentity [is] socially constructed and located in larger structures of privilege and oppression” (p. xxi). Navigating through the various power dominations, participants understood how to situate their identity according to the different contexts and situation they were involved in. This demonstrated further the fluid nature of identity. Tackling the intricacies of Chineseness and Americanness, participants eventually solidified their hybrid identity, Chinese American, a unique and third space identity, that was owned by them.

Chineseness, as whiteness, should not be a uniform presentation, as argued by Jacobson (1998) in delineating the fluid boundaries of whiteness. The single definition of Chineseness has been deployed historically to exclude ethnic identities within China (Tu, 1994b) and then was further utilized by various succession of Chinese government for the purpose of maintaining national unity against western powers. Shih stated,

[A] racialized ideology of the Western powers since the nineteenth century…presented Chineseness along the color line, disregarding the many diversities and differences within China…[and thus] the Chinese became “yellow” and reduced to one ethnicity…The external production of Chinese uniformity paradoxically worked well with the unifying intent of the Chinese state, especially since the end of the Manchu rule in 1912, which eagerly presented a unified China and Chineseness to emphasize its cultural and political autonomy from the west (Shih, 2013, p. 27).

While authorities and dominant popular culture in China have historically included all people of Chinese descent to belong to the “children of Yellow Emperor” (Tu, 1994b, p. 3), the hegemonic Chineseness has also been imposed on them without considering the specific historical, social, cultural, and political situations in the host country they settled down. Despite that, in this research, participants still identified some
common understandings of Chineseness, which were all derived from their experience of growing up in Chinese immigrant households. They referred often to their parents’ habits and practices when articulating what they regarded as typically Chinese. Often times, they compared with what they believed to be American, valid or not, in asserting their understanding of Chineseness. Through this comparison, Chinese American students also essentialized what American-ness is. However, as people of Chinese descent living outside of China, they reacted differently to the perceived Chineseness presented within their household and communities. Their host country and the open environment in college education played important roles in their resistance to this hegemonic Chineseness. In the following sections, I will present their perceptions of Chineseness and how they chose to perform that Chineseness. Through their strategies of either conforming to or resisting the Chineseness they observed, the following section aimed to further highlight the complexities of Chineseness and the gradual emergence of Chinese American college students’ hybrid identities.

3.7.1 High Academic Expectations

The most salient feature of Chineseness expressed by participants was their parents’ high expectation of their academic achievement and the parents’ efforts in pushing/helping their children to realize their educational goals. Scholars have believed this parental emphasis on education to be Asian culture, which they claim explained Asian American students’ academic success (Candill and De Vos, 1956). Jack said,

我爸就是有点特别，像中国那样，你说中国学生，像我这么大的，就是起来复习，吃早饭，上学，上完学去那个什么补习班，补习班回来再学习，然后就是整天就是学嘛。所以，他就以为中国就是那样 (所以他要我也那样)….
Jack understood this emphasis on education to be Chinese through his father’s repetitive lectures on his own schooling experience and the current Chinese students’ academic pressures. Jack’s father’s emphasis on working hard academically on the one hand reflected his belief of education in social mobility for his children in the U.S., on the other hand, his over-restriction of Jack’s activities indicated his attempt to minimize the host country’s influence, as also discovered in Latino immigrant families (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, 2001). It was perhaps his father’s strong urge to fight against assimilation in order to keep Jack’s Chineseness that stimulated the intense fights between them.

Amy also shared her mother’s focus on her study. She said,

夏天其他人放假的时候，她会买很多书，给我看，给我…说，哦，如果你不做作业，那你会忘记怎么做，你回…额，到你回…八月去额…再上课的时候，可能完全都忘了。…这样（笑）。跟中国的父母很…很类似我觉得。

(during summer break, she would buy a lot of books for me. She would say “if you don’t do your homework, then you will forget how to do them. When you go
back to school in August, you will forget all the things you have learned.” She is like that. Her way of parenting is very like the Chinese way, I think.)

Observing her other American peers having fun during breaks, Amy considered her mother’s extra efforts in helping her academically during breaks to be Chinese. This understanding was also built on her own awareness of the academic pressure students in Hong Kong faced and the considerable efforts their parents have made to help them excel.

Despite Emma’s physical disability, she was also aware that her parents expected good grades from both her and her older sister. Emma’s sister commented that “My dad, he wanted me to like succeed academically and professionally very much so.” Due to Emma’s physical condition, her parents became more lenient (sister interview) toward Emma’s academic performance, but Emma still recalled that “中国家庭很注重学习，所以就是我的父母总是说学习学习” (Chinese families value study a lot. My parents always say “study, study”). The family value, according to Emma’s mother, was “我们家的人个个都是特别，好像特别，就是除了工作学习就不知道干嘛了” (Everyone in our family is very, very, like we don’t know what to do except working and studying).

Emma’s parents gained their professional career through education in the U.S. Thus, they firmly believed that through education one can achieve social mobility. Observing the family dynamic, Emma internalized that value to be Chinese.

Linda emphasized a lot of times that her parents expected her to get good grades. Her bewilderment about her identity was very much related to her parents’ push on grades. Linda understood that the reason that her father worked so hard to bring her to America was for her to work hard and have a good job. This guilt of not excelling in academia was also observed by scholars (Hsu, 1971; Mordkowitz and Ginsberg, 1987;
Sung, 1987). They found the family-centered nature of Asian families were the single most significant reason for Asian success and that Asian children worked hard to please their parents and to avoid the shame and guilt associated with failure. Having spent several years in the Chinese education system before coming to the U.S. and knowing the educational competition there was more intense than that in the U.S., Linda applied this “dual frame reference” (Ogbu, 1987) to justify Chinese parents’ high expectation in education. She said, “[美国]可能没有中国竞争那么厉害，但是还得就是全拿 A，这不用说。他们不用说我都已经知道，就是得，得努力。他们老也说，就是‘哦，你得努力学啊，什么什么’” (It is not as competitive in America as in China, but I still need to get As in all my classes. There is no need for them to vocalize it. I just know it. I need to work hard. They always say ‘oh, you have to study hard, etc.’). Linda agreed with what her parents expected to achieve; she identified herself as a first-generation immigrant, who came to the United States to “拼命” (work desperately).

Despite the complex feelings toward their parents’ push for academic achievement—Jack fought hard with his dad when he was young, and Linda almost wanted to deny her Chinese identity because of that (discussed in earlier sections)—these participants chose to enact this belief in their daily life.

Amy had no problem with her mother’s nudge academically. She actually credited her mother for her current academic achievement. Linda confessed that she would be guilty if she didn’t spend enough time on study. Commenting on her socialization with Chinese international students, she said, “就是跟他们玩的有点多，然后就，“哦不行”，觉得，就是心里难受，就觉得时间没有放到学习上，就觉得哦好难受” (I played a
lot with them [Chinese international students], and after playing with them, I would feel “oh, I cannot play anymore.” I just felt guilty, because I didn’t spend my time on study. I felt very guilty about it). In her Chinese friend’s eyes, Linda was very school-oriented. She commented “感觉她学习挺认真的… 这周末要是约她出去，她说这周末要做什么，然后我就会回想想我自己也需要干哪些事情，然后就算了吧，就去（学习）” (I feel like she works hard at school….when I ask her to go out and play on weekends, she usually refuses because she needs to study this and that. That will push me to think about what I have to study, then I would be studying instead of going out).

Though Jack initially fought hard with his father over extreme emphasis on study, Jack later reconciled with his father when he began to understand that his father’s route to professional success was based on diligent academic work. Realizing this, he was willing to put more efforts into his own study. He said, “咱们不要disappoint 咱们的parents, 所以我们会做他们要你做的事情，可是说咱们不喜欢有时候也会做” (We don’t want to disappoint our parents, so we would do whatever they ask us to do, even though sometimes we don’t like to do it). Like Linda, excelling academically was not seen as an individual success but a collective benefit that was used as a tribute to their parents’ sacrifice. Jack even pushed it further to aim to be more successful than his parents by working hard and socializing with people who shared the same passion with him. He said, 我不知道每个中国人是不是这样想，可是 at least 我是这样，因为我父母就是两个箱子一百块钱，是不是，他能做到他那个程度，我现在，你看我又缺钱又不缺吃的。我父母老说，你得比咱们一块强，那已经够大的 offer 了，

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7 Linda’s Chinese friend came to the United State in high school, who had considerable understanding of U.S. and China as Linda did. Linda reported close relationship with this friend due to the hybridity she saw her friend embodied.
可是我就是想，…那我现在挣的，我就加几个零，是不是。所以我现在就是，我现在的朋友都是，中文怎么说，都是得有劲，得有一个，英文说我喜欢一个就是有一个 passion 有一个 fire 这些人。
(I do not know whether every Chinese thinks this way or not, but at least I have this thought. Coming here with two pieces of luggage and a hundred dollars, my parents could achieve this much. Growing up, I did not have worries for food and money, [I should achieve higher than them]. My parents always say “you should accomplish more than us combined.” Their expectation is already big. But I think…I would add several zeros to what they have earned now. All my friends are like very passionate and ambitious. I like to be with those people who have passion and fire in them).

Jack’s father grew up during the Cultural Revolution, but he educated himself and went to university despite all kinds of family pressures and difficulties. Jack’s mother was from a well-off family but decided to come to the United States to search for new ways of living. They both gained graduate degrees in the U.S. and secured jobs here. Observing his parents’ success at the U.S. through education, Jack firmly believed that he could at least achieve the same level of prosperity if not bigger than his parents did. Working hard academically was the most effective way to help him achieve his passion. He had no reason to not to embrace this Chinese virtue.

Same as Jack, Emma aspired to achieve at least what her parents and her sister have accomplished. She said,

但是我就是一直选 history major 是为了读博士，争取当教授，这也是爸爸妈妈的影响嘛，因为我们家都是高学位的，哦，姐姐在做这个，爸爸在做这个，爸爸都有 PhD,妈妈也是医生,我是想着最少要有个 PhD. (I chose history as my major and I want to have a PhD degree in it. I want to be a professor. This is due to my parents’ influence, because everyone in my family has high degrees. My sister is a MD, my father is a PhD. My mother is a doctor,… I am saying I want at least a PhD).

Despite Emma’s disabilities, she was seen in the library a lot. Her Asian American friend commented “she just studies a lot more than my friends do, so like I don’t see her often,
coz she is normally studying.” Emma successfully got her master’s degree in history and was preparing to apply for doctoral study by the time this research concluded.

Parents’ high expectation in academics has also been translated into diligence in other areas of their lives. Witnessing their parents hard work on a daily basis reinforced and internalized this ethics. Cindy knew her parents worked day and night in the restaurant to support their family. This taught Cindy the importance of hard work and she was willing to live by that virtue. She said,

我们要什么，不是随便拿到的，我们要一直上班，一直做好，跟我觉得，像我以前在我的父母亲餐厅要一直做这么多，看到我的父母亲每天要做这么多努力，我看到这个，我懂得比较好，我的父母亲有，有这么难过，要给我们什么，跟我，像我在 Walgreen 上班，他们会说 “小妹上班很好，因为她会一直做，一直做，”因为有在餐厅教我，跟在餐厅有教我“哦，你要做这么多，这么久，你才赚到七十块
(What we want is not achieved effortlessly. We have to keep working and working hard. I feel like, like I worked so much at my parents’ restaurant, seeing my parents working so hard every day. Seeing this, I understand the concept of working hard better. Understanding that my parents worked so hard to support us, I choose to work hard too. When I worked at Walgreen, my family were confident that I would work hard at it too, because working at the restaurant has taught me this. It taught me that to earn seventy bucks, I have to work this much, this long).

Chinese American students knew through observation of their family and the larger dominant society that hard work in academics and in everyday life was the norm for many Chinese families living in the United States. Despite their resistance in young age, they all appreciated and were willing to carry out this Chinese ethnic value in their own life. While Chinese American college students characterized this academic expectation to be Chinese or Asian, we know that this does not mean other cultures do not value children’s academic performance, as indicated in Lareau’s study (2011).

3.7.2 Reservation in Social Relationships
Another aspect that these Chinese American college students believed to be Chinese was that Chinese people were more reserved in social and dating relationships than Americans were. Though this was a general stereotype imposed on Asian males as “socially awkward” by the dominant society, many female participants’ perspective on this conservation revealed that parents’ guard against host country’s influence on girls. Here, American-ness again is essentialized, as it is understood by Chinese American students as open and casual in relationship. Jack, as the only male in this group, commented his disdain on Asian students’ awkwardness, as they tended to speak less and were not “comfortable” in social settings. Jack said a lot of his Chinese American friends were “shy.” While I did not have the opportunity to observe Jack’s behavior other than in the field, his expressiveness in the interview and his contempt for this behavior shed light on his resistance to this characteristic of Chineseness.

Female participants in this group stressed the restrictions in relationships that they experienced from their parents. Interestingly, all of the female participants were either the only child or had no brothers at their home. Therefore, it was not clear whether there would be gender differences in this regard. Linda was acutely aware that her parents only allowed her to have boyfriends after she attended college. In college, she was still scared to tell her parents about her boyfriend, because they “原来管得特别严” (had been very strict about this previously). When she finally told her mother about her boyfriend, she got the suggestion that “别影响学习” (do not let it influence your study) with an unspoken message of sexual relation restriction. Amy’s parents’ protection of her sexual purity resulted both from their Christian values and her Chinese heritage. She knew her mother’s expectation of her and planned to get engaged with her boyfriend before they
could live together if they happened to go to the same graduate school. While in college, Amy and Linda always invited each other to accompany them when boys asked one of them out, which was not a common practice among college students.

Cindy’s parents had a similar mindset as that of Linda’s and Amy’s. They did not allow Cindy to visit her boyfriend’s extended family in England, because her mother insisted “没有订婚不能去那么远” (You cannot go that far with him before engagement) (field notes, 4/24/2016). Cindy’s mother told me that when Cindy wanted to participate in a sleepover party as a child, they always insisted the party be held at their house so that they could make sure their daughter was not doing inappropriate things. She highly recommended me doing the same thing, as I have two daughters. Cindy eventually did not visit England, but her boyfriend got to visit Taiwan with her along with her parents, which they could supervise. Cindy’s parents were also very conservative about when to meet with her boyfriend and her boyfriend’s family. Cindy’s boyfriend voiced a strong confusion regarding the cultural differences he experienced in the relationship with Cindy; He acknowledged Cindy’s efforts to bridge that difference and educate him to understand and follow her family’s cultural practice. He said,

I think for them it’s kind of almost [until] we are married or engaged [I can go visit her family in Taiwan], you know. They don’t want to be too involved in the relationship, so I think she has to deal with me kind of not understanding that at first and also trying to teach me how is this their culture,…So it’s been a big world of experience.

Though parents did not explicitly express their restriction on sexual activities in their daughter’s romantic relationships, the unstated messages were understood well by their daughters. The connection between family reputation and a daughter’s sexual purity was also observed common to many Asian immigrant groups (Gibson, 1988; Smith-Hefner,
Parents’ such concerns can be viewed as tradition following; however, they could also be a response to perceptions of threat from the host society, as argued by S. Lee (2005). Participants in this group made a conscious choice to not challenge this tradition. This reflected their practice of “accommodation without assimilation” or “selective acculturation” adopted by many children of immigrants (Gibson, 1988; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001).

3.7.3 Authoritative Parents

Another characteristic that participants considered very Chinese was claims to unchallengeable authority from parents, especially from fathers. The patrilineal and patriarchal system that shaped husband-wife and parent-children relationship in Asian communities has been studied by scholars (Faderman and Xiong, 1998; Donnelly, 1994). Jack and Linda had a deeper understanding of this than the rest of the participants, as discussed in the previous sections. Their parents, usually their fathers, possessed absolute power in their respective families in deciding what and how Jack and Linda did things as children, leaving no room for argument.

Linda expressed frustrations about her father’s insistence on always being right just to assert his authority regardless of the merits of his argument. She said “他就不让我解释 ‘不行!’ 就他对那种, 然后我就受不了…有时候就是他不听我的, 因为他知道我的逻辑更, 更那个, 更对, 他就怕我” (He would not allow me to explain. Simply “No”. Like he is the one who is always right. I cannot accept this…sometimes he insisted on his idea, because he knew mine was right, and he was afraid that [accepting mine would undermine his authority]). Aspiring for the equal parents-children relationships perceived in the dominant society, Linda anticipated that she would respect her children’s
opinions when she became a mother. She said “这我会改的，就是得听小孩那面，让
他们说完，就是 at least,听他们怎么解释 (I would not be like my father. I would listen
to the kids’ opinion and let them explain).

Jack mentioned multiple times his fights with his parents (mostly with his father),
who pressured him too much about studying and did not allow him to go out and engage
social activities as his other American peers did. Jack expressed the frustration that “那我
没办法，那不就是吵架,有时候我火儿也大,可是有时候我觉得 at least 中国父母不听
他的孩子 even if it is a very valid point…我当时跟父母说就跟一墙讲话一样” (I was
left with no choice but to fight with them verbally. I was furious at that time. I think
Chinese parents do not listen to their children, even when they are making a valid
point…I felt like I was talking to a wall when I was talking to my parents).

Parents’ authority continued when Chinese Americans were in college. They
guided their children explicitly about what major they needed to study in order to ensure
a steady job, such as being doctors and dentists. Linda’s parents expressed explicitly that
they wanted their daughter to be a doctor, because she had the academic ability to achieve
it. But they also implicitly suggested that they valued their daughter’s efforts in study
more in the results, which was an added pressure on the children to fulfill their parents’
expectation. Linda eventually got into medical school to become a doctor of plastic
surgery. Despite Jack’s talent in business and his interest in mechanical engineering, his
parents pushed him to be a doctor too due to its security. Jack considered this logic very
Chinese. He said,

所以这点想法也是为你孩子，可是这就比较中国人，因为中国人就是我不在
乎你喜欢什么，都是为挣那钱，拿那个饭在桌子上，中国人，especially 吧
Pragmatism was what Jack considered Chinese. Jack valued this philosophy. He was fully aware that being a minority in the U.S., sacrificing personal interest and doing jobs that would bring financial safety is a survival strategy. He said, “Americans do what they like, but Chinese do what they should. … I think in terms of this, the Chinese logic is better, because doing what you like won’t make you money.” Making a lot of money and experiencing the luxuries weighed big on Jack’s mind. He aspired to have fancy cars, fancy watches and fancy villas, which were what he strived to achieve. He resented his childhood for living on the welfare and lacking money to participate in the sports his American peers were involved in. In this sense, having money not only represented economic security but also represented status, power and privilege, as argued by S. Lee (2005) in her Hmong American students. They believed money whitened (Feagin, 2000; Ong, 1999).

Despite Jack’s aspiration for making money and his appreciation of the Chinese pragmatic philosophy, Jack eventually managed a compromise between his parents’ authority in his career and his interest—research in chemistry. He learned to negotiate between the multiple cultures: one values idealism and the other pragmatism. He said “我
是要试试 research, 我说, 可是现在就是说我喜欢这东西, 然后我在 lab 又有结果,所以我爸就说你试试, 试试吧”(I wanted to try in research. I like doing research and I have accomplished things in the lab. So my dad said I could try it). Instead of direct fierce resistance, he eventually convinced his father to allow him to pursue a career he aspired (also the career of his father’s) through effective open communications, which he acquired from the dominant society. This integration of American beliefs into his identity further helped rebuild the relationship between the father and the son. He said,

咱们最近 relationship 特别就是，咱们就是最近走得非常近。… 像平常你是像中国人，像我这样长大，他不会跟你，不会跟他父母 establish 这种 relationship，不会让，我一直是让我父母看我的 view 是什么。我妈没什么问题，我爸，我就说，我就跟我那些中国人说，你也跟你爸坐下来，拿点酒，然后就谈话，… 可是我记得咱们第一次坐下来，喝那，就是拿点白酒，就是谈谈话，然后从那以后我和我爸就一直就越来越好。(The relationship between me and my father now is very close. Chinese people, growing up like me, would not establish this kind of relationship with their parents. They would not…I kept letting my parents know my points of view. My mother was fine with that. But my father was [hard to communicate with]. I told my Chinese friends to sit down with their father, grab a cup of wine and talk. I still remembered the first time me and my dad sitting down, drinking wine and talking with each other. Since then, the relationship between me and my dad has become very close).

Acutely aware of the rigid authoritative and patrilineal system in the Chinese culture, Jack challenged it by “teaching” his father the American way of parenting. He firmly believed that “我觉得对中国人的父母也非常重要, 他们得学美国的这种这一些东西，因为这样他能跟他的孩子 communicate 更好” (I think [learning how to communicate] is also important to Chinese parents. They need to learn this American practice so that they can communicate better with their children). Jack anticipated upon becoming a parent, who would incorporate the good things in his cultures. He would expect his children to study hard as his father did, but he would listen to his children’s point of view
and “come to an understanding” as in the American families he perceived. Though Jack valued the idealism in the dominant society, he would still pressure his children to study science, not arts or humanities, as he believed it “不是一个中国人的东西” (was not a Chinese thing). In his own performance, Jack vividly demonstrated the strategy of an “accommodation without assimilation” (Gibson, 1988) practiced by children of immigrants. He managed to perform a new identity that fused his Chinese with American identity, that both connects and separates from the two.

3.7.4 Frugality

Frugality is also associated with being Chinese. This perception was largely based on the comparison between their own lives with that of American families, who are believed to be squanderers. Linda considered her parents very Chinese. When asked what reflected her parents’ Chinese way of thinking, in addition to their emphasis on her study, Linda said “比较省钱” (they are very frugal in daily living). She recalled the daily practice of his parents:

厨房那个擦手纸啊，哈哈，我们喜欢洗完手了，那个湿的一擦，就是还算干净，然后就晾到那儿，然后要是桌子上脏，可以再用那个去擦，哈哈，就是比较省，然后，洗碗机，那个大多数时间是晾碗用的，不是洗碗用的，卫生间，晚上不是得把那个，冬天得把热水接出来，一开始好多都是凉水嘛，然后那个水，我们就会有两个盆嘛，然后我们就会攒到那，冲厕所用，哈哈。对，这就是美国人没有这样的。

(In the kitchen, after drying our hands with the paper towels, we reuse those paper towels to wipe our dinner table if there is something dirty there. We do not use our dishwasher to wash the dishes [we hand wash them]. We use the dishwasher to drain the hand-washed dishes. In the bathroom, especially during winter we would save the initial cold water running from the faucet to a basin for later toilet flushing. We usually keep two basins in the bathroom for alternation. Haha. No Americans are like this).
While I could not verify this in academic research, I do know from my thirty-year experience living in China that a lot of Chinese families have the similar practice. Linda, however, did not express her opinions of this frugality. Of all the participants, she was among the few who paid special attention to her clothing and wore make-up, which will be discussed below. However, despite this, she was very careful about how to spend her money, as revealed by her Chinese friend in one incident that she hesitated a long time to buy one of her favorite shirts on sale and eventually did not buy it due to its price.

Cindy’s understanding of frugality being unique to Chinese culture also came from her observation in her neighborhood. Cindy said “我的父母亲他们每天在餐厅上班比较辛苦，回家还会自己清东西，像我知道很多人会付人叫他们来他们的家清东西” (My parents work very hard at the restaurant every day, but they still choose to clean our house by themselves. I know a lot of people would pay people to clean the house). This American’ consumerism contrasted sharply with her perceived self-sufficiency from her parents, which Cindy believed to be Chinese. The concept of frugality was deeply embedded in Cindy’s mind. Commenting one of her friends’ squandering on luxurious things, Cindy expressed, “哦我要买那（这）个， 那，我的妈妈会杀我。我买两百块这个皮包” (If I were like her to buy that, a two-hundred-dollar purse, my mother would kill me). My field note (4/24/2016) also reflected one incident when Cindy was interested in my rolling backpack and she considered it too expensive when she found out the price, even though it was a regular priced backpack.
3.7.5 Showing Off

Interaction with Chinese international students on campus as well through the observations of their parents’ socialization enabled the Chinese Americans to conclude that showing off is embedded in Chinese culture, which they did not want to associate with. Jack and Linda were keenly aware that Chinese people loved to flaunt, especially their children’s academic achievement. Linda said “我知道好多中国人就是扎堆，然后扎堆然后就是比，就是比这，比那，然后我就受不了那个” (I know a lot of Chinese people like to socialize with people from the same ethnicity. When they are together, they compare this and that [mostly their children], and I cannot tolerate this). Linda’s parents chose to distance themselves from the Chinese community at their hometown because of that. Like Linda separated herself from the Asian students in high school due to her low academic confidence, their family chose to not socialize with the Chinese community due to its tendency to brag about their children.

Jack also understood that showing off their children to each other was common in Chinese culture. He remembered his father showed off his achievement at a Chinese party, though not in a direct manner, when he won an international science fair award in the chemistry division in high school. Jack acknowledged the prevalence of this phenomenon among Chinese, “中国人就是拿孩子互相比嘛” (Chinese people just like to compare each other’s children). This tendency to compare their children academically in Asian culture was also observed by (Kim, 1993). Jack embraced this concept and was willing to achieve higher to make his parents proud of him so that they could show off in front of their friends. He said, “我还要我父母，哦，这我儿子，能 show，...所以，当
然我们都会让父母说我们，可是也是有你自己要做的事情”(I want my parents to be able to show off their son…so we would love to be talked about by our parents, but we need to have certain achievements for them to talk about). To please his parents in terms of allowing them to show off in front of the community was the motivation for Jack to achieve higher.

Though Jack appreciated his parents’ showing him off to others, he despised Chinese international students’ similar engagement. Jack considered those Chinese students at his university “公子哥” (dandies), who came to American universities for the sake of a study abroad experience and spent their time having fun and showing off their wealth. Jack said “我觉得好多国内来的孩子都是 show off. 都是臭美, 好多这公子哥, 我能, 我有够钱能 show off 就够了。我看这些，就是 attitude 就这样” (I think a lot of the international students from China came to show off. They are like dandies, prioritizing showing off their wealth. I think that is their attitude). Jack disapproved of their mentality. Jack was annoyed by their squandering of their parents’ hard-earned money without guilt and their conspicuous wealth. He commented “你说你父母那么使劲在那儿做，供你来美国上学，完了你又乱七八糟又没什么，我看着…我有时候会烦就是你家里有点钱，可是你又假装你是特有钱” (Your parents worked hard to send you here to study, but you did all these sorts of things but not studying…seeing this, I get very annoyed. I am annoyed that they pretend their family is extremely wealthy when in reality their income is just decent). Jack’s seemingly contradictory attitude toward showing off actually reflected his fusion of his Chinese identity and American identity. He valued the independence and individualism advocated in the dominant society. He accepted the display gained through personal endeavors. Jack chose to distinguish his
wealth from his parents’ wealth. He said "That money is not mine, that is my parents’ money. I do not have money. This is the mentality people like me grew up with)."

3.7.6 Clothing Style

The significance of clothing style as a social marker has been studied by Eckert (1989) and Hebdige (1979). Clothing was always worn in public, and it served as an importance symbol of group membership to members and nonmembers (Eckert, 1989). Hebdige (1979) argued that all social groups, even those who appeared to be “normal” sent messages with their clothing. Associating the clothing style of students from China—who were mostly from upper middle-class families—with Chineseness, they failed to see the Chineseness embodied by people from other backgrounds. Though participants in this study all wore “normal” college students clothing common in U.S. university campus, such as leggings and sweatshirts, their observation of the dressing style of students from China both connected with and separated them from those students from China and thus consolidated their hybrid identity.

Linda and Cindy considered that female students from China and young girls in China in general were very concerned with their appearance in daily life. Cindy was very conscious of the differences between her and Chinese girls. She said “Chinese girls love beauty. They wear make-up every day; the clothes they wear are pretty beautiful too. I think they take time to think what they should wear to make sure they look beautiful every day. I would not do that). Cindy dressed like
Clothing style, in Cindy’s eyes, represented membership (Eckert, 1989). Her American style dress connected her with her American identity, but separated her from her heritage. While Cindy did not express any personal opinions about Chinese girls’ love for beauty, she continued to wear her legging and shorts, Linda, on the other hand, expressed admiration. Commenting on her initiative to get to know those Chinese international students in one of her classes, Linda said “她们是三个人，然后穿着打扮挺，挺可以的，就是比较时尚，然后比较时尚我就注意更多” (There were three of them. Their dressing style was very up to date, very fashionable. Because of their fashionable dressing, I paid more attention to them). My own observation also confirmed about Linda’s taste in clothing. Though she also wore leggings and shirt, the style was more fashionable or than practical. What I found out later was that Linda’s choice of clothing style reflected her identity development. Linda’s friend, a Chinese international student,
commented that Linda began to dress more fashionably after they became friends, when previously Linda chose to blend in with the American dressing style.

She told me before she met me, she dressed in the American style, because she wanted to fit in with her American peers. She said one of the motivations she came to talk to me was that I dressed differently. She said “It was amazing that that person can dress like this. I got to know her.” While I cannot brag that I gave her a motivation to change her dressing style, maybe I gave her an encouragement to choose clothes she liked to wear. Later, she began to dress as she liked [without worrying about fitting in]. You can see there is a big change in her dressing style. She likes K-pop, and I like it, too. So I dress more toward Asian style [so did she]. I cannot brag about being fashionable, but receiving approval from Linda was an acknowledgment. So Linda has begun to dress [in the Asian style, too] fashionably.

How Linda chose to dress herself reflected which membership she wanted to identify with. Previous sections have demonstrated that Linda in high school strived to fit in with her American peers due to the perceived conflicts between her family culture and the dominant culture. That she dressed herself toward American taste was not surprising. Recognizing the clothing fashion to be a representation of Chinesness/Asianness, Linda in college demonstrated her ownership of her ethnicity/race through her clothing choice.

3.7.7 Pragmatism
While pragmatism of Chinese parents in guiding their children’s career choices has been discussed, this section examines pragmatism in social relationships that participants categorized as Chinese. Again, the essentialized Americanness is utilized as a backdrop to assert Chineseness. Emma said that Chinese people tended to maintain a balance instead of going to one extreme or another when socializing with other people. Emma observed that her American teacher immediately fought for her when he noticed an unfair policy that her university had put on her. Emma was going to study abroad in China with American government support, but her university required her to pay for that study abroad class tuition while she was in China. Reflecting on this, Emma said,

我觉得有的时候中国人不会那么直接的去做一件事情，总是要慢一点，要再想一点，要 very careful….我觉得中国人不喜欢 rock the boat, 喜欢平静，安静。

(I think Chinese people normally would not speak up. They would choose to slow down, think twice and be very careful…I think Chinese people do not like to rock the boat. They like everything to be peaceful).

Chinese people’s tendency to weigh the pros and cons before speaking up was perceived by Emma from deciphering the various intricacies living in the Chinese community, though she did not provide any concrete example. Cindy, however, was alert to the dominant society’s perception of Chinese people in the US. She said US society perceived Chinese as “If the situation doesn’t involve them, they won’t involve themselves, 比较会一直做自己的，不去管别人” (If the situation doesn’t involve them, they won’t involve themselves. Chinese people focus on minding their own business and not interfering with other’s business).
Both Emma and Cindy chose to change this ideology, they believed, prevalent among Chinese people. Emma shared that she started to advocate more Disabled Access at her university for people with disability. Cindy also said “If I don’t believe in something, I am going to say it. 我不会安静的坐在那里随便，我比较管比较多人” (If I don’t believe in something, I am going to say it. I won’t sit there quietly and allow it to happen. I would speak up for other people). Cindy’s attitude reflected what students in S. Lee’s (1996) study said, “We get pushed around a lot and we should help each other out when there is a problem. And not just look at another person and say ‘Oh, that's not part of my business’ and just go away” (p. 43). During one of our many socialization, Cindy expressed her anger at the whitewashing in the American films and stated that she would not be silent if the new adaptation of the Disney movie *Mulan* was whitewashed again. Luckily, it was not. Cindy and Emma were confrontational (Espiritu, 1992), which they believed was a reflection of their being American.

**3.7.8 Hostility toward People of Disability**

As the only one with physical disabilities in my study, Emma made visible to me a Chineseness that was not available from other people. This understanding of Chineseness was derived from her own observation and experience in the United States and in China. While Emma also experienced discrimination from American people, though more subtly, it is interesting to note that Emma considered the hostility toward people of disability to be Chinese. Emma recalled that she experienced more stares and discrimination from people of Chinese descent than from American people. Emma remembered being called “half smart for half of the year, but then dumb for the next half” by one of her Chinese American peers in elementary school when she was first accepted
to a higher-level math class and then went back to the normal math class later. Emma remembered a Chinese American boy imitating how she walked but his mother, who, instead of stopping him, smirked. Emma’s sister also commented, “Probably some of the people that are mostly unkind to Emma are Chinese.” Chinese people’s hostility toward people of disabilities was further reinforced when Emma visited China at 11. She noticed that Chinese people’s social intolerance to those vulnerable people was so strong that people of disability chose to disappear in public. “这也可能是中国文化。11 岁的时候去过中国，我会注意，哦，除了我以外，没有别的残疾人在街上” (This is probably Chinese culture. When I visited China at 11, I noticed that there were no people of disability on the street except me). The regular public social activity engagement of people with disability in the U.S. contrasted sharply with the non-public social engagement of this group of people in China, pushing Emma to conclude that it was the social discrimination that prevented the social mobility of people with disabilities. Emma considered this discrimination to be part of Chinese culture.

This imagined social oppression of people with disabilities worried Emma when she decided to study abroad in China during college. Nevertheless, she decided to challenge it and break the social stereotype imposed on people with disabilities. She said “我觉得我去中国是可以当一个，一个 role model, 可以就是让别人知道，残疾的人，也可以做的好” (I think I can be a role model in China. I can let people know that people with disabilities can do as well as other people). Her experience in China turned out to be a great experience. She said people there, though they were curious about her physical condition, were very nice to her and willingly to help her. However, despite Emma’s ambition to break the stereotype society imposed on people with disability, Emma’s
mobility was restricted within that Chinese campus, because the site lacked disability facilities in the public infrastructure, which potentially limited the mobility of people with disability as well as the fulfillment of Emma’s ambition.

3.7.9 Parents’ Financial Support

As far as I know, all of the participants in this group received financial aid from their university to finance their study. Though they did not talk about the financial support their parents provided, none of them worried about their financial situation. None of them had to work extra hours to support their daily living. I know that Cindy’s parents gave her a monthly allowance in addition to paying her sorority room and board. She received a brand-new SUV as a gift from her parents when she entered college. Emma was confident that her parents would take care of her financially as long as they could. Though their tuition was covered by their scholarships, they were all certain that their parents would support them financially otherwise. Linda said,

我知道好多美国人他父母不管大学的钱，就是 tuition 得自己是 loan 啊，或者是得自己付大学的 tuition，我的呢，虽然我父母不需要帮我，但是我要是去 med school 的话，他们会 do anything 帮我付那个钱。
(I know a lot of my American peers’ parents do not pay for their college. They have to take out loans to support themselves. Though I do not need my parents to pay for my college [I have a full scholarship], my parents will do anything to help me pay for medical school if I am accepted).

Here, Linda’s understanding of Chinese parents’ financial support to be Chinese was also derived from her essentialized understanding of Americanness.

Chinese American college students’ various understandings of Chineseness largely came from their observations of the practice and habits in their own family and it was very personal to each individual. When asserting their understanding of Chineseness,
they often used what they believed to be American to validate their assertions. Their particular understanding of Chineseness spoke against a uniform Chineseness. Through their different performances in Chineseness, either conforming to, resisting or modifying, they negotiated and developed their hybrid identity through navigating unequal social powers of Chineseness and whiteness. Their active exploration of who they were enabled them to perceive this hybrid identity as an owned identification. This hybrid identity also demonstrated itself differently in different situations. It is the situational nature of the hybrid identity that I will turn to in the following section.

3.8 Situational Identity

As their audience, observing how those participants presented themselves to me provided me with deep insights into understanding how they situated themselves differently in front of different audience (Goffman, 1959). All five of them chose consciously to present their Chineseness in front of me, a Chinese national. They deliberately chose to speak exclusively in Chinese with me, despite that English was the language with which they were more comfortable with. Even when we were in public, they insisted on speaking only Chinese without any embarrassment in front of their American friends. They loved eating Chinese food and some of them were eager to learn the ways I cooked. Because of that I often invited them to my house or brought them food I cooked, which they greatly appreciated. Some of them also brought me their homemade food in exchange. Every time we hung out, our topics were related to China, such as Chinese culture, Chinese music, Chinese politics, and stories of their family, their study. I was not provided any story about stories they had with their American friends, such as the jokes they made, films they watched. From these
chats, I found out that Cindy brought homemade Chinese food to work, which perhaps she would never tell her American friends. Cindy showed me the pictures she took in Taiwan and how her grandparents led their life there. I learned that Linda had a Korean American boyfriend, which she shared more with me than that of her relationship with a white American. In her social media post that she opened to me, she posted lots of moments when she socialized with her Chinese friends, such as celebrating birthdays together, eating out together. Linda also voluntarily sent me the video she made when she visited China, in which she showed the places she visited, the small antique stores she loved, and the food she enjoyed. I learned Amy’s opinions toward her Chinese boyfriend’s parents, which she probably did not know how to talk to her American peers. I also learned from Amy’s social media that she friended with so many students from China; they were from very different academic disciplines and were of different ages. Of course, Emma talked with me endless times about current news in China, about her own family dynamic and the family tensions between in-laws at her sister’s. In a word, while they were with me, they deliberately presented themselves as much Chinese as possible to connect with me.

While they insisted on performing their Chineseness in front of me, they also learned to position themselves differently when they were with their American peers. Linda commented while she would speak Chinese and follow Chinese behavior norms when socializing with Chinese students, she chose to talk about American music and pop culture and things that her American peers were interested in. Amy, the biracial girl, also consciously picked appropriate topics when she hung out with different groups of people. She would talk about more China related things
when she was with Chinese international students, such as the food she ate, the music she listened to, the dramas she watched. But when she was with American peers, she said “跟美国人不会提起这些事情。如果她们不感兴趣，我也不会那么，也不会故意演出这样的，因为我应该也是希望可以 fit in” (I would not raise these topics with Americans. If they are not interested, I would not, would not intentionally perform like this, because I also hope to fit in). Emma mentioned she constantly apologized in front of Asian people, but when she was with American peers, she was more assertive. Every time when she commented about the negative news in China in front of me, she would say “I am sorry” to me as if to apologize for offending my country. When I asked her whether she did the same thing in front of her American peers, she denied it. While Emma discussed Chinese politics and her research on the Cultural Revolution with me, she seldom revealed her research and her opinion on Chinese politics to Chinese international students, because she knew they did not like that.

Possessing the ability to switch between cultures, these Chinese Americans freely navigated between cultures in college. Their active exploration enabled them to own their hybrid identity as both American and Chinese. Emma demonstrates how being Chinese American was essential to this group of students:

就是有的时候会漏出来，我觉得这是个很自然的东西，我不会[x x x x x x x x]，“哦我是中国人，我要怎么怎么表现”但是是我的一部分，其实是个很大的部分，所有有的时候就会漏出来。
(It [Chineseness] would sometimes come out. I think it is a natural thing. I won’t consciously say “oh, I am Chinese, I need to perform this way or that way.” It is part of me, actually a big part of me. So sometimes it will come out naturally).
CHAPTER 4. CHINESE AMERICAN: AN IMPOSED IDENTITY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the other group of participants who chose to speak English during the research. Though most of them had enrolled in the Chinese language classes for over four semesters, yet, all of them decided to use English for this research. In fact, our informal socialization was also conducted in English. In other words, the medium of our communication was exclusively in English, which could be the result of their relative heritage language ability or a reflection of how they preferred to identify themselves. I would argue that both these two factors contributed to their choice of English during the research. This group includes two males and six females: John, Ben, Alice, Ava, Angel, Sophia, Peilin, and Elizabeth. Most of these participants came from families that ran family businesses to survive. Most of the participants, except Ava, grew up in small cities in the Midwest, where their family was among the few Asian households in their hometown, if not the only Asian family.

Like those Chinese Americans in the first group who spoke Chinese in the research, this second group of participants also had to negotiate their identity through multiple cultures. The hegemonic whiteness as well as Chineseness worked together to alienate them. Navigating through the unequal social powers, they, too, have learned to develop a hybrid identity. However, their lesser proficiency in the heritage language, to some extent, limited them from exploring who they were while in college. For most participants, college education, especially the heritage language classes in college, provided a chance for them to explore and search for their heritage. The importance of the heritage language classes in college had a far greater influence on their ethnic identity
development than it did on the first group participants. The acquired heritage language ability in the language class, regardless of their degree of proficiency, validated for them a sense of being Chinese, which was not available to them previously. However, unlike the participants in the first group, participants in this group did not actively engage in the various resources and opportunities available on campus to further develop their identity. Their lack of agency in continuing to search for who they were further reflected the meaning of hybridity to them. Different from the first group who adopted “accommodation without assimilation,” this group of students were more Americanized as identified by themselves and perceived by others. Thus, despite their increased interest in their heritage, the Chinese American identity they learned to develop in college remained largely an imposed identity for most participants in this group. Yet, their agency in their understanding and performance of Chineseness further pushed them to refute the essentialism of Chineseness. Their different embrace of their heritage also raises further questions on the relationship between heritage language literacy and ethnicity.

4.2 Basic Information of the Participants

Sophia (2.5 generation, biracial)

I got to interview Sophia when I was doing a project for the advanced field study on Chinese American college students’ Chinese identity development in Spring 2015 during my doctoral coursework, from which this dissertation developed. Sophia is a biracial girl born to a mother from Taiwan who came to the United States at 11, and a Caucasian father. Her grandparents opened a Chinese restaurant when they arrived in New York. Sophia moved several times in her life; her family along with her
grandparents eventually settled down in a small-sized city with a small Chinese community in the Midwest state. Her mother worked in a hospital. I got to know Sophia when she was taking her third and also the last semester of Chinese class in her senior year in Fall 2014. She participated in the research in Spring 2015, and then graduated that semester. Sophia took Chinese learning seriously, but she was not doing more than the minimum. Her spoken Chinese was not significantly better than that of her classmates. Growing up, she never went to any Chinese weekend school. Her home language was English. But Sophia’s grandparents always lived close if not with them. Therefore, Sophia heard a lot of Chinese around her grandparents and her other extended family members. Her mother spoke Chinese to her grandparents but always English to Sophia. Sophia was very close to her grandmother, whom she called “po.” Her motivation to learn Chinese was to fulfill her foreign language requirement for graduation as well as “to make my grandparents happy.” Her ethnicity also played a role in learning Chinese: “It’s part of me. So it was something I was interested in. Plus, I need a foreign language.”

I didn’t realize Sophia’s Chinese heritage until our class project. She didn’t look Chinese to me. She had very tanned skin. Her hair was brown. She was tall and strong. Her clothing style was very American; she usually wore leggings or shorts. On the day of our first interview, she wore a sport short and a loose camisole, through which her bra was visible (field notes). I interviewed her twice, each around 1 hour. I didn’t get to interview her family members nor her friend.

I had very limited social interaction with Sophia, partly because she graduated that very semester when she participated in the research. She was a biology major and wanted to become a veterinary physician. She asked me to write a recommendation letter
during our research for an intern at an animal shelter, and she got the position to work
during the summer after her graduation. I sent her a couple of emails after her graduation
but did not receive any reply. She said she transferred to three colleges during her
undergraduate study, which was either due to her conflicts with the resident hall director
or her own family issues.

John (2 generation)

John enrolled in the Chinese language class that I was the instructor from Fall
2014 to Spring 2015. He participated the research in Fall 2015 when he took the
Intermediate Advanced Chinese class, which was taught by another teacher. His parents
came to the United States from Fujian province in China and opened a Chinese restaurant
to support their family. He was born in the U.S. and grew up in a small city with a small
Asian population. He spoke Fujianese with his parents, whose English was only enough
for the business. After his parents divorced, John lived with his father and continued to
live home when he was at college in order to help at his father’s restaurant.

John took all together five semesters of Chinese (four-semester of foreign
language learning would fulfill the language requirement). He didn’t take any Chinese
weekend school growing up, but he watched a lot of Chinese TV dramas when he was
little. Though his home language was Fujianese, John picked Chinese pretty quickly in
class. When I taught him during the second year of Chinese, his spoken Chinese was
noticeably better than his American peers. I thought he had practiced Chinese at home.
However, John was not very active in the Chinese class. Though learning Chinese was
not challenging for him, he didn’t attend class regularly. His reason for missing the class
was either over-sleeping or taking his dad to the hospital. While he was in class, he did
not actively engage in the class activities. Rather, he studied rather passively. John’s motivation to learn Chinese was very rational: “Mostly because I could learn it so I could speak to people. And then like one of my plans is I want to learn western medicine and eastern medicine. So somehow put them together and create something.” His major was chemistry. He has foreseen the benefits of mastering Chinese in advancing his career. However, he did not utilize the eight-semester Chinese language class offered at college to help achieve his goal.

It was hard to reach John. He didn’t reply to any of my emails. The only two interviews with him were scheduled with him in person when he enrolled in the language class. I did not have other informal socializations with John. I did interview his friend but not his parents nor his sibling (he is the only child but has stepsisters joined later). Each of the interviews lasted for around 1 hour.

Angel (1.5 generation)

Angel joined the research in Fall 2015 when she enrolled in the beginning level of Chinese language class as a sophomore. Angel took two semesters of Chinese and went to study abroad in China for four weeks in the summer of 2016, which combined would satisfy the foreign language requirement for graduation. She said, “Going to China will be a great opportunity to visit China as well as just getting that last credit in for my language requirements.” Her major was biology, which was on the path to be a doctor as her father wanted her to do. However, she was against that career option in the latter two years in her undergraduate study. Angel was active in the Chinese class; she studied hard; but her Chinese was not significantly better than her American peers. My class
observation showed that she enjoyed learning the language. She chose Chinese over Spanish because she wanted to communicate with her family.

Angel came to the United Stated at seven with her mother to join her father who petitioned them from Guangdong province in Mainland China. Angel grew up in a small southern city in the Midwest state where her family was the only Chinese one there. Her father opened a salon and worked as a stylist to support the family. Her mother left her father when Angel was fourteen years old, and since then her father raised her, his only child, by himself and remained single. Angel’s dad could speak Cantonese, Mandarin fluently, and his English was good, too. But the language between Angel and her father was English, though Angel was fluent in Cantonese when she first came to the U.S. Her extended families lived in California. His dad called his family there frequently, but Angel could not communicate with them in Cantonese, the only language her grandparents could speak. I interviewed Angel’s father in Mandarin for two hours at their house. I interviewed Angel twice, each around one and a half hours. I also talked to her Caucasian friend for about one hour.

I developed a good relationship with Angel over the years we knew each other. She was very social and outgoing. We had several dinners together at my place or at a Chinese restaurant. She loved Chinese food a lot. She said every time she went home from college (she only went back two times a year), she would tell her father “Dad, I cannot wait your food, coz I love American food too, but Chinese food definitely [is] my favorite.” Angel dressed the same as her American peers. Her skin was always tanned, and she always dyed her hair brown or dark gold. When she was not wearing glasses, which she normally did not, she would wear colored contact lens.
Peilin (2.5 generation)

Peilin was born in Massachusetts, but her family moved a lot throughout the US to find good places for opening a Chinese restaurant. They eventually settled down in a small city in the Midwest state with few Asian people. Her mother came to the United States at around age 13 from Fujian province. Her grandparents had also relied on Chinese restaurant for their living. Peilin’s mother could speak Mandarin, Cantonese, and Fujianese fluently, and her English was relatively good; though she didn’t graduate from high school, she went to two years of beauty school in the US. Her father came to the United Stated at around age 19. He can speak Mandarin, Cantonese, and Fujianese. His English was limited. His wife was considered to be the “translator” for him to operate the business and communicate with their three children (friend interview).

I got to know Peilin when she enrolled in the Intermediate Chinese language class in Fall 2014; she participated the research in Fall 2015 when she took the Intermediate Advanced Chinese class with a different instructor. Peilin took six semesters of Chinese and went to study abroad in China two times during college. Classroom observation showed that Peilin was passive in the language class; she did not engage actively with her peers and the instructor in language practices. Her Chinese was not noticeably better than her white peers. Peilin’s family speak a four-language mix: Mandarin, Cantonese, Fujianese and English. Peilin spoke English with her mother and her siblings. She also switched between Fujianese, Mandarin and Cantonese to speak to her father, depending with which one could make herself understood to her father. Her mother always spoke Cantonese to her husband, but always English with her children (parents’ interview). Her mother could not read much in Chinese. When I commented on the name of their
restaurant, 鸿禧, she said she did not know these characters and their meaning. It was her husband’s idea. Peilin said growing up in a mixed-language environment often confused her a lot as she didn't know which was which and she tended to mix them together. Peilin never had any formal Chinese language schooling except in college. She stayed with her grandparents for a while when she was young, and picked up some Fujianese from her grandparents. Peilin wasn’t able to read or write when she started learning Chinese in college though she could understand some Mandarin. She took Chinese because she wanted to get to know her heritage better. Peilin admitted that she felt “ashamed to call my heritage was from China that I can barely speak Chinese when I see some Americans that are very proficient in speaking in Chinese.” Peilin also expressed that taking the Chinese would help her defend her parents in Chinese against her grandparents, which she always wanted to do. Her grandparents constantly criticized Peilin’s parents for not teaching Peilin and her siblings Chinese. Peilin did not value the importance of learning Chinese for people growing up in the U.S., and her parents’ busy schedule did not make learning Chinese possible. Peilin said, “We are growing up in the America. They are busy working, …Where is the chance to learn that Chinese?”

Peilin graduated with an architecture major and a Chinese minor. She stayed home for a year helping at her parents’ restaurant, though she had the ambition to go to New York to pursue her career in architecture. When we met for coffee in 2019, she held a part-time job in a restaurant in the city where her university was, and planned to get a license in real estate. I had several interactions with Peilin. She was a very shy and reticent girl. She did not reply to my emails or text messages regularly, but we had several coffees and dinners together. She shared with me about her family life and her
understanding of Chinese architecture. I formally interviewed Peilin two times, each around 1 hour. I also interviewed her parents at their restaurant, mostly her father (2 hours), her brother (40 minutes), and her friend (her cousin) (40 minutes).

Elizabeth (2.5 generation)

Elizabeth was Peilin’s cousin, and she was the one who got interviewed as friend of Peilin. Elizabeth’s mother came to the US at fifteen from Fujian province. Her grandparents ran a Chinese restaurant to support their family. Elizabeth’s mother was the only one among her siblings to graduate from high school and later got an associate degree in college. Elizabeth’s mom ran back to China to escape the arranged marriage and met her father in China. They got married but divorced two years later. Her mother moved back to the U.S. with Elizabeth and her unborn younger brother, whom her mother found herself pregnant with right after the divorce. Her mother remarried to a Chinese man who came from China with two older children; her mother and her stepfather had another two children. Along with her other five siblings, they lived in the east part of the Midwest state, where her family was the only Chinese. They also ran a Chinese restaurant for a living. The home language was mostly English. Elizabeth’s mother’s English was good. She could speak Mandarin, Cantonese, and Fujianese fluently as well. When I interviewed her, she used both English and Mandarin. We visited her house for the interview, but the interview took place at the foot of a mountain, due to the many dogs at her house. The interview lasted for 2 hours. Elizabeth’s dad’s English was poor; he didn’t pass his citizenship test. He communicated with his wife in Fujianese but could barely communicate with his children.
Elizabeth majored in psychology, though initially she was in pre-med aiming to be a gynecologist. I got to know Elizabeth through a friend when she enrolled in the beginning Chinese in Spring 2016 as a sophomore. She participated in the research then. She took four semesters of Chinese in college. Though minoring in Chinese was on her mind, she did not make it due to her busy schedule in her major. Elizabeth took Chinese because she needed the foreign language credit; she also expressed the desire to be able to communicate with her family. She visited her birth father in China for first time in high school sophomore year. Not being able to communicate with her birth father pushed Elizabeth to study Chinese in college.

I feel like that’s like really sad if I don’t learn Chinese, it’s gonna to be really hard for me to talk to you [him], like the rest of my family, the whole like you know, my grandparents, like I would never be able to communicate with them, so I feel like it would be really good for me to learn Chinese.

Elizabeth was an introverted person and admitted that she had anxiety when meeting with new people. But when she was with me, she seemed comfortable. She liked to talk with me about her work in the lab and her research. She did not talk too much about her family with me. I had the feeling that my graduate student status related more to her than my Chinese identity. She invited me to her several research presentations over the years. She invited me to her graduation ceremony and the following reception at her house, when she was engaged with her high school sweetheart who was a Caucasian American. She also invited me to her wedding to be held in 2020. I interviewed her twice, each around one and a half hours. I talked to her brother for forty minutes, her Vietnamese American friend for forty minutes, and her mother for two hours.

Alice (3 generation, biracial)
Alice was a biracial born to a second-generation Chinese American mother and a Caucasian father. Her grandparents were originally from Jiangsu province in China and then moved to Taiwan and later to the United States. Her grandparents were pious Christians even when they were in China. Her mother and father have worked as missionaries in China for fourteen years; Alice, however, was born in Thailand when her parents had a missionary conference there. Alice lived in China until she was ten before they moved back to the United States. Her family lived in a medium sized city with a relatively large Chinese community. Her father continued to do missionary work reaching out to male international students at Alice’s university and her mother worked at the State capital. Alice was the youngest of the three kids (one sister and one brother). The home language was always English even when they lived in China. Commenting on why they did not speak Chinese when they were in China, Alice said “Because we are around Chinese so much …so like when we go home, we speak English, because all day, they have to speak Chinese.” Alice’s mother could speak conversational Chinese; Alice’s father studied Theology in Taiwan so his Chinese was better but he always had tone issues; he tried to speak Chinese when I interviewed him, but later switched to English. Alice went to a Christian international school in China. All the classes there were taught in English except the one-hour Chinese class every day. When Alice left China, her spoken Chinese was very good, but she was not able to read and write in Chinese (parent interview).

Alice started to take Chinese class as a freshman in college and she planned to take Chinese throughout her college. She graduated college in three years, and she did take six semesters of Chinese, which was also the language requirement of her major,
international studies with a focus on East Asia. She was very euthanasic about learning Chinese. She studied hard for every class. Her spoken Chinese was slightly better than her white peers at the beginning, but her language ability was among average in the later years. Alice chose to learn Chinese because that was her interest and was related to her family: “I really enjoy learning it, and also like my mom’s family is Chinese, and like I really care about them, so I want to be able to communicate with them more, especially with my grandma.” Alice was also very devoted to Christianity and loved travelling to different parts of the world to help people. She decided to be a missionary as her parents were. She worked in a Christian organization after graduation.

Alice loved Chinese food. I invited her several times to our home for dinner. We also had coffee together several times. She was very outgoing and friendly. She has blond hair and her skin is lightly tanned. But her figure is small comparing to other American girls. I didn’t recognize her Chinese background until she said that later she was both American and Chinese in class. Alice participated the research in Spring 2017. I interviewed Alice twice, the first around one and a half hours and the second around twenty minutes. I interviewed both her father (forty minutes in English and Chinese) and her mother (one hour in English). I also interviewed her brother and her Caucasian friend, each around forty minutes.

Ben (2 generation)

Ben was in the same Chinese language class with Alice from Fall 2016 to Spring 2018. Ben took two years of Chinese, which was the only course he enrolled during these two years to satisfy his foreign language requirement for graduation. This delay his graduation for two years. Ben decided to take four semesters of Chinese over three
semesters of Spanish, another choice to satisfy the language requirement. He wanted to be proficient in Chinese because he believed it would help him to communicate with patients from different language backgrounds as an optometrist, his career goal. Ben worked very hard in the language class. His Chinese was noticeably better than his peers. He also loved to go to various Chinese culture related activities, such as Confucius Day and Chinese culture club.

Ben’s parents came to the United States from Guangdong province first running a Chinese restaurant and later operating a bakery store to support their family. His dad was originally from Vietnam; he was fluent in Cantonese and with limited proficiency in Mandarin. His mother’s languages abilities were the same with his father. His parents’ English was barely enough for the business. Ben chose to live at home when he was in college to help out at his parents’ bakery. Their bakery mainly catered to the workers in the nearby automobile factory, which operated 24 hours. Ben’s parents chose to operate the bakery from 2 am to noon, when they could secure bigger profits. The home language was Cantonese between the parents and children, but the children spoke English with each other. Ben, however, was not fluent in Cantonese. He had difficulties communicating with his parents exclusively in Cantonese. He had to rely on non-verbal communication. He had to “demonstrate, like the action” or “look it up, like in the internet, like what is this word in English to Chinese.” Ben felt sad for not being able to effectively communicate with his parents.

Ben joined the research in Spring 2017. I interviewed him twice, each time around one hour. Ben was not willing to include his family in this research. Therefore, I was not able to interview his parents nor his brother, who was at the same university as
he was. I also did not get to interview any of his friends. We did not have much social
time except one dinner together. Ben was indeed admitted by College of Optometry
preparing himself to be an optometrist after he got his Bachelor’s degree.

Ava (2 generation)

Ava was introduced to me by Emma upon my request to interview her friend in
Fall 2017. It turned out that Ava was also a Chinese American and she was taking
Chinese class then. She was interested in the research and I interviewed her twice each
about one and a half hours in Fall 2017 and 2018 summer. I went to her house to
interview her mother in Chinese for two and a half hours. Her mother spoke fluent
Chinese and her English was pretty good too. Ava graduated in May 2018 as a theater
major. She then went to New York for career development. Her parents came to the
United Stated to pursue graduate degrees from Taiwan. They both secured jobs as
engineers in telecommunication companies. Later her mother was laid off and then
decided to homeschool her three kids. The reason behind this decision will be discussed
in the later sections. Ava was homeschooled from second grade to seventh grade. Despite
Ava’s parents’ fluency in Chinese, the home language was mostly English for
educational purposes. Ava’s mother said, “刚开始的时候我会讲中文，但是讲到最后就讲不清
c楚了，所以很多时候是我讲中文，她回英文，我就干脆讲英文” (When she was young, I spoke
Chinese to her, but then I couldn’t make myself understood in Chinese later on. Most of
the time, when I spoke Chinese to her, she would reply in English. So I just switched to
English). Ava’s resistance to speaking or her inability to communicate with her parents in
English reflected the influence of hegemonic whiteness on minority students’ ethnic
identity development. It also revealed the subtractive process of the public school, which stripped students of their family language and culture (Gibson, 1988; Valenzuela, 1999).

Ava was born in Maryland, but her family moved a lot due to her father’s job, whose English ability was adequate. They mostly lived in big cities where there was a large Chinese population until they moved to the medium sized city in the Midwest State when Ava was in eighth grade. Ava started public school since eighth grade. Their current city had a sizeable Chinese community, but Ava considered it less diverse than the cities in which she previously lived. She constantly described the state as “very white.”

Ava took three semesters of Chinese in advanced levels. Being exempted from the first two years of language class, Ava was directly placed into Intermediate Advanced Chinese class when she first started language learning as a Junior. Her mother commented that she studied Chinese very hard the previous summer in order to pass the placement test, which she did. Despite her supposedly good language ability, she communicated with me exclusively in English. Therefore, I did not know for sure her language ability. I did not get to observe her Chinese language class, but I went to her Chinese cultural class when she decided to minor in Chinese studies. She was not very active in the cultural class and she always came to class at the last minute and sat at the last row, mostly with American students. There were several Chinese international students taking that class, who normally sat together, but I did not observe her socializing with them. During my several class observations, she did not bother to recognize my presence. She was very into herself in class. Ava’s major didn’t require a foreign language to graduate. Her desire to take the Chinese was motivated by her Taiwan visit in college. She recognized her improvement in Chinese after the trip and realized the
urgency to maintain her language. She said, “If I did not keep practicing, I would somehow lose how good I have gotten….and I am a theater major; I have room to take Chinese and I found a way to take Chinese. I am interested in it.”

We did not get to develop our relationship during the research partly due to her busy schedule. Ava did not reply to my emails or text messages regularly. She considered herself introverted, but she seemed expressive to me. She was very good at articulating herself, which I really appreciated. We had coffee and lunch together; I also invited her to our home for Chinese food, which she enjoyed very much. She told me that her mother never cooked such authentic Chinese food.

4.3 “I Felt Comfortable Growing Up”

Chinese Americans in this group reported deliberate efforts to fit in with their peers and assimilate into the dominant society by denying their Chinese ethnicity. Considering white as the norm in the society, they actively engaged in the process of Americanization and being whitened. Though they also encountered some racial slurs, they chose to ignore them. Through this, they gained acceptance among their peers. Most of the participants, negotiating their ethnicities between cultures of the dominant majority and their Asian ethnic heritage (Meseus, 2014), did not report severe struggles navigating the hegemonic whiteness and Chineseness.

Growing up as the only Chinese family at her hometown, Elizabeth recalled acceptance by people there. She thought she was exact like them when she was young and was astonished to find that she was Chinese. She had a Vietnamese American friend in her neighborhood and became friends with her since then. They happily called themselves Asian one and Asian two. Being Asian/Chinese did not pose alienation for
Elizabeth at her hometown, which she felt close to. She considered herself an American, or a “Twinkie.” She seldom thought of herself as Chinese in her daily life.

Like me as a person, like I am entirely a Twinkie, that’s what my sister used to say, my older sister used to call me, which means I am yellow on the outside but white on the inside. I grew up completely Americanized. Like I feel American every way. I am not like super like tied to my cultural aspect, so it’s not that I didn’t respect it, I just never grew up with it… Like I never think of myself being Chinese unless like people pointed out to me. Because I have not been associated with the culture here, and like lived here all my life, like I never really feel Chinese.

Elizabeth didn’t feel offended to be called a Twinkie. Her reaction to this calling manifested the insignificance of being Chinese to her. She contributed her Americanization to her growing up experience. She noted that she wasn’t consciously brought up in a Chinese cultural environment. Her brother also considered Elizabeth “Chinese outside but American inside and Chinese is just a look for her” (brother interview). Elizabeth held a positive view toward Americanization. She believed assimilation into the dominant society would help minorities to succeed, as argued by the assimilationists (Mirel, 2010). She clearly objected to the people who chose to cling to their cultural values, which, according to her, explained their failure in the U.S. In her comment toward her aunt’s family dynamic, Elizabeth said,

They have been here for a really long time, they’ve been here for twenty thirty some years. But they still kind of hard, coz I think they never got a change, they are still like so strongly to like their cultural heritage, that’s hard to let go.

In Elizabeth’s opinion, the observed hard life experienced by her aunt’s family, such as struggles in the American society and the lack of social capital for networking, was a result of their association with their heritage culture. The underlying reason for Elizabeth
to perceive her aunts’ life in this way was probably due to her belief that assimilation or
conforming to the dominant culture was a better strategy for immigrants. This
understanding again manifested the power of whiteness, the dominant value, in
pressuring Asian Americans to dis-identify with their cultural heritage and assimilate into
the dominant majority culture (Museus, 2014).

The only one incident that Elizabeth recalled for being treated differently due to
her Chinese ethnicity under my multiple inquiries was the Pageant.

R: So, you’ve never had any unpleasant experience or subtle discrimination from
your peers or other American people due to your Asian heritage?
P: I don’t think so. I think the only thing I can think of was so I was in a pageant
my senior year. I think that’s why I didn’t win. Because I did the, it’s called
the “Miss XX County Pageant” so it’s like, which I am not sure, it could
because I was really bad, but like I won like the “Miss Congeniality”, which is
like people, so there is like twelve girls, and they all vote on like their favorite
person like who they think they should win, and like I won that one. But like I
didn’t get the winner one. I think it’s because like why would an Asian person
represent XX County? You know what I mean? Which I knew that coming in, I
was, it made no sense for me to win, you know.

Firmly seeing herself as an American, however, Elizabeth did not see herself legitimate
to represent Americans. What was implicit in her mind was that Asians were not
Americans. This aligned with what Hurtado and Stewart (1997) argued that whiteness
was implicitly associated with Americanness that in the United States, national identity
has been construed as white. To be non-white is to be non-American (Hurtado and
Stewart, 1997). The mindset of Asians as “strangers from a different ashore” (Takaki,
1989) was surprisingly prevalent in Elizabeth’s mind, who accepted herself as an
American. Rains (1998) explains:

This belief of “white is the norm” is so ingrained it remains obscured from view,
as natural as the air we breathe but so do not see. This inability to see something
that truly affects all of our lives contributes to the invisibility of white privilege as a corollary to racism (p. 80).

Elizabeth was not so sure about how her identity construction was in fact influenced by the prevalent whiteness in the society. Unable to challenge this hegemony, she internalized the “imposed reality” without resistance (Hardiman and Jackson, 1997) from the group with power and privilege. Museus commented, “Asian Americans who are unaware of racial oppression or do not fully understand it and have not developed an Asian American consciousness are less likely to engage in acts of resistance” (Museus, 2014, p. 75).

Similar with Elizabeth, Angel, who arrived at the U.S. at 7, also felt accepted by people around her. She said, “I grow up here, I don’t have accent, I think everyone, like I am very whitewashed, as people say it. Like that’s kind of a slang, but yeah, I am just very Americanized.” Same as Elizabeth, she didn’t really feel herself as Chinese. She said, “A lot of times, I don’t think ‘oh, I am Chinese.’ You know, just because everyone is so accepting me now, just because I do have a lot of similarities as all, like Americans.” Despite their comfort of seeing themselves as Americans, many of them experienced racism; they were called “ching,” “chang,” “chink” “konnichiwa” or were singled out due to their differences from their American peers. While these racial slurs pushed some of them to internalize negative views toward their own cultures by refusing to speak the language and eating the food at school, others chose to passively ignore these racisms. Peilin admitted that she would “just look at them and make mean face and then just turn away,” because she felt that “They are just wasting my time if I confront them, because they are never going to get over their narrow perspective. So I just ignore them basically.”
Sophia, the biracial female, learned the philosophy of transferring the blame to the
accusers instead of shaming herself. She said,

I’ve decided to learn that, you know, I have to be comfortable with myself really.
Because once you are comfortable with yourself, and it really doesn’t matter what
anybody says about you, because you know it’s not true. And you know the other
person is just trying intentionally to be mean, and you know they are intentionally
trying to be mean because they are not comfortable with themselves. And I feel
sorry for them, you know. And I think me turned it into “I feel sorry for you” kind
of helps me a lot.

Sophia’s example on the one hand demonstrated the importance of being comfortable
with one’s identity in fighting racism. On the other hand, her strategy by converting the
accusers to be the victims, though it revealed her agency and was conceived of a better
strategy, still demonstrated her inability to resist the hegemony in the dominant society.
Her “po” always told her “don’t worry about what other people do, you know, just take
care of yourself. And being calm and make you feel better will be better for you.” This
was similar to the “guest” mentality described by Ogbu. According to Ogbu (1991),
“They rationalize the prejudice and discrimination by saying as ‘guests’ in a foreign land
they have no choice but to tolerate prejudice and discrimination” (P. 21). The fact that
they chose not to fight against racism, but instead, took efforts to better themselves in
order to avoid these discrimination, illustrated their lack of ownership in the country
where they were legitimate citizens. John did not confront the perceived racism neither.
He shared an incident at his father’s restaurant. A customer called to place an order with
John and then came to pick it up.

Customer: where is the white dude at?
John: who?
Customer: what? You have no accent.
John: yeah. I grew up here. Can I help you?

Like what Tuan (1998) observed in her participants that a related stereotype to an assumption of heritage language fluency was its corollary, their fluency in English. John admitted feeling uncomfortable by that customer’s comment. But he chose not to confront him. The constant occurrence of these microaggression further reminded them that “They are viewed not as individuals, but as stereotyped members of a group relegated to a foreign status” (Tuan, 1998, p.144). Their reluctance to challenge the social hierarchy illustrated on the one hand, the power of whiteness in shaping who they were.; on the other hand, it indicated their lack of confidence in claiming their Chinese American identity.

4.4 Embracing Chinese in College

With the general acceptance as a whitewashed Chinese they experienced in high school, when these students entered college with its availability of ethnic courses and presence of students from China who shared similar physical and some cultural traits, their Chinese identity began to emerge and be appreciated. However, partly due to their less developed cultural knowledge and limited linguistic fluency in Chinese, they lacked the agency to explore more fully what being ethnic Chinese meant to them. They continued their lives as Americanized Chinese but with a certain appreciation of their ethnicity. Different from the students in the first group for whom peer interaction, ethnic courses and student organizations proved pivotal in the ethnicity (re)negotiation, students in the second group highlighted the importance of ethnic courses, especially heritage language class in navigating who they were in college.
4.4.1 Curriculum

The availability of Chinese language courses in college allowed Chinese American students to experience themselves reflected in the curriculum. The increased familiarity with their own language and culture validated their Chinese identity. They equated the ability to speak Chinese and understand Chinese culture with being Chinese.

Elizabeth felt more of her Chinese identity and realized she had two cultures at her Chinese short story class, when Chinese international students and American students were discussing one ancient Chinese official. Elizabeth noticed interestingly in the class that all the Chinese international students were sitting on one side of the room and all the American students were sitting on the other side. Elizabeth found herself sitting in the middle. Matching the sitting pattern, Elizabeth found her opinion was also standing in the middle between the two. She said,

I think it’s so interesting, because then I find myself, my own opinions and like, I like see that I am a little bit of this and a little bit of that. Like I am kind of like both, I kind of believe in both of this. …I never realize how much my culture has affected my personality until I got to XX university started to take these classes, because then I start to realize I am not totally American, you know, like I have some of the same mindset as these Chinese international students and it’s kind of cool to see. Oh wow, I am a little Chinese.

The Chinese cultural class allowed Elizabeth to discover the Chinese culture and realize its deep presence in her, which was a part of her, despite how little it was.

In addition to the positive effect of ethnic cultural discussions on campus, the Chinese language class also enabled them to own their Chinese identity. Alice said,

I feel like they [language class] helped me enjoy like my ethnicity more, because like you know in high school, in high school, it was hard for me, because you
know people always asked me like “Oh, like can you speak Chinese like blah blah ” and then I would not be able to say it. So now like I want to, like you know, I can speak more and more. I can write more and more, and like I can, you know.

The ability to speak the language empowered Alice to claim her heritage without shame. It also facilitated her to be assertive in who she was. This association of language and identity was argued by Edward (2009): speaking the same language could give the speaker a sense of identity. Tabouret-Keller (1985) also argued that the language spoken by somebody and his or her identity as a speaker of this language was inseparable: this was surely a piece of knowledge as old as human speech itself. Language acts were acts of identity.

Angel also shared similar thoughts on how the language learning brought her a sense of home. She said,

I think it definitely brings back some certain words on my Cantonese, and brings back some of my childhood memories. And it’s just like, I don’t know, it’s very nostalgic and I am just like “wow” like I used to not live here, and it made me appreciate my past more I think.

Taking the language class brought Angel a sense of home, from which she had long distanced herself. This was similar to what Fishman stated, “The language is, in a sense, the primordial home, even as it is the ever-present home for those who may have no other that they can call home…. It represents ‘the values and traditions that distinguish us from other human beings.’” (Fishman, 1998, p. 332).

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8 Cited from an Arabic protagonist, Al-Fayad, Mohaned Jaber, 1984 by Fishman.
In addition to the positive influence of ethnic courses in enhancing Chinese American students’ identity awareness, the representation of the faculty member from the same ethnic group also provided them with new insights on their ethnicity. Elizabeth said,

I think what helps me a lot being here, like being more in touch with being Chinese is like taking like language and like being more involved in like the Chinese department. Because I never realized that that something that I was missing, ‘cause I never got that in you know XX (her hometown), like we didn’t even have Chinese like the only Chinese people they were like my family. So I never like get experience in anything like any other like Chinese people. Coming here, …I didn’t realize that I was missing like the Chinese department.

Elizabeth went further to comment on her perceived familiarity with her Chinese descent professors. She appreciated her Chinese professors’ balance between strictness and kindness and considered it unique to Chinese. She found related more to her Chinese professors. On commenting one of her Chinese professors, she said, “He is like, I guess like attitude or his, the way he does thing that was so much that I was familiar with, you know. I was like ‘you are kind of like, I mean I feel like you are my uncle the way that you talk about things.’” Having the opportunity to socialize with professors from the same ethnicity granted Elizabeth a sense of security. She would be nervous and overwhelmed seeing an American professor for the first time due to her anxiety and did not know “how to hold myself”, but she acknowledged that she would be at ease, because she felt “ok, like they understand me better.” Elizabeth’s testimony further supported that the inclusion of diverse faculty members would positively influence students’ sense of belonging and identity negotiation (Smith and Schonfeld, 2000; Williams, 2013).

The Chinese cultural activities held at the university not only exposed Chinese Americans to their culture but also validated the legitimacy of their culture, which
empowered them. Despite that few of the participants in this group engaged in these activities, it certainly strengthened their ethnicity for those who showed interest. Ben shared his reflection after experiencing the many Chinese cultural festivals,

Nowadays like after experiencing the culture and everything going to like, what’s that thing, the one my mom and I went to, the Confucius festival. So that’s really a good way to get back to my root and everything. Like I got a lot more interested in Chinese culture, so rather than just takes the class, I really want to learn the language and hopefully be able to be fluent one day. So I just, I try a little bit more to try to include more of the Chinese, if that makes sense.

4.4.2 Peer Interaction

In addition to the availability of ethnic courses and cultural activities on campus, the presence of a diverse student population, especially that of Asian students provided them with an opportunity to negotiate the differences between Chineseness and Americanness. The increasing exposure of Chineseness on campus presented by students of Chinese descent allowed them to discover and/or feel at ease with their Chinese identity. Alice, the biracial girl, found herself not being judged because she was not the only Asian anymore, though she didn’t look very Asian. She said,

You just look at who is here, in my high school I was the only Asian person. In college, there is everywhere. I am not the only one, like I was walking around by myself and people really staring at me like who? They have never seen you before in high school. It’s like that. But in college like, they don’t care, like there is hundreds, thousands of you. I don’t know how many Asian people are on campus. While being the target of discrimination in high school because she was the only Asian, in college, Alice did not experience judgmental comments; the presence of other Asians made her difference less salient. She felt comfortable and accepted. Her experienced
alienation in high school and acceptance in college enabled Alice to reach out to international students from China and other parts of the world.

I understand them a lot better than other Americans; I understand like you know Chinese candies, things like Chinese Karaoke things like you know fun I used to do. …I know what will spark their attention …I can kind of understand like where they are coming from even how they feel they are coming here, how different they feel, I completely relate to that.

This connection with international students was also voiced by Elizabeth. Commenting on her socialization with a Chinese international graduate student at her lab, she said,

‘Cause she has a strong accent, but I also think that makes me feel more comfortable because I just feel like, I don’t know, I just feel like it’s easier for me or something, like I can understand her. Most [American] people are like don’t, cannot understand her like accents, like Chinese accents, but I just, my mom had an accent for like you know twenty years, so like I was really good at listening and like try to understand like what they say, like naturally I can understand them.

The perceived familiarity with an international population verified what Helms (1994) and Museus, et al. (2013) claimed about the association of Asian American identity with immigrant groups. Their shared status in the social powers provided common ground of understanding and sympathy. Alice’s background (grew up in China and moved back to America at 10, which required adjustment like those of immigrants) and Elizabeth’s experience communicating with people with accents facilitated their sympathy and bonds with immigrant population. They found themselves bridging the cultural and linguistic gaps between international students and their American peers.
Elizabeth, though she experienced severe anxiety, reported that she felt herself more comfortable talking with Asian people. She confessed that Asian people could understand her better, as demonstrated in her perceived relationship with her Chinese professors. This identified better understanding with Asian people also resulted from her awareness of the differences between her culture and the dominant values. Elizabeth said,

I feel like they understand me better, ‘cause I know like the way like I talk to my mom, like most people don’t talk to their parents so like the way I talk to my parents, like my mom would literally text me like “you are fat, like stopping eating, you are getting weight” you know, just stop. But that’s like completely normal for me, but like my [American] friends are like “oh my gosh, you mom texts you that? She would say that?” but that’s just like how we are, so I think it's just like it’s easier for me to like talk to Asian people…I feel like people are constantly judging me that I feel like whenever I am with Asian people, I guess I feel like they are not as judgmental.

The predominant norm on how parents and children should communicate pushed Elizabeth to recognize the root of her struggles and that Chineseness was embedded in her.

Elizabeth was not the only one who felt comfortable around Asian people. Ben was not a very outgoing person; he normally wouldn’t go out of his way to make friends, but he would “try a little harder I would say to be friends with them, if it's like an Asian American” and found himself making friends with Asian people faster. He said,

Since taking Chinese, I met a lot of like Asian American students, and I think I get along with them like faster or easier than I do with American students, because we are both, since we are both Asian Americans, like the culture we share similar cultures and then staff like that, I guess.
My own observation also validated Ben’s statement. I did notice him sitting together with
the other two Asians (a female Korean American and a male Chinese international
student) in the Chinese class from the first day of class and they remained friends for the
next year of the study.

Despite the expressed comfort and connection with Asian students by this group
of Chinese American students, none of them engaged actively in developing friendships
with people of Chinese descent. Sophia was in a steady intimate relationship with a
White American. According to my class observation, there were two other Chinese
Americans in her Chinese class, but I did not notice any interaction between them. When
asked why, she said, “I just don’t socialize with people…. I will not go out of my way
trying make friends or anything.” Angel did not report socializing with students of
Chinese descent neither. Her friends were all American friends in her sorority. The only
Chinese people Peilin contacted was a Chinese middle-aged woman, who was her
language partner for a short while and then they lost contact. Peilin did socialize with her
cousins. Even though Elizabeth, Ben and Alice reported their comfort with Asians, I did
not observe them socialize with students of Chinese descent. Though Elizabeth still
contacted her Vietnamese friend (her best friend since elementary school) in college,
most of her friends were Caucasian Americans. Despite the presence of a Chinese
American in Elizabeth’s Chinese cultural class, I did not observe friendship between
them. Similarly, Alice chose to make friends with Christians due to her beliefs; they were
mostly white Americans. Ben admitted that the relationship he had with the two Asians in
the Chinese class did not grow outside of the class. His busy schedule working at his
family’s bakery and his internship did not allow him much time to socialize with his
family
peers. Therefore, despite their perceived comfort with Asians and enhanced awareness of their ethnicity in college, these students chose not to develop friendships with others of Chinese descent in college.

4.5 Who am I?

Despite limited exploration of their ethnic identity, this group of Chinese American college students became more educated and exposed to their heritage in college than in their secondary education. This allowed them opportunity to negotiate their ethnic identity. Like the first group of participants, they began to recognize their hybrid identity, being a Chinese and an American. However, they did not fully develop the hybrid identity they discovered. They mainly identified themselves as American.

As described in the previous section, Elizabeth felt accepted in her hometown where her family was the only Chinese family. She was happy with her American identity and was not offended if she was called “Twinkie.” She appreciated that her mother brought her up in an American way, which facilitated her acceptance among her peers. The exposure of her heritage in college through Chinese language class and cultural class helped Elizabeth connect with her heritage. As she reflected in her Chinese culture class, she found herself “a little bit of this [Chinese] and a little bit of that [American].” She realized that she had both Chinese and American in her. She felt “a lot accepted” and “better understood” in college.

Despite the fact she felt her Chinese identity was more appreciated, one incident at her family restaurant in 2017 also pushed her to realize the bigotry people had toward her culture. Having lived her whole life in her hometown, for the first time, she heard people saying “What are Chinese people doing in the United States? [G]et out and go
The ingrained perpetual foreigner stereotype in the dominant society toward Asians infuriated Elizabeth. She said,

> We have been here for twenty years, why are these comments still coming up? So it was very like questionable. And kind of like hurt. Because like I’ve been here, I was born in this town, and you are telling me to get out and go back to my country. I was just like “I was born here, this is my country.

She was so disturbed by dominant society’s perception toward Asians as foreigners and her culture as bizarre, including an accusation in the 2017 incident that Chinese ate dog meat, that she decided to fight back on social media. “[I]f you are being racist toward us and you just have this mindset that we shouldn’t be here, then don’t support our business…. [W]e don’t want this negativity in our lives.” Though engaging in public resistance, Elizabeth expressed her anger and confusion toward those people, but she was not able to see the underlying reasons behind these people’s reaction.

With some awareness of American people’s eurocentrism, Elizabeth began to educate her peers about other cultures and speak up for the people from her culture. Reflecting on one of her co-worker’s criticism for Asian customers being “rude” or “don’t say please or thank you” or “don’t tip,” Elizabeth said,

> I am like, you know, that’s kind of regular in other countries, …like think about it, like in foreign countries, like tipping is not a thing, really, unless you [are] giving like extraordinary service and you are being amazing. I mean it’s not, it’s not they are being rude, it’s just like how they are. And because of their culture. And like I just like “you just don’t understand that.”

Elizabeth saw how “close minded” her American peers were, and she was glad that she was able to see the cultural differences and be open to differences due to her awareness of her identity. She said “If you really step back to think like ‘Oh, you know, they are just
Chinese. Like that is just their way to do with their culture.’ It makes, it’s easier to understand.”

Peilin, Elizabeth’s cousin, identified as an “American but with only Chinese skin.” She was able to see her bicultural understanding compared to her American peers.

Reflecting on a discussion during one of her classes, where students were discussing Chinese architecture, she said,

They are talking about the strictness and the number of things like Chinese architecture, and it gives you like classification of the class, and the more elaborate something is, or something has to be done in a certain way in architecture in China. And they didn’t understand fengshui also plays a big part in designing things. So that helps me, because they absolutely didn’t know what it was fengshui. I guess they heard about it before, but they didn’t really understand like the implication it had on Chinese society. And that helped me view like some people really honestly didn’t understand, just don’t know Chinese culture, and that’s why they just assume things. Because like I live in two different cultures, I can see both sides how it would be. I can understand that.

Astonished by her peers’ ignorance of Chinese culture in terms of fengshui’s role in Chinese architecture, Peilin was so proud that the knowledge of her own culture enabled her to see more intricacies of the society. This incident propelled Peilin to realize the cultural barriers between minority people and dominant group. She said, “I thought they understood each other, but they actually didn’t, like [they can understand] one part of it, and the other part was misunderstood.” This realization motivated Peilin to become an advocate for Chinese people. She said, “It kind of makes me defensive. Like have to defend this person because they are not, they are thinking a totally different way and it’s not trying to be mean or anything. It’s just how they grow up.” However, when pushed for concrete examples, Peilin was not able to provide one. Understanding that people’s behavior was inevitably judged by whatever value or standard held true by American
people, Peilin was able to see how that could influence her identity construction. She admitted that whenever she needed to introduce herself, she would say establish her American identity first to avoid misunderstanding. She said,

I was born in America, but my heritage is Chinese. So I would probably, I feel proud when I say my heritage is from China, but I start out as I am American to establish a link between other Americans rather than just say my heritage is Chinese.

Unlike Elizabeth, who identified herself and was perceived by her friends as mostly an American, Peilin was perceived by other people (her brother and Elizabeth, her cousin) as more Chinese. They considered her conservativeness in dating and personality, and her willingness to spend her summers exploring China, as her embrace of her ethnicity—more than they did theirs. I will further discuss Peilin in a later section.

Angel, who arrived at the US at seven, developed an integrated understanding of who she was. While still saw herself as “whitewashed,” and “very Americanized,” she expressed hope that people could accept her Chinese identity as what they would do to her American identity.

I want people to perceive me as who I am, which is Asian American. So I am also Chinese, I have that side, …but I also like I also love American culture. …I have both sides and I want people to see that both sides equally, because that is who I am.

Angel wanted to identify with panethnicity. The similar struggles and oppressions faced by people of Asian descent politically and culturally pushed minority people to develop a shared identity to combat racism. This embraced racial identity over ethnic identity was also due to the dominant society’s inability or unwillingness to distinguish people within
Asian groups (Tuan, 1998). They were what Espiritu (1992) called institutional ethnic lumping. While there were two dimensions in panethnicity—political and cultural (Espiritu, 1992), it was the cultural dimension of panethnicity that Angel strongly identified with. She had not developed an Asian American identity that was derived from the awareness of political oppression that Asian Americans faced in the dominant society.

Despite her limited understanding of being an Asian American in the United States, Angel managed to see that Asian American identity as a third space, which both connected and separated her from her Chinese and American peers:

I think another thing that really open my eyes to accept even more is I’ve watched a lot of Youtube. On Youtube there are Chinese Americans. They are like, they kind of have their own kind of culture in a way. It’s like Asian American culture. What they do is go and eat at Chinese restaurant. It’s like authentic stuff and then also do like American food. It’s like there is both sides. That made me realize I can do that too, like I can just live that life of accepting both cultures, ‘cause there are those resources out there like in California and there is more and here, like Chinese restaurants and like you know, Panda Cuisine and staff. So that made me realize I can do both.

Seeing Asian American identity as a separate identity allowed Angel to employ “accommodation with assimilation” (Gibson, 1988) to enable her hybrid identity to emerge. She was able to see the possibility of being recognized in the dominant society by integrating her heritage into who she was. Unlike the participants in the first group, who already apply this concept into their ethnicity construction, Angel’s wish of “I can do that too” indicated her less developed hybridity compared with her peers in the first group.

Alice, the biracial girl who had lived in China until she was ten, identified herself as half Chinese, half American or Chinese American. Despite her perceived comfort.
being half Chinese in college, Chinese remained a label for her. Her Caucasian friend perceived her as “an American who has that (Chinese) culture behind her,” which didn’t “help her or hold her back,”

I think for her it’s [being Chinese] like not something she thinks about a whole lot. I think it’s just, you know, who she is, and just another dynamic to Alice, like if anything it’s a positive, it’s a plus thing like makes her a more interesting person. …I think that her amount of Chinese culture is just enable her to a conversation starter or er, just a way to be different from all people you know, or to feel different.

Being Chinese was not deeply significant to Alice, according to her friend’s testimony. Chinese identity was like a label that she could choose to pick it up or get rid of depending on the contexts. Though in high school, her biracial status brought her some discrimination, in college, Alice was very cognizant of the benefits being biracial has brought to her,

I think being half Chinese, …It not only makes me different in a good way, but it also makes me,… It kind of makes me stand out of a crowd. So, see, even if I look for a job, I am gonna to stand out automatically. I stand out automatically in scholarships, which is a good thing. But I also stand out, you know, I have a different perspective. I think I am more interesting. I am not trying to boast “oh, I am better than anyone.” but I am proud of it, and I think that like,… If someone asks me about it, you know, I want to tell them about it and, I think it makes me stand out in the crowd in a good way.

Being biracial gave Alice the edge socially and academically. Having lived there for ten years, Alice considered China a very fun place, a place that she considered having the “freedom” and “safety” that she could not get to experience in the United States. However, she chose not to assert her own understanding of China when her professor expressed negativity about China, such as pollution and crowded subway. Alice fought
back in her mind, “You have to live there to be able to like fully grasp how great it is. Because like I do think if you go like the Great Wall and you do stay for a week, and it is really fun.” While she did not provide the reason for her silencing, which was partly due to her ethnicity identification, I would argue that unspoken rule of what was encouraged to be said and what was prohibited to be expressed in classroom was another contributor. As Fine (1991) wrote, “Silencing is about who can speak, what can and cannot be spoken and whose discourse must be controlled” (p. 13). Despite students’ increasing embrace of their ethnicity, the perceived discourse of control and power in higher education further prevented their development of ethnicity.

Sophia, the biracial girl, whose mother came to the United States, identified herself as Chinese/Asian American. She said,

I consider myself Chinese. I don’t,…I would consider myself as Asian American. I don’t,… I don’t really know what I should consider myself as. (Chinese) is what my mom is, my grandma, my grandfather were, you know, so that’s who I am.

Sophia thought she was a Chinese or Asian American because that was who her families were. Attributing being Chinese American to her ancestors revealed that the Chinese American identity was an imposed identity to Sophia. She identified her siblings “growing up as American kids.” Her Chinese heritage was not something joyful she wanted to discuss, as illustrated in the following scenes.

Scene One

Sophia was with her mother and her brother, who look Asian, when they met her friend, whom she has known for years. Her friend was shocked to see the three of them together.

Sophia’s friend: I didn’t know you are an Asian. What is this?
Sophia: Yeah. Now you do. Cool, my mom is Chinese; my dad is Jewish. Ok. Let’s go move on now.

Scene Two

Some Asian American people found out that Sophia was half Chinese. They were very curious about her.

An Asian American: Oh, how long have you been able to understand (Chinese)? Why you are so different?
Sophia: My mother is from Taiwan, so. My dad is an American. I don’t look like you. I am sorry. I can understand you. I don’t speak well.

Sophia did not want to elaborate on her heritage when people found out about her Chinese background. She certainly was not willing to reveal it to any of her peers. In fact, Sophia almost got annoyed by people’s inquiries. She had no interest to satisfy their curiosity. She wanted to end the conversation as quickly as possible, sometimes rudely. Sophia’s indifference toward her heritage, sometimes irritation at being asked about her Chinese identity, indicated that she felt being Chinese American was imposed on her. That Sophia could pass for not being perceived as a Chinese derived from her appearance—tanned, blown hair—which people usually associated her with being a Mexican. Sophia ridiculed, “I am Mexican, you know, I am always Mexican. That’s what everybody always says, so.” Experiencing this imposed identity derived from dominant society’s stereotype against minority people, either culturally or physically, Sophia was compelled to develop an indifferent attitude. She said, “It doesn’t bother me, none. …. I always know who I am. I really,… I really don’t care what other people think of me.”

The imposed identities of being either a Chinese, which was based on part of her heritage, or being a Mexican, which was based on her appearance, were not relevant to how she perceived herself. This revealed indifference, as argued by Yao (2009) was “a touch of boredom, to the whole question of Chineseness” (p. 252).
Similar to Sophia, John also identified himself as an ABC (American born Chinese). When pushed further, John said quickly “Both, I will say, keep it simple, you can say whatever you want.” Validated by John’s American friend, who has Native Indian and German heritage, John chose to be disinterested in how he was perceived by other people. His friend commented, “I think he is accepted as to who I am in the sense of my ancestor made me who I am and he is pretty OK with that.” John was pretty certain of who he was. He stressed multiple times in the interview that “I am who I am. I cannot really change that. So I am who I am. So the way people see me is whatever.” Socializing with people with hybrid identities, John was perceived by his friend as “sort of creat[ing] his own identity by ways of like things he likes to. He likes K-pops, he likes video games, he is definitely very loyal to his family.” The assertion, “I am who I am,” though it can be interpreted as an indifference to ethnic identity development, could also be viewed as a form of passive resistance against the imposed identity on people of Chinese descent in the dominant society. As argued by Yao (2009), “In this quiet indifference there might even be a whiff of ‘political resistance’, in perversely not caring for something the state cares too much” (p. 253).

Ben also identified himself as a Chinese American. He recognized the equal importance of being a Chinese and being an American to him.

I personally like my Chinese heritage; I get to enjoy like the cultures of both. I get to eat a lot of Chinese food, a lot of the Chinese culture we do in our family and then on the American side I get all the American food all the like American something, so I think it’s good.

While enjoying being bicultural, Ben clearly recognized the limitations should he only value one part of his identities. He said,
I get to avoid of all that, because I am an American. But I guess if I was just American, I wouldn’t get to experience the Chinese side like the food, the culture, just like the style of life, so I get to pick like the best of those things. So I guess it is what it means to be Chinese American.

Well cognizant of the competition in Chinese schools and the more stressed life Chinese students have in China, Ben was grateful that being an American allowed him to avoid it. The “dual frame reference,” (Ogbu, 1987) which stressed the better situation in the U.S. compared to that in their heritage country, was also utilized by Ben to persist in the face of difficulties, such as when he was ridiculed by his friends. At the same time, Ben also appreciated that living between cultures enriched his cultures and lifestyles that he was able to incorporate the best part of them.

Being Chinese American evoked different meanings for students in this group. Though their ethnic identity was developed through the various opportunities and resources available in college and they reported a hybrid identity formation, yet, they possessed different interpretations toward their hybridity. Most of the students in this group lacked the agency to further explore what this hybridity meant to them. For some, Chinese American was an imposed identity due to their ancestry. For others, Chinese American/Asian American was a reflection of their biculturalism. Several of them have recognized the separated nature of Chinese American identity in that it exists in the third space.

4.6 Accomplishment of Natural Growth

The term “accomplishment of natural growth” refers to the strategy that parents do not actively engage in organized leisure activities in parenting (Lareau, 2011). In this
research, “accomplishment of natural growth” is used to describe parents’ similar attitude and efforts toward maintaining their children’s heritage as those adopted by parents in Lareau’s study. Unlike the parents in the first group, who exerted considerably influence on educating their children about their culture, parents in this group were either willingly or compelled to “give up” educating offspring about their heritage. I would argue that parents’ inclination toward natural growth cultivation, to some extent, explained this group of Chinese American college students’ different understanding of their hybridity. In addition, their parents’ ambivalence toward their culture reflected their conformity toward whiteness; this submission to social privilege and oppression was implicitly understood by their children and influenced how they perceived their own identity.

Five participants (Elizabeth, Peilin, John, Ben, Angel) came from homes that owned small family businesses (restaurant/bakery/salon). The pressure to maintain the business did not allow parents enough time to spend time with their children, let alone concerted heritage culture education. They worked ten to fourteen hours a day to support their family. John remembered a lot of times being left home alone by his over-worked parents: “They go to work for 12, 13 hours a day. So when I go to class, they are sleeping and then I come home I am sleeping and they two come home later.” Peilin’s mother also said “我们两个都是做餐馆的，晚上回去的时候也困了，都是十一二点了” (We two are doing restaurant. When we get back home at night, it would be midnight, and we are very exhausted). This intense schedule not only exhausted parents physically, but also mentally. They did not have the patience to explain inquiries related to their heritage to their children should they be asked. Angel’s father shared,
一点点吧。一点点，也不是很多。因为有时候很多东西她不知道。而我老是工作，所以她想知道的我都会给她说。但是有时候我也不知道从哪里开头给她说，但是，我就说，你怎么可以...一两句话我怎么解释。她也想知道，但是有时候我就是说不来那么多。

(A little bit. Not too much. Sometimes she wanted to know a lot of things. I was always working all the time; I would tell her anything she wanted to know. But sometimes I don’t know where to start, so I was like “how can I explain this to you in one or two sentences?” She wanted to know, but sometimes I just couldn’t share too much.)

Failure to take children’s inquiries as opportunities to help them get in touch with their culture, like what the parents in the first group did, parents in this group did not have the resource or support to enable their children to value their heritage. Surviving everyday was their priority. This was especially true for Angel’s father, whose wife left him when Angel was in seventh grade. He felt overwhelmed to handle work, family and parenting at the same time. He tried to avoid as much complexities as possible. Commenting on communication with her daughter, he said, “对了就做, 不对了就不做, 其他的就不要告诉我了” (If it is right, then do it. if it is not right, don’t do it. There is no need to tell me the rest). His strategy discouraged his daughter to share struggles and questions she may have experienced in the U.S. as an ethnic Chinese and thus limited the opportunity for Angel to explore who she was. In fact, Angel’s father was not aware of any of the struggles Angel shared with me when she was young. He considered her fully accepted by her peers and was extremely happy for her.

However, this does not suggest that parents did not put any efforts in sustaining their culture. All five participants’ parents tried to teach their children Chinese when they
were young, such as asking them to write Chinese characters. But they quickly gave it up under their children’s strong resistance. The home language was not consistently Chinese; it was typically a mixture of local dialect of Chinese with English. Parents spoke the local dialect with each other, and children spoke English among themselves. The communication between children and parents were mixed local dialect (Cantonese/Fujiannese) and English. Sophia always communicated with her mother in English, since her mother came to the U.S. at a younger age and was probably conversational. While Sophia was exposed to Chinese language around her extended family members, she was discouraged by them, because “They are laughing at us, so it’s just kind of hard.” While Ben grew up speaking Cantonese with his parents, he was only fluent in conversational Cantonese. When his English ability was more advanced than his Cantonese, he had difficulties communicating with his parents. He had to rely on internet and body language to make himself understood. Ben’s parents kept updated with the current Chinese news through watching television, but they didn’t utilize it as an opportunity to help their children learn about China and Chinese language; rather, they just talked to themselves. Parents reported that they did not have the time to consciously teach their heritage language nor did they recognize the importance for their children to master the language. Peilin’s mother regretted that it was her fault that Peilin did not learn to speak Chinese. She said “我很小就来的美国，都是讲英语的，我看电视也是看英语的，所以孩子他们听不懂中文，我不知道为什么，我对着他（她老公）说广东话，我对着我的爸爸妈妈说广东话，我对着我的孩子说英语” (I came to the US very young, and I spoke English. I watched English TV programs. My kids don’t’
understand Chinese. I don’t know why, but I speak Cantonese with my husband; I speak Fujianese with my parents, but I speak English to my kids). While Peilin’s mother did not explicitly express her underlying reason for speaking English with her children, I argue that their preference over English to Chinese reflected their emphasis on assimilating to the mainstream society, where fluency of English is appreciated. Angel’s father shared his experience about his decision to stopped speaking Chinese with his daughter: “在老美面前说中文有点不礼貌，因为他们不懂,可能认为你在说他们。…“久而久之，她就一点中文也不说了” (It was impolite to speak Chinese in front of Americans, because they didn’t understand it and would assume you are talking behind their back…. Gradually she wouldn’t speak any Chinese at all). Perceiving the negativity American people might express toward people speaking Chinese in front of them, Angel’s father deprived his daughter of the opportunity to be fluent in her heritage language. Losing the heritage language meant a great waste of a national resource (Fishman, 2001), a potential loss of identity (Cho, 2000) and deteriorated family relations (S. Lee, 2005; Fillmore, 2000). The following quote further illustrated parents’ agony.

我三个小孩跟我沟通都有问题，有时候我跟他们说话要她妈妈翻译，…经常有时候沟通不来，很多话想跟她说，说不出来，你说了一大推，她听不懂…我现在是赚一点钱，但也失去很多，跟小孩失去很多，我最后悔的就是跟小孩不能沟通，这个最后悔” (I couldn't communicate with all my three kids. Sometimes I need their mother to translate for us….We couldn’t really communicate. I have a lot to talk with them, but I cannot say it out, because they wouldn't understand it….I have made some money, but I lost too much. I lost too much with my kids. The most regrettable thing is I cannot communicate with my kids. This is what I regret most) (Peilin’s father interview).
While some parents experienced powerlessness in connecting their children with their heritage due to the loss of family language, other parents were determined to raise their children as Americans. Resenting her own experience of being blocked from American society by her parents, which pushed her to run away from home, Elizabeth’s mother was very resolute in her belief that to

make sure my kids [are] going to [be] raise[d] American way, …I am not raise[ing] my kid American. I just raise American what we are, because this is how they grow up, like look in front of you, that is how they go to school, [how] they live every day, why they have to be differ[ent]?

Elizabeth’s mother firmly wanted her children to grow just like those American kids did. She wanted her children to be “melted” into the dominant society, which she believed is a good thing. This mentality was very prevalent among those earlier immigrants, who firmly believed the assimilationists view (Mirel, 2010). During our two-hour interview, she constantly insisted her philosophy of adaptation. She wanted me to “adapt to, like [when] you are in XX, then be XX.” Therefore, maintaining Chinese culture was in the far back of Elizabeth’s mother’s mind. Elizabeth’s mother demonstrated agency in how to parent her children. She chose very consciously the way acknowledged by the mainstream culture to educate her children. Maintaining Chinese culture and language was deemed by her not relevant to her children’s success in the United States.

Consistent with her assimilationist point of view, Elizabeth’s mother made a conscious choice in terms of their family language:

So [shall] I teach my kids Chinese or shall me and my husband learn English? Because I could teach me kids Chinese and what if my husband’s English [is] never going to get better? And I don’t want my kids don’t speak to his dad at all…So therefore, I make my all kids speak English.
Elizabeth’s mother believed so strongly in the irresistible influence of the dominant society from her personal experience that she was almost certain that raising her children Chinese would eventually cause alienation between parents and children. Her lesson from how her parents blocked her from the American society when she was young and how she nevertheless became Americanized confirmed her that living in the United States her children would not be able to accommodate without being assimilated. Therefore, she insisted their children speak English so that she and her husband’s English ability would be improved. This was perceived by her as a better strategy because it would enhance her children’s academic success and would not lose the smooth parents-children communication. Ideal as her plan was, her children certainly lost their heritage language and her husband’s English was not significantly improved as to achieve the ability to communicate effectively with their children. Her husband did not pass the citizenship test; her children reported that they had minimum communication with their father.

Alice’s parents, who were missionaries, were also clear how they chose to raise their children. Alice’s mother was born to a Christian family in the United States. She had very little Chinese culture exposure growing up. She said “My parents actually didn’t tell me a whole lot about China, just because they were gone so long and China has changed so much.” She shared that she could only taught her kids trivial stuff in Chinese culture like “Don’t play with your chopsticks; finish your rice; call people by their title” that her parents had taught her. Alice’s mother acknowledged the Chinese value at her family but stressed the importance of Christianity, “Yeah, we were Chinese, but we were also Christians, so that actually comes over, that becomes the more dominant value.”
was considered a “香蕉” (banana, yellow outside white inside) in her husband’s eyes.

Observing her children living in China, Alice’s mother even considered them “more Chinese” than her, because “they grew up in China.” Though they were “only half Chinese, but by culture, by instinct, they are more Chinese.” Though they have been living in China for fourteen years, they didn’t see it crucial for their children to master Chinese. They chose to put their children into international schools where they got limited exposure of Chinese instruction. When they moved back to the U.S., Alice’s parents did not see the urgency to keep their language, as Alice commented that “Again they both had to work all the time, so they didn’t really push on us, because they didn’t see there is much of a point to learn the Chinese anymore.” When comes to Chinese holiday celebrations, they either forgot them or just went out for dinner. They were engaging in what Gans (1979) called symbolic ethnicity identification, which employs the easiest and most superficial forms to identify ethnically. Alice’s experience was much like what Tuan’s (1998) participants engaged in ethnicity expression. Without providing any resources to assist them, Alice’s parents left the choice to their children, “If you want to learn it, you can learn it when you go to college.”

Following the tradition of her parents’ family, Alice’s mother emphasized Christianity at her own home. While Alice’s parents expected their children to “never forget their heritage and continue to value that; or have some more extended time living in China,” their biggest dream for their children was to “follow God, walk with Jesus and realize that God loves her, through the church, through the Bible, through just day to day living and then have a humble attitude and a thankful attitude.” Raising their children to maintain their Chinese heritage was never a big thing on Alice’s parents’ mind, to be a
Christian was. How Alice negotiated her Chinese identity and her Christian identity will be further discussed in a later chapter.

Parents in this group chose a parenting style that they believed to be reasonable to them. The natural growth cultivation demonstrated in their efforts to maintain their children’s heritage culture reflected their conscious decision-making process to conform to the mainstream culture to ensure their children’s success. By allowing their children to grow naturally as other Americans, they transmitted the insignificance of their heritage implicitly to their children, which carried over into young adulthood.

4.7 Language and Ethnicity

Readers may notice that in the previous sections, one participant was purposely omitted from the discussion. Ava, the Taiwanese American, born to two engineers in the United States, was not discussed. Her story, along with the stories of Ben and John provided a different perspective on the relationship between language and ethnicity. While a big argument of this research indicated the inseparable relationship between language proficiency and ethnicity development, as Tabouret-Keller (1998) said, “Language is taken as an external behavior allowing the identification of a speaker as a member of some group,…Language is taken as the means of identifying oneself” (p. 315). It was precisely based on this that I divided the participants into two groups according to their language choice and language ability. However, this reasoning cannot cover all the nuances existing between language and ethnicity. Fishman (1998) said,

[J]ust as ethnicity itself is perspectival and situational, and therefore variable in saliency, so the link between language and ethnicity is also variable. For some (and in some historical and situational contexts) language is the prime indicator and expression of their own and another’s ethnicity; for others, language is both merely marginal and optional (i.e. detachable) vis-à-vis their ethnicity (and that of
“others” as well). Nevertheless, although the link between language is merely constructed or conditioned by social, contextual, and historical circumstances (rather than a constant given in the human condition), this “detached” scientific perspective on language and ethnicity does not keep the language and ethnicity link from being experienced as vital and as a basis for social organization and mobilization. To claim that this is a specious basis for social action is not only to be judgmental but (which is worse for social scientist) to miss much of the meaning in other people’s lives, i.e., to miss the very meaning that is the scientists’ task to elucidate (p.330).

What Fishman argued essentially is that while language can be fundamentally important to some people’s expression of their identity, it can be marginally significant for other people’s identity negotiation. Language should not be viewed as a marker for people’s ethnicity embrace alone. The complex social, contextual and historical circumstances in conditioning the relationship between language and ethnicity should be respected. Otherwise, we would run the risk of being judgmental and “miss much of the meaning in other people’s lives” (Fishman, p. 330) It is precisely this deference to “the meaning in other people’s lives” that I will separately discuss Ava in depth.

Ava was similar to the other participants in this group because she chose to spoke English in this research, but her experience demonstrated much more complexity than others in this group. Unlike the other participants, who were the only or the few Chinese families in their predominantly white hometown, Ava spent her time in diverse big cities with big Asian communities, such as Maryland and Huston, before she moved to the Midwest state, where was predominantly white. This exposure to diversity and her heritage shaped significantly how she viewed herself. Growing up in the Chinese church, Ava had a lot of Asian friends to play with. She always had her “comfort zone” to turn to whenever she perceived alienation from her American peers. However, moving to a
“white state” and starting public school there made her ethnicity salient; her ethnicity was constantly questioned by her peers. She cried, “why cannot I just eat my food and you just not wonder what it is!” Ava’s experienced agonies were also observed by her mother,

我女儿在YPAS的时候，有人就是讲得很难听，她回来就哭啊，很难受啊，…她那一段时间，而且加上说她是个基督徒，然后再加上她是个非常保守的女孩子，然后再加上一个她们会吸毒，她们会喝酒，她们会跟男生乱睡，这样一个环境中，她觉得她像鹤立鸡群，非常痛苦，我觉得她在这边，这四年的高中是最痛苦的。

[When my daughter was in YPAS (Youth Performing Arts School), her classmates expressed very rude comments. She cried hard every time she got back from school, feeling heartbroken…. She was like a crane among chickens, standing out among her peers in high school, who were taking drugs, drinking and sleeping over. She was so different from them, believing in Christianity and was conservative that the high school years was miserable for her].

Ava’s Asian beliefs conflicted with what her peers practiced. Though not verified, Ava’s ethnicity, which helped her get into the program but at the same time excluded her from it, was another source of her agony. Her mother commented, “为什么她在四年的高中她三年都在performing art都没有演到一个主要的角色，那这是一个很明显的种族歧视” (She wasn’t able to perform a major role during the three years in the performing art program, and this was clearly a racial discrimination). Struggling between the dominant culture and her own culture, Ava was forced to make some accommodations. Her friends circle began to change.

Switching her friends circle to predominantly white when she entered a predominantly white college suddenly changed her perception of herself.
Like because the friends I have made, I have to suddenly shift my identity. Ur, so I honestly think that it was a huge part of it. My closest friends became not Asian, so then I had to start unconsciously figuring out why there was a communication gap all the time. Because I think when I first came here, I realize there was a different way of in which we talk about the world, and there was like this wired gap between our understandings. … I don’t think I even knew what it was but I just could tell there was something not quite bridged. … Unfortunately, like if I had been a different state …maybe it would be less of a gap. Maybe I wouldn’t have to bridge so much space. … Because I was in XX, I had to bridge a bigger gap and so basically, I just started evaluating like what does it mean that I am Asian because that’s probably the root like why there was differences. And I think I like before college, …I think that existed as an Asian American unconsciously. Like I didn’t really know like what means to be an Asian? And after college, I had to start thinking about these things a lot, and so, so complicated. So I think that I,… there was a huge shift. I think it had to do with me think about what it meant, and realized a lot of what it meant was.

This perceived gap between her and her non-Asian peers in college pushed her to meditate upon the meaning of being Asian. She was acutely aware that it was her Asian-ness that had created the gap. Ava engaged actively in bridging this gap. During this process of negotiation, she understood she could “bring where I come from and where they come from and we sort of meet at a place that doesn’t begin at the same place.” This compromise enabled Ava to perceive her ethnic identity analytically. Socializing with her non-Asian peers pushed Ava to challenge the significant meanings of shame and honor that she previously valued.

So I feel in some ways it makes me almost less Asian, which is a little unfortunate, coz I don’t want that to feel less Asian, but it just feel less Asian in some ways because I don’t care about the same sort of things that are like “丢脸，不丢脸，不好意思” (shame and feeling embarrassed) …I guess like learning about like my value as an individual sort of like overrode all of those things, and I think in some ways it made me more of an American than an Asian person.
Finding herself embracing the virtue of respecting individual merits over the collective good empowered Ava to gain a sense of belonging among her non-Asian friends. This sense of increased acceptance allowed her to get rid of the personal shame for being a minority in the dominant society.

And I think another shift, this, I think was something else I wanted to say I remember. Honestly the biggest shift is I have sort of been working on this aspect of personal shame, and I think that actually ties into my Asian identity. Of also being like, …I think when you are a minority group in the United States, you are told to feel ashamed of your race a lot, just by indirect comments, like your whole life, like “why don’t you have eyelids? Or like “why is your food so wired?” Like you know people [are] just questioning everything about you, so you constantly feel like ashamed for being different. … I think that I constantly felt shamed for being different before college, like try to keep away from people, [was] because I didn’t know like what was accepted and what it wasn’t. And at the same time of me getting rid of my shame in college, which makes me sometimes feel more American at the same time, … also helps me feel more Asian, because I actually apologize less for things that make me different, … I am a lot more assertive of being like, “Yeah, this Chinese music is really great” or like, “Yeah, I love playing this video games,” which seems like a very Asian thing to do, or “I love Chinese food. I love authentic Chinese food. We cannot go there, [but] we got to go here [to be able to eat authentic Chinese food]. You definitely have to try this, because this is good,” you know. So, it’s a very interesting aspect of also feeling less shame for being Asian. I am trying to [be] assertive more and being more ok about it.

This profound understanding of being an Asian and being an American permitted Ava to find a balance between her double identities, which reconciled her long-harbored shame for being a minority. She became at ease with whom she was and began to engage assertively of her ethnic/racial identity. The following argument between her non-theater major friend and her on the film Ghost in a Shell, where a Japanese character was played by a white female, demonstrated Ava’s increasing awareness of racial oppression her people faced.
Friend: I don’t understand, like why is this a big deal?
Ava: Ok, I will tell you why it’s a big deal like why it’s important like we are white washing because of this.

The indifference of her peers towards Asians “being whitewashed” was upsetting for Ava. This further allowed her to see the invisible white privilege in the dominant society. The binary discussions on race, which limited to black-white issues, further propelled Ava to advocate for her race.

Because the discussions normally surround around white black relationships, …like my issues get overlooked. And people don’t talk about them…. I don't think there is Asian voices, so I can talk about them because they are not present. They don’t know what to talk about, or they know what's wrong with the system, [or] they just don’t know…I also feel privileged to be an Asian in the theater department as well, because I get to provide a very unique voice that no one gets to provide. Like I could provide this and teach people things that they wouldn’t know if I wasn’t there.

Ava expressed clearly her transition from her embrace of ethnicity to her advocacy of her racial identity. While this study focused on ethnicity construction, Ava’s emphasis on her racial identity over her ethnic identity revealed the more urgency of race construction than ethnicity construction in the United States. The term Asian American was initially a convenient concept imposed by the dominant society, which historically ignored different ethnic groups’ cultural, linguistic and often times longstanding animosity (Nagel, 1994). Those people who were forcibly lumped together formed alliances to protect and promote their collective interests through the recognition of the commonalities in their experiences in America (Omi & Winant, 1994). Their efforts pushed the previously imposed identity, Asian American, to take on a life and meaning of its own as a new cultural base (Nagel, 1991, 1994). This shared identity and experience propelled the ethnic distinction to be
mattered less and less in the face of an emerging racial consciousness (Onishi, 1996). Ava demonstrated her clear understanding of how Asian Americans, including Chinese Americans, as a group were marginalized in the dominant American society. Unlike the participants who embraced the cultural dimension of their panethnicity, Ava embraced the political dimension of it. It was the political oppression toward Asian people with which she identified. In against the larger society, her racial identity was more salient than her ethnic identity. Having that realization, Ava constantly advocated for the representation of Asians in the social media. She expressed her exhilaration to be seen and heard through the film of *Crazy Rich Asians* on her Facebook page.

No. No way. Is this really happening? Is this real? It's too good to be true. Is this real?... This movie was as if the whole world had just sat me down at a glowing dinner date, looked me deeply in the eyes, and asked “tell me your life story” and then listened for hours and hours with the most intense compassion...and then told me I was beautiful and valuable. I guess that's what representation feels like …The cultural complexities of my identity that no one cared to learn, the richness of the world I grew up in that no one ever knew, and the love and laughter and wonder filling up all the spaces between--all of it was finally revealed to the world in the grandest of ways!

Her long-wanted recognition and acceptance by the dominant society for whom her people was finally accomplished through the film *Crazy Rich Asians*, in which all the actors and actress were people of Asian descent without being whitewashed. The cultural representation of her culture in the dominant white society granted Ava pride, empowerment and appreciation toward her heritage. Ava saw the political significance of her culture being represented, heard and seen by the dominant society.

Ava’s intense awareness of her identity (racial identity over ethnic identity) was related to how she was brought up. In addition to Ava’s greater exposure to Asian
community by having lived in several big cities, her parents - especially her mother - were the only ones who practiced concerted cultivation in parenting in this group.

Ava’s parents worked in telecommunication companies after they got their graduate degrees in the U.S. After Ava’s mother was laid off later, she decided to homeschool Ava and her older brother. The rationale, which at the beginning was to cultivate a better relationship with Ava’s brother, who was very rebellious at that time, was later validated by a necessity to maintain a disappearing domestic culture that had been replaced by industrialization. She said,

Not only in the US, but the whole world is losing a culture in which the son will learn to become a carpenter if his dad is a carpenter. Children are learning skills from their parents. But since there is school system, kids are hanging out with kids, and they learn not so good stuff from each other. The educational system is aiming to make sure each kid is able to learn, which means it cannot tailor to your kid’s needs. So you [your kids] waste a lot of time at school. Smart kids feel schooling is boring but dumb kids feel it challenging.

Regretting the loss of the domestic culture around the world and criticizing schools’ ineffectiveness in education, Ava’s mother saw the benefits of homeschooling. She taught Ava needlework, painting, arts and crafts and how to handle family issues, such as taking care of her little sister, changing diapers, cooking, and answering phone calls. Her
mother also worked with other homeschool agencies to teach her academics. She said, “所以你每两年你就要换一些 curriculum, 然后你要去参加家庭教育的 conference, 去问别人怎么教, 然后你也参加一些教 co-op, co-op 就是 说很多家庭合在一起，他们办一些活动” (You have to change your curriculum every two years, and then go to homeschooling conference to get updated on what other parents are doing. You will also join some co-op, where a lot of families join together to hold some activities). Ava’s mother initially decided to use Chinese as her medium of teaching, but then realized she could not make herself understood. She switched to English as the medium of instruction to home school her children.

However, the experience of homeschool provided Ava with intense exposure to her heritage culture through her 24-hour immersion in the Chinese family and Chinese community, though her Chinese language proficiency lagged behind that of her English. Her mother still insisted on teaching her children Chinese. She told me that her son achieved a high level of literacy in Chinese; he could read Chinese novels, such as those written by Louis Cha Leung-yung, 查良鏞 (commonly known as Jin Yong, 金庸), which demands a pretty good command in Chinese. Though Ava was not as fluent as her brother in Chinese, her mother continued her effort by “每天晚上我给她念中文，每天晚上，但是呢，她是念了就忘，忘了再念，念了又忘，同样的书，她念十遍还是记不起来。但是我们就，就是不懈” (reading Chinese to her every night. But she would forget soon, and we would read it again, then she forgot again. She wouldn’t
remember the book even we have read it ten times. But we never give up). Despite frustrations, Ava’s mother believed her efforts would be worthwhile in the long run. Unlike parents who gave up under their children’s resistance, Ava’s mother believed, “坚持给她种一点种子，然后将来她要回过头来学的时候就很容易”[ (if I) persistently plant some (Chinese) seeds in her head, when she wants to learn it later, it will be easier]. She also went to her children’s elementary class to share Chinese festivals, such as Chinese Lunar New Year, with Ava’s friends. She wanted her children to be proud of who they were and be accepted among their peers by introducing their own culture at their school. She said, “然后我让她的朋友感觉到说，‘你看，她们和我们不一样，她们有这样有趣的文化’”(I wanted them to be proud of who they are, and let their friends feel that “they are different from us, because they have such interesting culture”). Her perseverance to instill their own culture and language transmitted a message of resistance to hegemony and hierarchy in the dominant society and respect for and appreciation of who they were to her children. This has tremendously shaped Ava’s identity development later in her life.

In addition, Ava’s parents were very conscious toward their children’s inquiries toward their culture. They chose to “活出那种文化来，比方说我们就非常保守啦，然后我们对一些奇装异服啦，弄头发啦什么，我们就有点 ‘啊，可以不要弄这样子嘛” (live out that culture, for example, we are very conservative, we have reserved
opinions toward outlandish clothes and hairstyles). Ava’s mother engaged actively in explaining Ava’s inquiry about her heritage,

事实上你常常带他们回去，然后他们会看到说“妈，这个东西是怎么回事啊?”你就跟她讲一讲，“哦，那个为什么要这样子啊”或者是参加 funeral或者什么，你就跟她解释我，“哦，我们中国人是这样做的，这个代表什么意义”。然后我们带她去旅行啊，讲比如这是什么历史啊，为什么有这个长城啊，我觉得这个东西你不用，你不需要就是老刻意的好像坐在课堂上，给她教，而是你就是让她 explore，就是你要让她有接触。…所以我觉得文化是在生活中，就是活出你的那个东西来，你就在那陪着他们…所以我们教了很多中国故事，那他们只是拿来当 entertainment的，但是这个过程当中，”哦，原来，”可是那个故事中就有她的 culture。

(Actually when you often take them back, they would ask you questions if they see things, “mom, what is this thing?” you can explain it to her, like “oh, this is blah blah,” or if you are in a funeral or something, you could explain to her “oh, this is what we Chinese people do. This means blah blah blah.” When we take them to travel, we could talk about history, like why there is this Great Wall. I think like those things you don’t need to be like sitting in the classroom to teach her. You could let her explore and let her get in touch with the culture… so I think culture exists in life. It is what you live out. You just need to be there for them. …So we taught a lot of Chinese stories, which they took as entertainment, but during the process she got to know her culture, because the culture was in those stories)

These concerted cultivation practices adopted by Ava’s mother in maintaining her children’s heritage paved the way for Ava’s later exploration for her identity. Despite Ava’s limitation in her heritage language, like her peers in the first group, she also acquired “acculturation without assimilation.” Her strong attachment to her ethnicity/racial identity allowed her to engage in political activism for her people. The story of Ava complicated the relationship between language and ethnicity. In the following section of Chineseness understanding and performance, how John and Ben
chose to perform their Chineseness also demonstrated the non-lineal relationship between
heritage language proficiency and identity.

4.8 Chineseness Understanding and Performance

Like students in the first group, participants in this group also had reflections on
how they were caught between the multiple cultures in constructing who they were. It
also demonstrated the hegemonic whiteness and Chineseness in structuring their identity
formation. Tackling the intricacies of Chineseness and Americanness, participants
demonstrated the varied significance of their ethnicity to them and how their identity was
constructed by resisting and conforming to the hegemony of whiteness and Chineseness.
Not different from their counterparts in the first group, their understanding of
Chineseness also derived from their experience growing up in Chinese immigrant
households and through the comparison with American culture that they observed.
However, they articulated different understandings of Chineseness that pertained to their
specific social, economic, cultural, contextual and historical situations. This again refutes
the Chinese essentialism claim.

In the following sections, I present their perceptions of Chineseness and how they
chose to perform that Chineseness. Through their strategies of either conforming to or
resisting the Chineseness they understood, the following section aimed to further
highlight the complex meanings of being Chinese to them.

4.8.1 Model Minority Stereotype

Participants all expressed the imposed expectation of being smart and good at
math on them from the dominant society. How Chinese American college students
negotiated their ethnicity is greatly influenced by this stereotype. Some of them had more profound experience than the others. John perceived that,

They joked about how Asians are smart with math everything and this one show, family guy, the main character pulls out like instead of he pulls out calculator and he pulls out like an Asian boy does his math. And I was like “what?” but yeah, they expect Asians to be smart.

This model minority stereotype on Asian people prevalent in the dominant society, as discussed in depth in S. Lee’s (1996) study, revealed a racist remark toward people of Asian descent. Though John was not able to discern the underlying hegemonic device underlying this rhetoric, he certainly believed it was unfair to impose this on every Asian,

In China, like not everyone is smart, just like in America, not everyone is smart, but not everyone is dumb. It’s just depends on how much education you got, like it’s all ranges from like really smart to not smart. So we have different kinds of people.

John believed that this discourse ignored the diversity within the Asian community and risked the institutional ethnic lumping (Espiritu, 1992) by painting Asian Americans as a homogeneous group. Such discourse “erases ethnic, cultural, social-class, gender, language, sexual, generational, achievement and other differences” (S. Lee, 1996, p.6). John did not want to conform to this stereotype. He was observed by his friends “as far as school, [he] is slack a little bit, because [of] the video games.” My observation of his constant absence in the Chinese class also confirmed his lesser devotion to study in college. His strategy of choosing to be addicted to video games is similar to those adopted by high schoolers in S. Lee’s (1996, 2005) study through absenteeism and
association with African American culture to fight hegemonic whiteness. S. Lee (2005) interpreted these Hmong American high students’ behavior as engaging an oppositional identity to resist the dominant culture in school. John’s choice to not become a high achiever can be interpreted similarly as engaging an oppositional identity against the “model minority” rhetoric imposed on Asian Americans. This demonstrated the detrimental effect of stereotype threat on Chinese American students’ identity search as well as their academic success (Steele, 2010).

However, other participants, who were expected to be smart by the dominant society, chose to live up to that expectation. Angel said she was happy that she was considered that way.

I am accepting that stereotype. That’s ok with me. Being smart is not a bad thing, but when I was younger, it just seems that that’s a stereotype of Asian. I didn’t want to be that smart girl... So I was like “no, I don’t like math” when I was little, but then I was like “wait, I really do like math.” And I am really good at it. So I am like I am gonna to accept that. So now I am like “yeah, I love math.” And all, any of my sorority sisters like in the house if they need a math help, they are like “Angel, help me with it.” I love it.

Like the high schoolers in S. Lee’s (1996) study, Angel took this model minority as a compliment of Asian students’ academic achievement. She failed to perceive the nature of “racist love” (Frank Chin and Jeffery Chan, 1971) underlying this “accolade” from the dominant society, as S. Lee (1996) argued “as a hegemonic device, the model minority stereotype maintains the dominance of whites in the racial hierarchy by diverting attention away from racial inequality and by setting standards for how minorities should behave” (p. 6).

The repercussion of the model minority stereotype for Asian American students was not to be dismissed. Angel experienced extreme pressures in college to maintain her...
straight A status she gained in high school. Her inability to maintain her expected academic excellence quickly made her to conclude that she was not good at biology and therefore was not good enough to be a doctor. Here, the impact of stereotype threat, even though it can be understood as a “positive stereotype,” poses a danger to Chinese American college students’ academic success. Ben acknowledged that he was “just an average student.” He credited his academic excellence to hard work. Encountering his peers’ mockery, such as “You must be good at math,” he replied with “Oh yeah, I am your human calculator.”

Just as Ben attributed his academic success to hard work, hard work was another trait that the participants saw as marking them as Chinese, and another trait included in the model minority rhetoric. Unlike their different reactions to imposed expectations of academic excellence, participants each embraced the idea of hard work. Elizabeth was proud to be a hard-working person: “I think I work so hard like in school and everything I like always want things to be perfect.” Elizabeth’s brother also said one of the differences he perceived between Elizabeth and her peers was her being a hard worker. Elizabeth’s Vietnamese friend also testified that witnessing her parents’ hard work at the restaurant, Elizabeth “(worked) harder in school and stuff to not have to fall back rely on restaurant life or something.” Escaping the hardships their immigrant parents experienced was perceived as an important rational for immigrant children to work harder academically. They saw education as a way to achieve social mobility.

Juggling family responsibilities, studies and jobs forced Ben to be a hard worker. Ben admitted, “Since I both work at the bakery and three optical places, like my days are like this. My work is like 18ish hours every day.” His daily schedule included working at
his optical internships after class and then helping his parents with the bakery till 2 am. Ben’s hard work paid off; he was accepted by an optometry program in Fall 2018. Like many participants who learned the hard-work virtue through observing their parents, Ava was inspired by her father’s experience from a “poor boy in the shat house and dirt floor” all the way to “the middle class in the America.” Ava admitted that “seeing them being such hard workers” enabled her and her siblings to “pick up” what their parents embodied and became hard workers.

4.8.2 High Academic Expectations

Like their counterparts in the first group, Chinese American students in this group also experienced high academic pressures from their parents, which they considered to be Chinese. This similar expectation was also experienced by students from other Asian groups (Kim, 1993). Korean parents adopted a cultural model of success, the foundation of which was believed to be money and prestige (Kim, 1993). Therefore, students in this group experienced implicit and explicit pressure to pursue medicine related areas, which were considered lucrative and prestigious. This is different from how the parents in the first group approached education. They emphasized more on their efforts on study than on the area of study.

Being a doctor was what most parents in this group wanted their children to become. John’s mother expected John to be a doctor. But John managed to study pharmaceutical science by convincing his mother that his career was still medicine related. Ben’s parents also conceived being a doctor as Ben’s only career choice. They saw the doctor as a promising job for Ben to raise his future family. Ben was willing to follow his parents’ suggestion, as he considered him a born math and science person. But
when he found out the competitiveness to go to medical school, he chose to become an optometrist. It took him three months to break up the news to his parents due to his fear of their rejection. He said, “I had to make sure [to them], oh, this is still a good job. I am still gonna be helping people. I still be able to support myself, ur, yeah, and it [will] still be considered like a doctor but just with the eyes.”

Angel was the one who experienced the most stress from her father’s expectation for her to be a doctor. She was fully aware that the only dream her father had for her was to have a bright future. That bright future was believed by her father to rest on being a doctor. He believed being a doctor was a steady profession and this career would not discriminate against her due to her ethnicity. Her dad supported her financially 100% in college and didn’t push her to work, because he wanted her to focus on school, which was more important to him. With this expectation in mind and witnessing her dad’s investment in her education compared to that in other American families, Ava felt a tremendous burden. She said “he was always working and that’s why I feel bad of not being a doctor. My dad works so hard, and I don’t want him to [be disappointed] and [think me to] be failure.” When Angel realized that she had a passion for performing arts, she was so terrified to tell her dad about giving up on medical education that her fear was even felt by her friend. Angel’s friend said Angel “went shaking and crying, like really nervous” that it was not typical for her peers. She said, “It’s different than my American friends, coz it is like she is literally afraid. It’s like a whole another level.” Angel’s example once again illustrates what scholars have argued that Asian children work hard to please their parents and to avoid shame and guilt associated with failure (Hsu, 1971; Mordkowitz and Ginsberg, 1987; Sung, 1987). Though it is out of the scope of this
research to investigate the potential psychological consequences associated with parents’ high expectations on their children’s academics, Pang (1990) cautioned that children’s desire to please can also lead to anxiety among Asian American students.

Other participants also experienced high academic pressure from their parents, which they believed was part of Chinese culture. They confessed that they were fortunate that they enjoyed more freedom than the participants above. Though Elizabeth’s mother was very clear to raise Elizabeth American, she said in terms of education it “had to be Chinese, [because] I just don’t want them play video [games] all day long.” Though she was busy at the restaurant, she squeezed her time for their study: “When my kids [were] little, I talk[ed] with them. I taught them math. I taught them English; I learn[ed] the science; I made school advance[d].” When she was not available, she hired babysitters to take her children to the library two days every week; she believed that “When they are boring [bored] enough, when they [have] nothing to do enough, they will read [at] some point.” Elizabeth was cognizant of her mother’s investment in her study, she appreciated: “One of the main differences between my family and like the American family is like my mom pushes me to do different things…that’s why I’ve done so well at school, because my parents, because they pushed me like be better, do things…their expectation for me is always kind of high.” Elizabeth was grateful that her mom did not push her to certain career tracks. She said, her mom just wanted her to “do what makes you happy. Don’t, you know, be a doctor just because of money.” Elizabeth thought in this aspect, her mother was adopting the American way of parenting.

Similar to Elizabeth, Ava had the freedom to choose her career, majoring in theater, to which her parents did not express overt rejections, but she always felt the
implicit pressure to conform her career to one traditionally accepted by Chinese. She acknowledged, “Becoming a theater major was a bit of battle, coz they didn’t want me to be a theater major, or they want me to be a theater major and something else, because they want me to be provided for.” Though her parents felt insecure about her being a theater major, they chose to support her decision; they went to her performance. However, Ava saw her parents’ minimum engagement with her and her peers about the performance as less supportive. Nevertheless, she understood it as a common Chinese behavior. She expressed, “I think this also pretty typical Chinese thing of like I think maybe we have a tendency toward science and math thing so when it comes to art and emotional things, they like do not know how to handle it.” Ava’s parents indeed have mixed feelings toward their daughter’s career choice. Her mother shared:

我觉得今天我如果没有信仰的话，我会非常反对，因为我觉得，从我的生命经验中，来美国就是求生存，然后有的时候你的工作是没有选择的，…那要是抱这样的心理的话，她这样，走这条路是非常危险的。但是也许是因为我有信仰，就是我要相信说，她是她的个体，那么神会对她有特别的带领。那我能为她做的就是替她祷告，你若是问我说，我会不会担心，我会，我会很担心，你问我说，会不会很支持她，其实，我还是不怎么支持她，但是不能跟她讲，哈哈。我不能直接跟她这样说，她会生气。

(I think I would be very opposed to her choice had I not have my faith. From my experience, you [immigrants] come to the US to survive, so sometimes you don't have a choice about your job. …If you have this mindset, it will be very dangerous for her to go through this route. But maybe because I have my faith, I have to tell myself that she is an individual that God will lead her life. What I can do is just to pray for her. If you ask me whether I am worried about her or not, I am, very much so. If you ask me whether I support her or not. Well, actually, I am not that supportive. But you cannot tell her this. Haha. I cannot directly tell her this. She will be sad.)
Like Korean parents in Kim’s (1993) study, parents were pragmatic in instructing their children’s career choice. However, Ava’s mother was able to turn to Christianity to reconcile her belief with her daughter’s major choice. Ava was very thankful for her parents’ understanding. She believed that her parents had learned to compromise between Chinese ideas and American ideas in parenting.

4.8.3 Family is Important

The perceived/imposed importance of family in their life was understood by students in this group as very Chinese. The conception of this Chineseness again was derived from the comparison with their understanding of American culture, which they believed to be individualistic and less family oriented. Repeatedly, they essentialized Americanness and failed to see that this Chineseness may not be necessarily Chinese. They were constantly reminded of the family responsibilities they need to take. Peilin’s parents constantly implanted filial piety in their children, “等 daddy mommy 老了,你要 take care 我们了” (When Daddy and mommy are old, you are going to take care of us).

Pilin was ready to fulfill that expectation. She said,

   As I grew up, like I actually moved away from my parents’ house, I would come home and help out whatever I can, because I feel like they are helping me go to college, so I want to give back as much as I can when I come home.

She prioritized her family when making decisions. When she graduated from college, she chose to help her parents at the restaurant instead of going to New York to develop herself as an architect. Her cousin, Elizabeth, commented on Peilin’s family-oriented
behavior by saying that “I think family is super important for her…(she) is always like ‘I need to do this for my family.’ And I think that’s one of the reasons she is staying.”

Like Peilin, John and Ben, the only two male participants in this group, also prioritized family over their personal interests. John explicitly said “I am going to be more concerned to my family than to my friends in the future because family is always there. So for me, family is going to be more important than friends kinds of thing.” His Caucasian friend also testified John’s devotion to his family: “There is definitely times when we couldn’t hang out, because he has to go help his dad or his mom at the restaurant, or watch their house, or do something for some of his other family members.” This demonstrated preference of helping out with family to hanging out with friends was also revealed by Ben, whose family owned a bakery. He expressed his struggles,

A lot of the decisions I make, I have to think like should I go out hang out with my friends tonight or should I go home help my parents who have been like working fifteen hours last night? So a lot of it is like, wow, it would be nice if I would go out hang out with friends, but then if I don’t help them out, who is gonna like help them?

Helping out with family chores has been evidenced by many studies on immigrant children (S. J. Lee, 2005). They constantly had to choose between educational and/or social network pursuits and family responsibilities. Ben took helping out with his family as his undoubted obligation. Replying to his peers’ suggestion about leaving home, Ben and his friend had the following conversation,

Ben’s friend: Why are you working for your parents without being paid?
Ben: It’s just helping them out.
Ben’s friend: Leave home, come live with us, and get an apartment, be free.
Ben: I cannot leave them alone. I wouldn’t leave my parents alone like that.
Very serious about his duty as a son and willing to fulfill that expectation pushed Ben to work between studies and devoted many of his hours each day to his family. John also never challenged his obligation as a son. His friend witnessed that John “spent a lot of time doing things for his family and he never resented that he had to, which in American culture, kids complain about their parents all the time, you know. But you would never hear John say anything bad about his parents.” Both Ben and John were prepared to take care of their parents when they are old. John said, “They took care of me [when I was young], [so] I take care of them [when they are old].” Ben also expressed similar attitude, “Once they are done working I will be working and then I will take care of them.” Justifying its necessity, Ben explained, “coz they don’t have a plan for the future and like if I don’t help them, then who is gonna to help them?”

Though not explicitly expected to take care of her family, Ava was also aware that the connections between family members distinguished her from her American peers. She said,

We are very communal like family. [It] is like [a] huge value to us. So like I remember like all throughout college, I have had to visit a lot… but sometimes I get really annoyed because like I have so much to do here, why do I have to keep visiting you guys? But I mean that’s the way they felt respected, and loved was when I came and visited. So I try to visit a lot, but like for example, like my American friends like their parents aren’t always like “come visit us now” … it also just seems to be more of a like “it’s ok if you don’t visit us often kind of thing.” But my family is like “COME VISIT” and “I mean it like come here.” And haha, and, yeah, so I think just the extra emphasis on family that like I mean every family cares about each other, but I think it’s an extra emphasis that’s a little bit different from every[one] else, a little bit more.

Ava knew that her family valued more on maintaining closeness with each other, which Ava perceived a little overwhelmed. But Ava chose to meet her parents’ expectations and
she always helped with her mother with household chores every time she went home. Her mother shared, “她是三个孩子里面，大概就是说对家的责任感最大的，就她很愿意，她，哪怕她现在上大学回来的时候，她会说：‘啊，妈妈，今天你要不要我帮你接妹妹呀，你要不要我帮你做点什么啊？’” (Among the three kids, she is the one that values family the most. She is willing to, like even now in college, every time she came back, she would ask ‘mommy, do you want me to pick up my sister for you? Do you want me to do something?’). Ava would feel guilty when she was too tired to help. Her mother recalled Ava saying, “我回来的时候就有很多属灵的挣扎，我又想帮你做事，我又好懒，我想要睡觉，可是我又想帮忙，那我发现没有跟你们在一起花时间的时候我又觉得很罪疚感” (When I came back, I had a lot of Spiritual struggles. I wanted to help you, but I was lazy. I wanted to sleep but at the same time I wanted to be able to help. I felt guilty that I wasn't able to spend time with you).

This obligation to their family enormously shaped how those Chinese America students perceived their ethnicity and how they presented themselves to others. They believed that the committed responsibility to their families significantly distinguished them from their American peers. It again demonstrated how Chinese American college students’ Chineseness construction was based on the essentialization of Americanness, which was believed to be less family orientated. While Chinese American college students strongly associated this family-orientation with being Chinese, this does not indicate that it applies exclusively to Chinese culture.
Though they did not acquire the ability to speak their heritage language fluently, they demonstrated strong identification with their ethnic culture at least in the aspect of recognizing the importance of family to them. These participants’ “meaning of their lives” were validated and respected if the analytical understanding between language and ethnicity was observed. While it is commonly believed that language represented membership, Fishman (1998) argued that there should not be a lineal relationship between language and ethnicity. Just as ethnicity is “subjective, variable, and very possibly non-consensual,” therefore, “[t]he variability in perceived and experienced ethnicity also leads to variability in its association with language” (Fishman, 1998, p. 329). This research also validated this association. How one identifies oneself ethnically should take his/her social, cultural, geographical, and historical situations into consideration; while language can mediate the process, it should never be a sole marker.

This was also vigorously supported by scholars who have refuted the essentialism of Chineseness, which was defined by speaking a certain language and from a certain race (Tu, 1994b; Shih, 2013; Ien Ang, 2001). Tu (1994b) said, “A focus on the Han race would inadvertently marginalize over ninety million members of Chinese minorities… emphasizing proficiency in spoken Mandarin, which is unintelligible to millions of Han Chinese, may make speakers of Cantonese or Fujianese feel inadequate” (p. vii). In the similia vein, Shih (2013) also claimed that “Hence, this procedure of ethicized reductionism of the Chinese as the Han is not unlike the racist misrecognition of authentic Americans to be white Anglo-Saxons. In each case, a different but similar form of ethnocentrism is in operation.” (p. 26)
Like the two male students, Angel was also aware of the filial responsibility as a Chinese. Commenting on her grandfather’s living in a senior home, she said “It almost makes me shameful, coz our culture is so, like puts so much emphasis on talking care of the elderly.” Angel knew as her father’s only child she had the responsibility to take care of him, but Angel wasn’t sure if that was what she wanted to do:

It just feels so different, just because I do not think it is a natural thing in the American society, especially I don’t know who I am going to marry, and it might be a wired adjustment … You want them to be close, but not want them to be in your house, like controlling. So I don’t know what I am going to do. I don’t want to have too much space where we lose contact, so hopefully we will find a middle ground.

Struggling between the perceived differences between American culture and Chinese culture in terms of family responsibilities, Angel was not sure how she should position herself in fulfilling her filial duties.

Elizabeth, (2.5 generation) was also aware of the importance of family at her house, as she admitted, “In Chinese culture, it’s very like [to] do what’s best for the family, do what’s best for everyone.” However, growing up encouraged to be an American, she decided to “do what you want, [do] what is gonna to make you happy.” Commenting on Peilin’s decision to stay at home after graduation, Elizabeth said she would never do what Peilin did. She said, “If I had to pick between, you know, like staying at home working, help[ing] with my family restaurant or you know going to school, like I would probably go to school.” In fact, Elizabeth rarely talked about helping her parents at the restaurant. While I knew Peilin went home frequently helping her parents during school breaks, Elizabeth chose to stay at her college working or travelling.
One thing worth noting was the relationship between Elizabeth’s family and her maternal grandparents, which might contribute to Elizabeth’s lesser involvement with her family. Elizabeth’s mother told me she ran away from home to escape her parents’ control when she was in her late teens. She also shared with me about her parents’ constant demanding for money when she settled down with her own restaurant. Elizabeth knew from a very young age that her grandparents were not appreciated.

While the previous participants appreciated their family closeness and expressed desire to take care of their parents, Sophia’s family dynamic was quite different, though she understood profoundly that Chinese culture valued family from her own observation. Her grandparents had lived with Sophia’s family for most of their life, which she knew was not usual in the U.S. She saw her grandparents putting a lot of expectations on her mom to take care of them: “They wanted her to be at home and they wanted her to help out with the restaurant and everything, you know… I feel like in Chinese culture, the women are supposed to take care of their parents.” Sophia also knew in Chinese culture that “with all the festivals and all the stuff, it’s always, you know, all the families get together, you know, under one roof… They are more focused, just [on] their family” Despite Sophia’s strong aspiration for family closeness, she was not able to enjoy it from her parents. She said she “could go for months without seeing my mother. It wouldn’t matter” and she didn’t get the phone calls like “Hey, are you alive?” She shared the only time she got this kind of phone call was during a basketball game; when a lot of people were arrested due to the riot, her dad called to make sure he didn’t need to bail her out. In Sophia’s mind, her family was not a place where she could feel being loved and connected. She said, “If my family doesn’t fight during dinner, that would be a miracle to
me. Like I literally cannot leave my parents’ house without getting so mad that I have to leave.”

Despite the Chinese Americans’ understanding of the importance of family in Chinese culture, their own experience within their family community influenced how they chose to perform this Chineseness in their own life. This understanding also influenced how they chose to position themselves between the differences in the dominant culture and their heritage culture. Their agency in choosing to perform this Chineseness or not also confirms the changing meaning of being Chinese, which needs to take the family dynamic, historical, cultural, and contextual differences into consideration. In other words, there is no essentialized experience for being Chinese. Despite Chinese American college students’ assertion of connecting this family-orientation with being Chinese, there is no ground to claim this to be uniquely Chinese.

4.8.4 Conservative Culture

Similar to their counterparts in the first group, students in this group also expressed that Chinese culture was very conservative, especially in regulating the behaviors of females. This also derived from their comparison with the American culture that they observed. Though Ava didn’t share a lot about herself being conservative, her mother observed her conservativeness through her struggles in high school, where she found herself isolated from her peers partly due to her refusal to sleep around with boys as other girls did. While Ava’s behavior reflected her attitude toward sexual relationships, her comments on international students’ conservativeness revealed the social awkwardness she perceived among Chinese students. She saw them “more quiet and
more reserved and more embarrassed in speaking sometimes.” She believed she was certainly not like that.

Peilin was acutely aware of the sexual restrictions for female Chinese Americans. She was instructed by her parents, especially by her father, to keep her purity until marriage. She was not allowed to date until 22. Though Peilin told me she chose not to tell her parents when she had a boyfriend, she indeed did not date as many boys as her peers would. Peilin clearly realized how this restriction set her and her peers apart. She shared, “Because I don’t have a lot of dating experience, I don’t really connect that well with other students, or like other people of my age.” Nevertheless, Peilin was grateful for having followed this. Commenting on her peers back at home, who had children in high school, she said, “Because I come from a more traditional family, that I see everything that I am [doing as] more responsible, and I am more conservative. So I feel like I respect myself better than some of the girls that I met before.”

Sophia believed Chinese had higher values than Americans did. She asserted that though it was acceptable for a thirteen-year old girl to be half naked in America, yet she could not imagine a Chinese mother would let her daughter do that. She talked that her grandmother was so shocked to see her cousin wear a short that was just enough to cover her underwear that it would almost give her a heart attack. Observing these conservative values reflected through girls’ clothing and behavior in Chinese culture, Sophia, however, refused to follow.

Po: You cannot be that loud you know, you got to be quiet, you are a girl. Be a girl. That’s not very ladylike.
Sophia: Everybody else is going it though. I am not that loud.
Po: You cannot make faces like that in public.
Sophia: But I am with you. I can make whatever faces with you. You are my grandma.

Rebellious to these expectations imposed on her, as a girl or as a Chinese American, Sophia admitted that she went to the American side and didn’t want to follow these.

Angel was once very proud of her sexual promiscuity, which she believed indicated her popularity among boys and “It’s normal…and was glamorized in college.” She never understood the conservativeness of Chinese culture in sexual relations until she visited China. She realized that “I need to be respected more of myself.” She was so grateful to have that reserved culture help her that she stopped her promiscuous life at a very important time where her disease was “one stage away from cancer.” The last time I talked to Angel, she told me she had settled down with a boy, which she never imagined herself doing previously.

The immigrant parents’ restriction on their daughter’s sexual purity is also observed common to many Asian immigrant groups (Gibson, 1988; Smith-Hefner, 1999). Parents’ concerns could be viewed as tradition-following. However, it could also be their response to perceptions of threat of the host society, as argued by S. Lee (2005). While some participants in this group made a conscious choice to not challenge this tradition, others were either not aware of it or decided to do as what Americans do. Once again, they essentialized the meaning of being American. Their varied performance reflected some participants’ agency in negotiating who they were by adopting the strategy of “accommodation without assimilation” (Gibson, 1988; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001) and other participants’ conformity to perceived dominant cultural values by choosing to be assimilated into the dominant society. Once again, despite their similar heritage language
proficiency, their different strategies in performing Chineseness demonstrated the complicated relation between language and ethnicity.

4.8.5 Pay Respect to Their Ancestors

When asked about what elements in their family represented Chineseness, the students in the first group identified Chinese paintings, Chinese scrolls, souvenirs from China, such as paper fans, and cheongsam (qipao, 旗袍). The majority of the participants in this group (Elizabeth, Peilin, Angel, Ben, Sophia) identified a particular religious ritual as well as the display associated with that ritual to be Chinese, which was the rite to respect their ancestors. An altar was set up in their house, on which their ancestors’ pictures were displayed all year around. During major holidays, such as Chinese Lunar New Year, and the ancestor’s deceased day, parents would display food, incents and burn fake money to honor their ancestors. Chinese Americans in this group remembered joining their parents to pray and ask for protections like good health, and wealth. Though all of the five participants did these ritual multiple times a year, they reported not knowing exactly the meaning of it. They considered it “superstitious.” When they had to explain it to their American peers, they coined terms that their peers would understand by relating to Mexican people’s Day of Dead, which a lot of American people are familiar with. Ben said, “It’s just too complicated, just too out of American culture to explain, …So I’ll just say it’s our Chinese day of the dead.” Tuan’s (1998) participants, who were later generation Chinese/Japanese Americans reported similar attitude toward their family’s such practice. They reported that the rich meanings behind such practices were largely lost, because they family failed to make clear why these were performed.
They ridiculed that they were “the generation that got dragged around” (Tuan, 1998, p. 61) and that “the ritual is largely devoid of sacred meaning” (Tuan, 1998, p. 61) to them.

4.9 Situational Identity

Identity is fluid, contextual based, and perspectival (Fishman, 1998; Liu, 2005). Like participants in the first group, students in this group also positioned themselves differently in front of different audience. As I did not socialize as intensively with this group as I did with the first group of students, what I write in the following was mostly based on their own reflections.

They reported a socialization boundary with their Asian vs. non-Asian friends. John said,

Mostly just the way we talk pretty much. Like when talking, like some, some of the words in Fujiannese won’t be sound as right as I say it in English …Like some stuff are funny in Chinese but not when you translate [them] to English. That kind of thing. Like translation messes up kind of thing…. So it’s like if I find this funny, I cannot tell this group this is funny because it is like a boundary, so usually I just split my American jokes and Chinese jokes like that, like one side the other.

What John perceived as boundary not only pertained to language barriers between his Asian and non-Asian friends, but also to the cultural differences between the two groups and their unique experience growing up as Asian Americans. Ben also acknowledged this, he said, “We just joke a lot, like with my Chinese friends. We just joke a lot on being Asian. A little bit making fun of ourselves a little bit. But then with American friends, I guess we don’t do that, because they don’t understand the joke.” This shared camaraderie was also observed among Tuan’s (1998) participants, who reported “There’s less explaining because we were brought up pretty much the same” (p. 130).
While John and Ben found themselves switching their identities by adjusting their conversation topics and language preferences when socializing with their Asian and non-Asian friends, Ava noticed herself adjusting the manner of her speaking. Ava recognized the “unspoken connection” with her Asian friends, which she perceived as “a kind of familiarity I can only find with them as opposed to with them (non-Asian).” With this unspoken connection, Ava found herself communicating with her Asian friends in a way that was more silly and sarcastic that came from the understanding that “There is an aspect of the family that makes us more like ‘Ah, we can joke around each other, be really silly, [and] make fun of each other.’ ‘It’s almost like you are my sister, even if you are not my sister. And I can speak more sarcastic with you.’” Ava asserted her Chinese identity when she engaged in conversations with her Chinese friends sarcastically without being offended. While Ava also developed deep understandings with her non-Asian friends, she acknowledged that,

It’s just a different kind of deep, a different kind of deep where I think that I sort of bring where I come from and they bring where they come from and we sort of meet at a place that doesn’t begin at the same place. But I guess with my Asian friends, it’s like we meet at a place that begins at the same place.

4.10 Conclusion

Like what Yao (2009) has argued in his essay, Being essentially Chinese, students in this group claimed their Chinese identity through ancestry or/and through things they did. Their ethnic identity negotiation process also illustrated their resistance against the dominant white culture in othering/assimilating them and the perceived Chineseness, in which the ability to speak Chinese was the sole criterion of being Chinese, as argued
against by Ien Ang (2001). Unlike their counterparts in the first group, who had already
developed a relatively solid understanding of their heritage in college, students in this
group expressed desire to get in touch with their own culture in the future. Sophia said,
“One day [when] I am done with this school stuff, then I can actually have a life. I would
like to [learn my culture].” These declarations, although sincere, should be viewed with
doubt, as found in Tuan’s (1998) study. Despite the increased interest in their heritage
culture, the Chinese American identity developed in college was perceived as an imposed
identity by many participants in this group instead of an owned one embraced by
participants in the first group. Students in this group as well as those in the previous
group, localized their Chinese identity to reflect the politics, cultural, historical and ethnic
relations in the nation-states in which they settled, and “[T]hrough the forms of ‘doing’
and ‘acting’, one becomes someone, or more accurately, becomes what one chooses to
be” (Yao, 2009, p. 255)
CHAPTER 5. CHINESE AMERICAN: NOT MY ONLY IDENTITY

5.1 Introduction

Black lesbian poet Audre Lorde (1984) described “…constantly being encouraged to pluck out some aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing and denying the other parts of the self” (p. 120). This highlighted the urgency of deploying an intersectionality lens to study people’s identity. Shields (2008) also acknowledged that “The facts of our lives reveal that there is no single identity category that satisfactorily describes how we respond to our social environment or are responded by others” (p. 304). An individual’s sense of self can be based on many groups with which he or she identifies, and people can be defined simultaneously by their race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, religion and other aspects of their identities (Jones, 2009). Though this research primarily focused on Chinese American college students’ ethnicity development, it was impossible to separate their ethnicity from their other identities, such as the American identity, which intertwined with their ethnicity, as discussed in the previous chapters. Given that my initial interest was in exploring how being Chinese meant to Chinese American college students, I primarily inquired about their ethnic identity. According to Bowleg (2008), criterion of good interview questions for conducting intersectionality was its ability to reflect participants’ intersectional identity, as it indicated that participants’ multiple identities cannot be separated, independent, and ranked (Cuadraz and Uttal, 1999; Weber and Parra-Medina, 2003). In spite of the limitation of the interview questions in reflecting participants’ intersectional
identities directly\(^9\), participants explicitly and implicitly revealed the interrelated, inseparable, dependent and simultaneous nature of identity construction. This further confirmed that our experience, including the experience of being an ethnic Chinese in the United States, could not be understood fully without incorporating our experiences negotiating in and with our other social locations.

By analyzing the intersectionality between participants’ ethnicity (more often, the racial identity\(^10\)) and other identities, this chapter aims not only to confirm the intersectional nature of identity construction but also to investigate “the ways in which privilege and oppression can be co-constituted on the subjective level” (Nash, 2008, p. 11). Chang and Culp (2002) noted, “It is one thing to say that race, gender, sexuality, class and national operate symbiotically, cosynthetically, multidimensionally, or interconnectedly…The next step is to be able to prescribe or imagine points of intervention” (p. 490). In investigating how the social privilege and oppression structure the lived experience of these Chinese American college students, who also embraced other marginalized or privileged identities, this chapter does not want to impose additive discrimination/oppression on those participants. Rather, it aims to reveal the intra-group differences and highlight their unique experiences because of those. The confluence of one’s multiple marginalized and privileged identities is an interaction that creates a unique experience distinctive from those with whom they may share some identities but not others (Choo and Ferree, 2010; Crenshaw, 1991).

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9 Participants were offered freedom during the interview to engage in any aspect of life that mattered significant to them. The researcher also pushed the participants to elaborate more on topics that seemed important to them but not directly related to their being Chinese.

10 As discussed in the previous chapter, participants’ embrace of ethnicity seemed to matter less than their racial identity in the United States, given different ethnicities within Asian Americans were constantly lumped together by the dominant society. This salience of racial identity was even obvious when it intersected with their other identities.
Due to the initial interest of this research, some participants clearly articulated the interconnection of their ethnicity with their other identities, while the intersectionality of the various identities was not explicit in other participants. Bowleg (2008) argues,

> It is the interpretation of the seemingly un-measurable and unanalyzable data that becomes one of the most substantial tools of the intersectionality researcher…. Researchers are charged with the responsibility of making the intersections between ethnicity, sex/gender, sexual orientation (to name just a few) and the social inequality related to these identities, explicit (Bowleg, 2008, p. 322).

Despite the advantage of using intersectionality for identity studies, Luft (2009) warned us of the “flattening difference” of this approach. Luft argued, “There can be unintended consequences to the blanket application of intersectionality. Uniform deployment may inadvertently contribute to flattening the very differences intersectional approaches intend to recognize” (p. 100). By keeping these suggestions in mind, this chapter makes explicit how students’ ethnic identity (or racial identity) intersects with other dimensions of their identity to create a social hierarchy of oppression.

In the following sections, intersecting social locators of personal identities and social identities other than ethnic ones are investigated to allow individual’s unique experience to be understood. Personal identity includes being a daughter/son; social identity includes being a Christian (a western religious construct), a person with disability, a person from a low socioeconomic status and a geographic identity. Each is a critically important push-pull factor in understanding the students’ ethnic/racial identity negotiation. How students’ other identities interlinked with their ethnic/racial identity in searching for who they were is the focus of this chapter. Listening to these other identity discourses reinforces the many complexities of identity negotiation; it reveals how the context can influence and be influenced by one’s presentation of identity. The context,
most often, but not always, is tied to social constructs of privilege and power. This intersectionality approach also allows us to challenge identity politics, especially group solidarity and group essentialism (Hancock, 2007b).

5.2 Intersectionality between Ethnic Identity and Socioeconomic Status/Children of Immigrants

Most of the participants in this research were children of immigrants. They were either second-generation Chinese American or came to the U.S. at a younger age. Being children of immigrants was a salient identity, even though none of them explicitly associated that identity with their ethnic identity. Similarly, none of them explicitly associated their ethnicity with their family’s socioeconomic status. Though not all immigrants are from low socioeconomic class and in fact, a lot of them achieve some degree of social mobility after their immigration to the United States, it is not uncommon for immigrants to work at positions below their educational credential or previous employment (Suárez-Orozco, 2001). For those immigrants who migrated to the U.S. with no or little education, and supported themselves through family business, their family dynamic required intensive labor from their children for the family financial stability and constant help in cultural and social navigation from their children to function in the new world. This family dynamic would inevitably influence how their children understood their ethnic identity. For most of the participants described below, the relationship between their socioeconomic class and their “children of immigrants” identity was intertwined so seamlessly that it was hard to distinguish one from another.

While a lot of research has investigated the influence of family socioeconomic status on students’ educational achievement, social mobility (Matthys, 2012), and
children’s negotiation of identity (Lareau, 2011), this research mainly focuses on how Chinese American college students’ socioeconomic class, being children of immigrants, and their ethnic identity interwove together. S. Lee (1996, 2005) and Suárez-Orozco (2001) also observed that immigrant families, especially those from low SES backgrounds, increasingly demanded their children’s devotion to family responsibilities. While none of the participants mentioned explicitly the relationship between their ethnicity, social class and being children of immigrants, that implicit intersection must be made explicit (Bowleg, 2008).

The commonly understood “filial piety” discussed in the chapter 4 by Chinese American students was a strong indicator of how their ethnic identity, social class and immigrant identity converged together to not only shape their understanding of Chineseness but also differentiate themselves from their counterparts from middle/upper middle class. While none of them complained about their family’s economic situation, they fully understood that their family’s dynamic had different requirements for them. Cognizant of the importance to their family of their labor and of the cultural capital they have acquired through education, Chinese American college students highlighted their son/daughter identity in the research. This filial emphasis manifested the interlinkage among their ethnic identity and social class identity as well as their identity of being children of immigrants. They knew their parents, as immigrants, had no other resource to turn to for support except them.

John and Ben emphasized the importance of being a son with concomitant expectations to fulfill the responsibility that came with it. They associated the importance of family to be one of the most salient characteristics of the Chinese household. The two
young men both lived at home while in college and helped out with their family business. Being his parents’ son was so important to John that, if he had to choose, he would go home to help instead of socializing with his college friends. He saw friends as temporary but family as permanent in his life. He said “I am going to be more concerned to [with] my family than to [with] my friends in the future because our family is always there. So to me like family is going to be more important than friends kinds of thing.” John considered it his duty to take care of his parents when they were older, since “They took care of me, [so] I take care of them.” As a child of an immigrant, he had to utilize his cultural and linguistic capital to support his family, either taking his dad to see a doctor or negotiating with employees at his family restaurant. John’s female American friend further confirmed the importance of being a son to John, a value that separated him from his American peers. She said,

I think for him, rather than being like Chinese or American, or like, you know dividing himself whom he belongs, I think his main identity is being a son. You know, his family is like central, like everything he does, like I, even not being friends with him, just listening to him before we were even friends in that class, you can tell his family means a lot to him. He spent a lot of time doing things for his family and he never resented that he had to, which in American culture, kids complain about their parents all the time. You know “Oh, they make me do this, they make me do that.” But you would never hear John say anything bad about his parents. He might make a joke like “They worked me too hard” but you could tell like he never meant it like in a bad way. So I think, I think, his most important identity to himself is just be like a good son to them.

Being a son also weighted heavily on John’s mind. He was not uncomfortable to present his son identity to his American peers. Ben expressed the same sentiment of being a son. He was acutely aware of his different values of family from his American peers when he had to decide whether to help at the bakery or to have fun with his friends.
He was also aware of the responsibilities he needed to shoulder as a son, such as taking care of his parents when they are old. Ben was also keenly cognizant of his other responsibilities as a child of immigrant. Acutely aware of the cultural, linguistic and social capital which his mother was deprived of as an immigrant in the new world, he took his mother to experience the new world whenever possible, such as taking her visiting the Chinese cultural festival held at his university, hoping to bring her some joy and rest. Their parents’ demand for “filial piety” which they perceived to be associated with their ethnic culture, was, in fact, also a result of the convergence of their ethnicity, social class and being a child of immigrants.

Female participants also articulated the importance of being good daughters and responsible granddaughters, which they also believed was tied to their ethnic culture, not anything else. Researcher have discovered that in immigrant families, girls were imposed more family responsibilities than boys (Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Females’ expressed family devotion was also the result of their parents’ immigrant status. Cindy’s parents were restaurant owners. Among all of her siblings, Cindy was the one who went back the most frequently to help at her parents’ restaurant. Confirming this, her Caucasian American boyfriend recounted, “I think Cindy realizes the importance of helping out her parents, being there for them, whereas her sister kind of removed from home, helping at the restaurant.” Always being there for parents is not easy when one is in college, where academic pressure and peer social needs can be urgent to college students. Her boyfriend witnessed Cindy’s struggles, alienation, frustration and limitations that resulted from the convergence of her social class, being a child of an immigrant and ethnicity. During one of our informal socializations, Cindy voiced her frustrations of not getting proper
academic guidance during her schooling due to her parents’ educational background, which she considered was a defect compared with her other peers. This disadvantage of being immigrant parents, especially those with no or little education, in guiding their children through complex educational maze was also observed by Suárez-Orozco (2001). Nevertheless, Cindy managed to succeed in education and at the same time take care of her family as much as she could. Her boyfriend commented, “It’s not all happy stories, but I think it kind of shows that she does values it, even though she was frustrated, she still goes help her parents. She never wanted to have them think that she didn’t care about them.” Cindy’s care for her parents extended to her hope that her other siblings did the same thing. Her oldest sister commented that Cindy would get angry at her second oldest sister when she chose to socialize with her peers the few times when she did visit home. In her oldest sister’s eyes, Cindy was “super family oriented.” Cindy shared her family story with me about her parents’ hardship surviving in the United States, the family support she experienced growing up, and the close relationship she developed with her parents and grandparents (field notes, 11/1/15). She understood her parents’ struggles and difficulties in raising her and was willing to pay it back by being a filial daughter. She initiated the suggestion that her parents take a day off every week from the restaurant for a break; she immediately concerned her father’s health when she found out her boyfriend’s father’s health condition was not good. (field notes, 4/24/16).

This constant awareness of taking care of one’s parents was also testified by Peilin, whose dedication to her parents was presented in chapter 4. Angel, whose father was a stylist, also internalized the importance of being a good daughter. However, for her, being a good daughter manifested itself in her good academic achievement. Her
dedication to her study revealed how her ethnicity, her social class and her children of immigrant status intertwined together, as Suárez-Orozco (2001) stated for children of immigrants, who had first-hand experience of their immigrant parents’ sacrifice to support them saw “success in school means not only self-advancement and independence, but also, and perhaps even more importantly, making the parental sacrifices worthwhile by ‘becoming a somebody’” (p. 113). Cindy believed becoming a somebody through education would lift her family out of its working-class status. This is true to other participants, as they believed economic aspirations for themselves and for their families were significant motivators in academic success.

The interconnection between their ethnic identity, social class and children of immigrants identity worked so seamlessly that these Chinese American college students attributed their devotion to their family as purely an indication of their ethnicity. They failed to see how their socioeconomic status, as a structural inequality, also shaped their experience as Chinese Americans and their understanding of Chineseness. By delineating the classed ethnic experience and the ethnicized class experience, this intersectional conceptual lens allows their unique experience as working class Chinese American students to be recognized and respected.

5.3 Intersectionality between Ethnic Identity and Gender Identity

Among ten female participants in this research, three specifically expressed the linkage between being a female and being a Chinese American. The experienced expectations at home and in the larger society as a female Chinese American, which distinguished them from their male counterparts. Scholars have long established the notion that gender identity is socially constructed. Whether a gendered behavior is
accepted or not is shaped by the established social and cultural norm. Judith Butler (1990) argued that gender was constructed through a set of acts that are said to be in compliance with dominant societal norms. These social norms, such as defining how women should dress, speak and women’s role in marriage, reflected gender inequality and the power relations in society. In this research, how participants defined their gender identity was constructed both through a set of beliefs held in their ethnic culture and in the larger society. It mirrored the structures of privilege and oppression on gender equality in the family and social spaces where they negotiated their identity.

Sophia, the biracial girl growing up with her grandparents living nearby, was acutely aware of herself as a female Chinese American. She was always reminded by her grandmother to talk and dress in a way that was appropriate in Chinese culture. She remembered her Po always told her that “You can’t be that loud you know; you got to be quiet. You are a girl. Be a girl” or “You can’t make faces like that in public. That’s not very lady like.” These suggestions on how to talk and how to dress were always lingering on Sophia’s mind, which shaped how she viewed herself and other female Chinese Americans. In addition to the manners of dressing and speaking, Sophia was also aware that her parents expected different things from her due to her gender identity. She knew the privileges male Chinese get to enjoy through stories from her mom. While Sophia’s uncle enjoyed freedom in dating, Sophia’s mom’s right was severely restricted. Sophia said “I do know that my mother was not allowed to data AT ALL [when she was young]… They (her grandparents) want to marry her off to whoever they decided.” In addition to gender differences in marriage, Sophia also noticed the differences of males and females in shouldering responsibilities in the Chinese household: women were
expected to be more responsible to take care of the family. Sophia recounted: “They [my grandparents] wanted her [my mom] to be at home and they wanted her to help out with the restaurant and everything. You know, I think that is partly why they [my grandparents] follow[ed] us.” These observations along the different upbringing between Sophia and her younger brother reinforced her understanding of her unique experience as a female Chinese American. She admitted,

I mean they [my parents] put their own responsibilities on me without even saying anything. I know that if my parents go, like go somewhere, I have to step up. I know I have to go make sure Po is ok, and she has everything that she needs, because my brother’s not gonna to go check on her, even though she is across the street. I understand who[what] my role is, even though it wasn’t told to me.

Even though Sophia did not have dating restrictions growing up, the gender expectations, nevertheless, influenced her own experience as a female Chinese American. The interconnection between gender and ethnic identity further demonstrated itself in the story of Peilin, who was acutely aware of the gender preference at her house. During one of our informal socializations, she expressed her strong appreciation of the “one child” policy established in China, which enabled parents to value girls as much as boys. My field notes captured her intention to mention this policy.

我很诧异她为什么提起这个, 经我再三问才明白, 她是说在中国因为有独生子女政策, 所以女孩也很受重视, 可是因为她们在美国, 不受这个政策的影响, 她作为女孩就没受到重视。她说她的爷爷奶奶很看重他的弟弟, 但是却不重视她和她妹妹 (field notes, 5/2/2017).

(I was surprised why she mentioned this [the one child policy]. After several inquiries, I finally understood the reason. She said because of the one child policy in China, girls got to be valued as much as boys. But because they are in the U.S., her parents can have as many children as they wanted, so she, as a girl, (did not enjoy the privilege as those girls in China could enjoy), was not appreciated at
home. She said her grandparents preferred her brother to her and her younger sister.)

Peilin firmly believed that due to this “traditional” son preference held by her parents and her grandparents, her brother was exempted from housework. She said, “Me and my sister would do a lot of the chores around the house and my brother would just be off, maybe just take out the trash a few times, and that’s it.” This leniency toward males in housework was also recounted by Ava’s mother. In reflecting her parenting differences between her son and her daughter, she said, “所以那个时候她在家教育的时候，她就很不高兴，她说 ‘我要带妹妹，我要洗碗，我要做事，然后哥哥在哪里呢？’ 哈哈。对，他在外面去野，跟朋友去玩什么的，她就不高兴” (When they were homeschooled, Ava was not happy because of this. She said, “I have to take care of my sister. I have to wash the dishes. I have to do this and that. Where is my brother?” Haha. [She was right] Her brother was playing wildly outside. He was having fun with his friends. She considered it unfair and was not happy at all). Research has demonstrated similar gender roles in other immigrant families, where girls were expected to shoulder more family responsibilities than their brothers (Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

The different gender treatment also demonstrated itself in the female purity protection. This parental regulation on their daughters’ sexual behavior was an indication of their fear for their daughters’ “Americanization,” which was a synonym for sexual promiscuity (Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). This similar pattern of regulation on girls other than boys was also observed by Espín (1999). Peilin said her parents
managed to “keep my purity until marriage. … But it’s mainly me, …My brother, he just
does whatever he wanted.” Though Ava did not express this concern explicitly, her
mother reflected,

比如说她说有男生喜欢她，我就比较紧张，我反应就不太一样，那我觉得这
个是错误的，因为后来她就以为说，我觉得她不够好，或者说她不可以喜欢
别人，或者，她就说，后来她觉得“我喜欢人家是一种罪疚，罪恶感”以至于
影响她后来再跟男孩子来往，

(For example, when Ava told me some boy liked her, I was very guarded. My
reaction to this was different from that if my son told me some girl liked him.
Thinking back, I think it was wrong. This decreased Ava’s self-appreciation. She
thought I did not think she was good enough to be liked or she could like other
people. She later even had the thought that “It is guilty if I like somebody.” This
influenced her later interaction with boys.)

This relationship between Chinese Americans’ ethnic culture and their gender
identity also shaped how their career was viewed by other people. Ava’s mother admitted
that, “…我女儿学戏剧，我就让她学，可是如果我儿子学戏剧，我可能不让，你这
样将来怎么养老婆啊” (…My daughter wanted to major in theater, I would let her. But
if my son wanted to major in theater, I would probably say no. [I would say] how could
you feed your wife [if you major in theater]?) This message revealed the implicit societal
perception that women’s careers are not as important as that of men’s and that women are
subordinate to men. The unequal social power along gender lines in the society
intersecting with their ethnic identity shaped a unique experience for female Chinese
Americans.

In addition to the social privilege and oppression in defining female Chinese
Americans’ experience, the hegemonic white standard in defining feminism and
masculinity also shaped female Chinese Americans’ understating of who they were. S. Lee (2005) argued that the hegemonic masculinity and ideal femininity are centered around whiteness, as Gillespie (1998) noted that the women who were represented as beautiful in popular and consumer cultures conform to a White body aesthetic (e.g. blonde, blue-eyed, thin, long hair, voluptuous). Living in a society where whiteness is normative, many of the female participants internalized the standard of beauty defined by whiteness. Angel’s hair was always dyed blonde and styled curly instead of keeping her black and straight hair. She also wore colored (blue) contact lenses to cover her black pupil. In other words, Angel was deliberately pursuing beauty guided by the white standard. Linda confessed that wearing black hair made her “dull,” so she also dyed her hair light brown. While Angel and Linda conformed to the white standard of beauty, Ava experienced severe agony of not being beautiful.

I think even the absence of me made me feel less beautiful, because there is always like romantic movies, like the staring girl is this beautiful blond girl or this beautiful brown haired girl. And you never looked like them. …So I don’t think that you felt that you could be them. … That’s obviously the beauty standard, because it was always the same kind of looking girl in every kind of movie. … That was the beauty standard you didn’t fit into, and it made me feel like I didn’t fit into the beauty standard. Um, so I actually haven’t felt beautiful for most of my life…Even if you are considered attractive to someone, it’s almost like you are their… like they are into exotic types of people, if that makes sense…I used to feel like the potato in my friends group.

Ava’s reflection demonstrated how the hegemonic white standard of beauty affected how female Chinese Americans viewed themselves and their relationship with other people. Their gender identity intersecting with their ethnicity in the context of the prevailing unequal social powers and hegemonic whiteness created unique experiences of being female Chinese Americans in the United States. The skepticism of being appreciated
caused by the exoticism imposed on Chinese females further demonstrates the detrimental effect of stereotype threat on people (Steele, 2010)

Due to the limited number of male participants in this research, and the fact that the research questions did not explicitly explore gender, few male participants articulated their experience as a male Chinese American. None of them articulated their observed differences between their counterparts in their family dynamic or in their community, nor did they articulate how American masculinity shaped their experience as male Chinese Americans. Researchers have manifested that Asian American men failed to exhibit the forms of masculinity valued by the dominant American society because they were seen as quiet, passive, nerdy, and small (R. Lee, 1999; Lei, 2003). S. Lee’s (2005) study also demonstrated that Hmong high school males were perceived by their peers and teachers as lacking the expressions of hegemonic masculinity. They were assumed wimps and gangsters. Hmong Americans in S. Lee’s (2005) study have learned to develop their own understanding of femininity and masculinity. Despite that this research did not explicitly examine gender identity, it is possible that the patriarchal society that privileges males over females make their male identity or male privilege unrecognized (McIntosh, 1992). Just as what McIntosh (1992) argued about the invisible whiteness, male privilege is often invisible too. In fact, among the female participants, who (Alice, Elizabeth, Peilin) have brothers, their brothers all reported not having any privilege as men. Peilin’s brother admitted that the only difference he enjoyed was that he got a new car upon entering college while his sisters got second-hand cars. Instead of admitting it as a privilege due to his gender, he justified it with his success in academics. Due to the limitation of my research, future study needs to investigate further how gender identity and the hegemonic
femininity and masculinity of the U.S. as well as their ethnicity affect Chinese American college students.

5.4 Intersectionality between Ethnic Identity and Disability

Jones and Abes’ (2013) argued that “Systems of privilege and oppression influenced [individual’s] experience and created a different set of identity dynamics depending on whether or not the ‘difference’ was visible (for example, race or ethnicity) or invisible (for example, social class or sexual orientation)” (p. 85). Different from other participants, Emma had physical disabilities and she was on wheelchair. Her disability identity was more salient than her ethnicity. When I asked her unpleasant experience growing up in the United States, Emma shared a lot of her experiences of oppression as a person of disability. When she was younger, her peers refused to play with her, because “you are not like me, because you cannot walk like me.” When she was older, people questioned her academic abilities due to her disability. When she demonstrated her knowledge explaining a complex phenomenon by using a more academic word “altitude”, students with disability at her high school jeered at her for “using a white word,” because they internalized that students with disability were academically underperformed and that only white people were able to articulate such complex thoughts. Emma knew that her disability was the major reason that her family stayed in the United States instead of returning to China; Emma’s mother believed Emma would very likely experience more overt discrimination in China, and the social facilities for people of disabilities were not properly established there. Emma was fully aware of her parents’ greater devotion to her than her other peers’ parents did. Her parents visited her much more frequently and devoted more of their time and energy to assisting her. Emma knew that her mother
worried about her future as a person of disability more than that of a person of Chinese
descent. Emma’s mother even expressed request for Emma to compromise her Chinese
learning due to her disability. When Emma was going to take the Chinese language class
in her freshman year, her mother expressed objections, despite she had put so much effort
to preserve Emma’s heritage language. She worried that “因为我想她会很花时间，她
可能写不成那么多…我怕她压力太大…而且我是认为她要是把中文学的可以看历史
书的话，那就很难很难” (I think she will have to spend more time on writing Chinese
and she cannot write that much [Emma’s hands have limited dexterity]. I don’t want her
to have too much pressure…and I think it will be very hard if she wants to be able to read
China’s history in Chinese). The connection between Emma’s disability and her ethnicity
not only shaped her daily and academic life, but also influenced how she viewed the
society. Emma’s sister commented,

I think that because of her disability, both Emma and I are sensitive and
passionate about civil rights, um, social justice issues. Like for example, disability
rights, equal access, and I don’t think, …I don’t think it has anything to do with
our being Chinese.

Though Emma’s sister highlighted the important role of Emma’s disability in
their dedication to social justice by denying the role of their ethnicity played in it, I would
argue that the double oppression status of being a person of disability and a minority both
contributed to their concerns for social injustice.

Emma shared one of her experiences in high school that had a long-lasting effect
on how she perceived herself. Encouraged by her parents to be independent, Emma took
the courage to request an alternative assignment in one of her AP classes. The original project involved complex hand coordination, which Emma was not able to finish due to her physical condition unless with her parents’ help. But her teacher refused her request right away assuming Emma was playing the “disability card.” This was hurtful to Emma. This societal conception of people of disabilities greatly impacted Emma on how she perceived herself and how she related to other people. Emma was afraid to ask for support later due to this incident. She wrote, “Although I cannot hide the physical aspects of my disability, I am constantly trying to ignore my less obvious limitations and minimize my need for accommodations." Her disability and her racial identity intertwined in an intriguing way in terms of seeking support. Being an Asian prevented her from accessing support, as supported by many scholars who found that Asian Americans are assumed to not need resources and other support (Suzuki, 2002; Mesues and Kiang 2009). As a person of disability, Emma had learned through her own experience to “minimize the need for accommodation.”

How her academic experience was also shaped by the intersection between her race and her disability was clearly illustrated by Emma. She saw the Chinese identity and the disabled identity as linked, not separated. She expressed her dissatisfaction with me presenting her identities separately in an academic forum. She came to me after the forum to articulate herself.

我当时给你讲这个事情的时候，我也是跟我残疾情况连在一起了，因为，因为我学习方面比较慢，所以我父母就特别在意，然后我小时候我自己并不在意，只是父母逼我，但是后来长大了，也觉得，就是我知道我自己学习方面

11 This was shared by Emma through a personal essay.
Instead of accepting my statement that her ethnicity was credited for her academic performance, Emma argued that it was the result of the intersection of both her identities. While academic achievement was one of her many ways to perform her Chinese identity – as evidenced by her friend saying that “I think that she, ur, yeah, this is an Asian thing, that makes her different from my friends [is] she just studies a lot more than my friends
do” (friend interview) – it was also a strategy that Emma used to fight against the social stereotype of disabled people. Her agency in fighting for disabled people through academic achievement cannot be explained without combining her identities together. The intersection of these two identities allows us deeper insights into how Emma perceived herself as a whole. As Warner (2008) said, “Intersectionality theory leads us to question the very usefulness of considering social identities separately from each other” (p. 454-455). By adopting the intersectionality approach, many of the intricacies in Emma’s life was able to be presented to allow her unique identity as a female Chinese American with disability to be understood. Jones and Abes (2013) wrote, “An intersectional portrayal of multiple intersecting social identities may show certain social identities on top of one another (for example, race and gender), combining into some new identity form” (p. 159).

5.5 Intersectionality between Ethnic Identity and Religious Identity

Three participants in this research talked about their religious identity in the interview in addition to their ethnic identity. Christianity, instead of an oppressed identity, was perceived as a form of privilege, at least in the United States. Nevertheless, when it intersected with Chinese American college students’ ethnicity, it complicated their perception of who they were. Though the interconnection between their ethnicity and their religious identity provided them with a unique experience from their counterparts, how their religious identity intersected with their ethnic identity varied greatly from one to another. The three participants demonstrated that this socially privileged identity either validated their Chinese identity (Ava), paralleled with their Chinese identity (Amy), or pushed away their Chinese identity (Alice).
Ava, a theater major, was very firm about her Christianity. She said, “I am a child of God first, and afterwards, I am also an Asian Christian.” She expressed this at the first interview when I asked her to elaborate more on her Asian identity. She had a very strong attachment to her Asian identity, but in situating being Asian, she shifted to the significance of being a Christian. She said,

I also think my sense of identity shifted in that way like I used to think that my race was like,… like it still is,… like my race is a huge part of my identity and I still write plays about Asian American experience. I still want to represent it. I still want to be an Asian face in film and theater…That’s still important to me. But I think it almost became a secondary identity as opposed to belonging to God first. …Like where it does matter and it is part of who I am, but it isn’t the only thing about me. It sort of like fits everything that who I am as well. Like I am a child of God first, and afterwards, I am also an Asian Christian.

Ava’s ranking of her identity as a Christian first and Asian American second, on the one hand, illustrated her unawareness of the inseparable nature of her identities; on the other hand, highlighted the importance of an intersectionality approach in studying identity formation. Ava acknowledged the pivotal role of being an Asian in the United States; however, the acceptance of her religious identity mitigated the many unpleasant experiences of being an Asian American. Ava vividly remembered people mocking her appearance and questioning the food she brought to school. She was very alert to people’s comments on her being Asian. She shared one of her experiences in college when she happened to sit with two other Asian girls during an audition for a show. One of the assistant directors, who came out to call people back in, said shockingly “Oh, that’s funny, you guys are sitting in a row.” Ava remembered herself feeling “awkward, and uncomfortable.” She was immediately cognizant of the racism that African Americans experienced in the dominant society (Tatum, 2017). She considered it an “intrinsic racism”
which was the result of the cumulative microaggressions experienced by Asian Americans.

When you are a minority group in the United States, you are told to feel ashamed of your race a lot, just by indirect comments, like your whole life, like “Why don’t you have eyelids? Or like why is your food so wired?” You know, people [are] just questioning everything about you, so you constantly feel, like ashamed for being different.

Growing up in that racist environment, in which her own culture was not valued by the dominant society, perpetuated a sense of unworthiness and shame in Ava. Furthermore, the perceived mechanism of “honor and shame” in her ethnic culture further disabled her to appreciate her own value.

So I realized a huge way… that I operated as a person was from my honor and shame perspective, because that’s the kind of culture that I grow up in, so I was constantly like apologizing for who I was, or I was constantly apologizing for my actions and I was constantly feeling, like I had to hide who I was, … There was a lot of that coming into play and ur, as opposed to a culture where you are very assertive of your identity, compared to a culture where you are very like apologizing for a lot of things. … I constantly have self-worth issues that I constantly ur, … and I constantly just felt not good enough, and I constantly, even like in my faith, like I even couldn’t come before the Lord, because I was so not worthy all the time, er… Even though by definition of the Christian Gospel, like He has made you worthy, like He has taken you from a place of shame to a place or honor …

Ava implicitly articulated her struggles in negotiating under the “honor and shame” concept in her own culture. She perceived it as a practice of achieving one person’s honor (usually the elder) through shaming the other person (usually the younger). Ava saw this further diminished her own perception of her worthiness, as Ava constantly felt herself “not good enough” and therefore not deserve to be loved. This double oppressions from
the dominant society and from her own culture pushed Ava to search for a new identity that allowed her ethnicity to be valued and herself as an individual to be loved.

I think I always view God as a very distant figure who is just some sort of authority and some sort of law, but really realizing that one of the biggest purposes of God coming to people is relationship, like he didn’t just come to enforce rules. He came because we were meant to be in a relationship with God. It’s not a distant relationship; it’s a love relationship, which we are connected with God. …. [So] I am not any kind of accident. Like the way that I was made, [for example,] my height, my weight, my race, like the way that I look, the way that I am a person like super emotional, sometimes over dramatic, and like just the way that I am outside and inside, was made with purpose. Like, it wasn’t just some accident that exploded; it was like I am putting together as a person and this is who I want this person to be.

The integration of her Christianity and her racial identity allowed Ava to perceive her cultural and racial differences as pre-designed by God. Finding acceptance through her religion, Ava felt intense comfort with God, and she came to accept herself for being an Asian. Her search for her new identity as an Asian American Christian allowed her to find comfort in being both a Christian and an Asian American.

Amy, the biracial girl, did not talk about her religious identity extensively in the interviews. She mentioned occasionally that she was a Christian but never elaborated on that. Her friend attributed her being reserved in relationships to her religion. Unlike Ava, whose Christianity had enormous effect on how she perceived herself ethnically, Amy saw her Christianity parallel with her Chinese identity. The ability to speak Chinese language and her belief in Christianity enabled her to reach out to more people in China. She said “就是一个可以帮助另外一个，我可以跟那边的人沟通，我可以在那边找到基督徒，可以找到更多的话题” [one (Chinese) identity could help the other
(Christianity). I could communicate with people there (in China); I could find Christians there and talk to them in Chinese. Therefore, I could relate to more people by having more common topics to talk about. The language advantage could not only help her relate to more people, but also allow her to spread her religious belief to other people and better help them. She said “所以我我就希望我身为一般的中国人的那种身份也可以去跟更多人交流，可以沟通，达到更深的这种关系，就是要是他们需要的话，我就可以解释。要是你不能靠近那些人，你真的不能表达那种心意” (I hope I, as a Chinese, could communicate with more people [about Christianity] and reach a deeper relationship. If they need me, I could explain it to them. If I could not speak their language, I could not be able to help).

Unlike Ava, who situated herself in the U.S. in negotiating her ethnicity and Christianity, Amy imagined the linkage between her ethnicity and religious identity would enhance her socialization with people in China. She saw both her identities as privileges in negotiating her unique experience.

Biracial and from a missionary family, Alice’s ethnic identity was shadowed by her Christianity. In fact, in her friend’s eyes, Alice was a missionary rather than a Chinese. Though her friend knew that Alice had Chinese heritage, she didn’t recognize its importance in Alice’s life. She said, “I think her amount of Chinese culture is just … a conversation starter, just a way to be different from all people, you know, to feel different. Alice, I see, is a missionary, I think [that] is her major identity.”
While Alice expressed her love for China and her hope to return to China, she chose not to reveal her Chinese heritage unless she was asked. China was not in Alice’s career plan. She did not plan to visit there because she considered it too expensive to go. Her plan was to work in the Middle East with refugees (field notes, class observation 2/6/2018). Alice openly associated herself with God. She chose to make friends only with Christians. She justified what she did as following God’s calling. Similar to Ava, the interconnection between her religious identity and her ethnicity allowed Alice to confront racism she experienced in middle and high school. She said “This is how God made me, and I am very thankful for it, because I am a better person, because I live somewhere else, and I am biracial.” Alice’s mother was a second generation Chinese American. Both she and her husband reinforced the importance of being a Christian for Alice. They articulated stronger expectations for Alice to follow God than to be Chinese. Alice’s mother said,

My biggest dream is that they (my children) would follow God and then I don’t have to worry about them, you know, because if we die the best thing about Christian is you know where you are going to. There is absolution that you know you will be together. That’s the big thing I care about. My biggest dream, I mean for them, is that they would find spouses that would also follow the Lord and be great partners for them.

Following God was the core value in Alice’s family. It was what Alice grew up with. Alice’s maternal grandparents were also pious Christians before they moved to the United Stated from Mainland China. Alice’s parents did missionary work in China and in the United States. Being a Christian was so salient to Alice that she considered herself a “‘foreigner’ on Earth, and her hope to be at home in Heaven” (Alice’s friend interview).
Alice also manifested this notion in her essay “The Utopia in My Mind” in the language class, in which she considered Heaven as her Utopia.

The intersectionality between Chinese Americans’ ethnicity and religious identity enabled their unique experience as Chinese Americans to be seen and respected. However, the variations within this group was also obvious. Unlike Ava, whose Christian identity validated her Chinese identity, Alice’s Christian identity shadowed her Chinese identity, and Amy saw her Christianity and ethnicity paralleled. Alice’s physical features: blond hair, high nose, brown eyes, enabled her to pass as a Caucasian; her physical “markers” as an ethnic Chinese were invisible in the US society. Her friend commented that “Her appearance is ambiguous; like you know she is from somewhere or has some kind of race in her, but you don’t necessarily know [she is] Chinese.” Similarly, Amy’s biracial appearance also enabled her to pass as a Caucasian, as her Chinese friend commented, “然后我一开始看到她以为她是美国人” (Initially, I thought she was a Caucasian American). According to Jones and Abes’ (2013) argument of visibility versus invisibility in identity presentation, the differences presented by Alice’s and Amy’s Chinese ethnic identity were invisible in the United States. They were both able to present themselves without being questioned. While an intersectionality lens allowed their unique experience to be visible, the individual variations also need to be respected.

5.6 Intersectionality between Ethnic Identity and Regional Identity

Of the thirteen participants, one participant alluded to the importance of regional identity. She was from Appalachian area in the United States, a region historically stereotyped as poverty-ridden and uneducated. Elizabeth identified herself as an
Appalachian. Possessing two identities, as a person of Chinese descent, a group never freed of stereotypes, and one from Appalachia, generated double oppressions for Elizabeth. However, this did not suggest the additive discrimination Elizabeth experienced. Rather, the intersectionality of her two identities provided her with a different perspective in viewing herself, understanding her community, and relating to other people.

In her Honor’s thesis presentation at her university, Elizabeth emphasized her identity as an Appalachian to highlight the difficulties she had encountered to achieve academic success (field notes, 4/11/2018). While Elizabeth did not include her ethnicity in justifying her academic success during that presentation, I would argue that the conjunction of her two identities were not to be ignored. Much like Emma, her success in academia was not only her strategy to fight the stereotypes against people from Appalachia and also a demonstration of her ethnicity.

In college, Elizabeth actively led an institutional outreach program to engage students at her university with students from Appalachia aiming to reduce stereotypes and promote Appalachian growth. Under that context, Elizabeth strongly saw the salience of identifying as an Appalachian American in that program. She said “I feel so, like, close to my hometown, and my beliefs are like I am Appalachian too, and so sometimes I feel like we put on a face that is, you know, with me being Chinese American in Appalachian, I think that sometimes depending on the circumstances you are more representative of one people.” While Elizabeth’s statement underscored the nature of identity as being context based, what Elizabeth learned from that program illustrated how the relationship of her two identities could inform her of distinct perspective that she would otherwise not be
aware of. She said, “I think that being Chinese of itself makes me realize that people [have stereotypes]… [it] makes me have a better understanding of stereotypes and like bias, and I think that helps me like overcome, or like develop that idea to that project.”

Being an ethnic Chinese in the United States contributed to Elizabeth’s understanding of her regional identity and how she related to other people because of that. The stereotype she experienced in the United States as an ethnic Chinese contributed to her insights on how people outside of Appalachia perceived people from Appalachia.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter adds yet another layer of the complexity of Chinese American college students’ ethnic identity negotiation by taking the intersectionality of it with other social identities into consideration. This approach, on the one hand, complicates the identity negotiation process and asked for recognition of individual agency; on the other hand, the incorporation of intersectionality speaks to anti-essentialism in perceiving minority population, as argued by Hancock (2007b). This chapter allows Chinese Americans’ multiple identities to be seen as integrative, inseparable, and dependent instead of additive and separated, as Bowleg (2008) said, “There is no single reality about the experience of one's intersecting identities, only multiple constructed realities about one's own experience of intersectionality” (p. 317). Though this chapter presents the intersectionality of gender, social class, children of immigrants, disability, religious and regional identity, each as unique positions of identity, for some Chinese Americans, multiple identities intersect at the same time, such as being Chinese, being a female, being a child of immigrants, and from low socioeconomic class. We need to recognize
each individual’s unique experience as living in social systems of privilege and oppression contribute to the construction of their identities.
CHAPTER 6. CHINA’S ROLE IN ETHNICITY CONSTRUCTION

6.1 Introduction

People of Chinese descent in the United States have long been depicted as “inassimilable” and “alien” and thus never “real Americans.” Asian Americans are historically stereotyped as the pollutant, the coolie, the deviant, the yellow peril, the model minority, and the gook (R. G. Lee, 1999). Despite the fact that they have been settled in the US for many generations, they are constantly questioned “where are you from?” Their answer would never satisfy the inquirer unless it relates to some distant countries in Asia. They were construed as Asians, not Americans, and came to embody whatever threat the land of their ancestry allegedly posed to the United States (E. Lee, 2015, p. 381). The Japanese internment camps during the World War II and the anti-Muslim movement after 9/11 have strongly demonstrated the long-ingrained sentiment of Asian Americans as aliens prevalent in the US. When the interests of the U.S. are suspected to have been violated, Asians have become targets.

With China’s rise in the world economy, this suspicion became even stronger, as demonstrated by the Wen Ho Lee incident in 1999. The ethnic profiling faced by Chinese American scientists continued into the twenty-first century, as evidenced by the dismissal of two Chinese American faculty members at Emory University (Nature). When Bloomberg Businessweek reported the purging of the Chinese cancer researcher in Houston, it noted “In any case, recent events in Houston and elsewhere indicate that Chinese people in America, including U.S. citizens, are now targeted for FBI surveillance.”
Against this backdrop, this chapter investigates how China, as a country, played in Chinese American college students’ ethnic identity construction. How did they view China and how did their contact with China influence their understanding of themselves as people of Chinese descent? I analyzed how the mass media in their resident country, America, portrayed their country of origin and how it impacted Chinese American college students’ perception of their Chinese identity. I also inspected their own understanding of China, and how it reflected their comprehension of being Chinese in the US.

I argue that the increasing opportunity for physical interaction with people in China, on the one hand connected them more closely with their country of origin and fostered their pride in being Chinese; on the other hand, it exposed them to a perceived Chineseness in China, which was used as a standard to evaluate the authenticity of their Chinese identity. Louie (2004) said “Ideas about degrees of authenticity as Chinese, which are seen as derived from links to territory and knowledge of traditional Chinese culture, have become a basis through which diaspora Chinese define themselves in relation to one another” (p. 21). Their ethnic identity negotiation was caught in struggles against this hegemonic Chineseness. In addition, China served as both a push and a pull force in their ethnic identity development. It bore significantly different meanings to individuals. For some, China exerted a greater influence on who they are; for others, China was no different from other countries, except that it is where their parents/grandparents are from. While many factors contributed to their different attachment to China, how Chinese American college students comprehend the relationship of Hong Kong, Taiwan and China is not to be ignored. In this research,
participants were not asked about what constituted China, but they unanimously equated China with Mainland China. For students whose heritage was from Hong Kong or Taiwan, they would distinguish their place of origin from the term “China.” But at other times, the boundaries became blurry, making it hard to determine what they meant by “China” or “Chinese people.”

I argue that despite their increasing contact with China and their greater interest in incorporating China into their academic development and future career, China was their heritage, not their country. Their struggles in (re)negotiating their Chineseness under the unspoken and uniform Chineseness when they visited China further validated their belief that “China is neither the symbol of personal identification nor the source of the private ecstasy of belonging. That is China; Chinese culture is another thing” (Yao, 2009, p. 258), though some variation was also observed.

6.2 The Presence of China

China’s rise as the world factory since the 1980s has allowed an increasing presence of China in the global public’s life (Yang & He, 2017), as more and more daily necessities are made in China. In addition, more and more major newspapers in the US cover China related news. The study on the images of China in four major American daily newspapers: the Washington Post, the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, and the Wall Street Journal further indicated the increasing presence of China in the US (Liss, 2003). In fact, China is one of the most reported countries in the U.S. media due to its economic rise and the many perceived, potential threats to America that comes with its rise (Silver, 2016).
In the higher education setting, Asian and Asian American Studies programs have proliferated since the 1965 Immigration Act. This Act transformed the demographic of the Asian population in the United States and brought an increasing number of Asian Americans to college (E. Lee, 2009). In 2019, the directory of Asian American studies programs maintained by the Association for Asian American Studies listed thirty-two stand-alone programs, twenty programs within other departments, and eighteen campuses that regularly offer Asian American studies courses. These included public and private institutions, research universities, state universities, and small liberal arts colleges (AAAS, 2019). The research site of this study, though it had no Asian American studies, offered two Asian languages majors: Chinese and Japanese, with a Korean language minor about to begin. The Chinese program at the research site was introduced in 2006 with an average enrollment of 40 students at the beginning level Chinese language class. The Confucius Institute at the university regularly held activities relating to Chinese language and culture and actively engaged in exchange programs in academia between China and the United States. All thirteen participants valued the opportunity to take Chinese class in higher education. Some of them reported participating in activities held by the Confucius Institute whenever they could.

In addition to being exposed to China through university-based language learning and cultural activities, increasing flow of transnational movement, easy access to information on websites, and the increasing economic competition between China and the U.S. have made the presence of China more and more salient in college students’ everyday lives. Most of the participants have utilized the convenient transnational movement to visit their family’s country of origin and had first-hand experience in China.
This direct contact with their country of origin provided them with opportunities to validate and/or combat the messages presented in the U.S. mass media and thus consolidate their own understanding of China.

6.3 The Portrayal of China in American Public Media

While the first generation immigrants had first-hand experience about China, many American-born Chinese Americans learned about China mostly through second-hand family stories, media and popular cultural images. Ideas about China coming across in a highly meditated fashion are of central importance to the ways that Chinese Americans perceive their Chineseness (Louie, 2004).

In the interview, participants were asked to describe the general portrayal of China in the American mass media. In this question, I did not specify what “China” referred to. This allowed the participants agency to elaborate their own understanding of “China”. Their answers revealed two patterns indicative of China’s importance in their everyday lives. One group of the students reported that they were not actively engaged in the media discussion about China. Elizabeth said,

I don't’ know if I read that much about it. I think like my parents send me stuff but not really, all I hear about Trump and China, their relationship which I don’t really know what their relationship is, I, not really. I don’t know if I know that much. I haven’t really in touch with it.

Despite the above-mentioned significant presence of China in their academic and daily life, Elizabeth did not actively engage in it. Similar to Elizabeth, Peilin also did not look for or pay special attention to news that was related to China. She said,

I think it has to be more like my dad explaining how China views America, coz in high school or college, every time I come home, I would see like my dad
explaining the situation we had in America, or this thing happened in China, because he is always reading the news, I am not really reading the news.

Parents were their main source of contact with China for Peilin and Elizabeth. Other students actively updated themselves with news about China. When I interviewed Amy in the spring of 2017, she was very aware of the tension between China and South Korea after South Korea announced its intentions to deploy THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) by the United States in its territory. Here, Amy understood “China” as the political entity of the People’s Republic of China. Emma constantly shared with me about China related news, such as the #MeToo movement in China, the restriction of the film, Seven Years, the ban on Xiaobo Liu’s story by the Communist Party of China and the opening of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China during our various formal and informal conversations. A lot of the time, she updated me with news of China that I would otherwise not be aware of, since our source of news was dramatically different. While I updated myself on China mainly through Chinese mass media, Emma relied more on American mass media and some media specially targeted for Chinese overseas for Chinese news. Similar to Amy, China in Emma’s understanding referred to geographical and political entity of the People’s Republic of China.

Despite participants’ different agency in associating themselves with China, their general understanding of the American media’s portrayal of China remained similar. All participants agreed that China was in general viewed negatively by the American public.

12 Liu Xiaobo was a Chinese writer, literary critic, human rights activist, philosopher and Nobel Peace Prize laureate who called for political reforms and was involved in campaigns to end communist one-party rule in China.
“Communism” and “economic competition” were the most frequent terms participants considered American media used to describe China. It is important to point out that here, all Chinese American college students understood, China as the People’s of Republic of China, which does not include Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macau. This aligned with how the American public viewed China specifically as the PRC. As indicated by the Gallup (2019), more than two thirds of Americans considered China as an economic and military threat. Liss’s (2003) study also suggests that in major American daily newspapers negative images of China overwhelm the positive. These four media focused on six areas of negativity toward China: a focus on the coming conflict between the United States and China, a focus on the coming conflict between the PRC and Taiwan, a focus on China’s human rights abuses and/or repressive political system, a focus on China’s internal instability and unrest, breakdown within the social order, and backwardness and corruption within the political system (Liss, 2003, p.300).

In addition, Chinese people in American’s eyes were not positive as well. Peilin said American people considered Chinese people “Only thinking about profit.” Cindy was aware that Chinese people were perceived as “robotic,” because “他们觉得你们不是真的 human, 你们只是机器” [They think you (Chinese) are not human, you (Chinese) are just machines]. “Chinese people” in this situation was understood by Cindy and Peilin as represented by people from PRC. This sentiment aligned with general public’s view about China was profit-drive, and lack of human right (Adarian, 2019).

This negative attitude toward China from the U.S. mass media was even more keenly felt by those who actively engaged in China. Jack, due to his father’s influence,
was well informed of China’s development and rise in the world, especially in military areas. He was acutely apprehensive that America viewed China as economically “corrupted” and its military development “threatened” the U.S. based on his readings in the American mass media. Emma, whose research was about the Cultural Revolution, was very cognizant of the American media’s description of China’s “censorship” and its attack on the lack of “human rights” in China. Amy noticed the “cautious” attitude American media adopted toward China, which was considered as an enemy or a rival. She said “那个媒体可能会觉得，“哦，他们是很狡猾，要小心他们”你会觉得他们只想得到什么 power 之类的，呵呵。想跟美国斗” (American media may think “China/Chinese government is very dishonest. We need to beware of them.” They think China wanted to get certain power privilege and compete against US). In this context, again, their understanding of China pertains to the PRC.

Their heritage culture and their country of origin, for most of them, were not positively valued and respected by the country where they were born and raised. How did this negativity of China impact their own thinking of their heritage and their being Chinese American in the US? Did they buy into these descriptions? This will be discussed in the following sections.

6.4 Complex Relations with China

Chinese Americans fifty years ago had few resources or rights to physically visit their country of origin. Due to the increasing transnational movement cross the globe, changed political relations between countries, and greater financial resources, Chinese Americans, especially Chinese American college students, enjoy the privilege to freely cross national borders to explore their identities and new opportunities. China’s growing
prosperity in the world economy since the end of the twentieth century along with the establishment of multiple language and cultural exchange programs propelled people of Chinese descent to visit China. Eleven of the thirteen participants physically visited Mainland China, Taiwan or Hong Kong at least once if not multiple times. Four of them participated in a study abroad program hosted either by their university or by the US government (Emma, Amy, Peilin and Angel). Seven visited China with their family as children (John, Elizabeth, Alice) and as young adults (Cindy, Jack, Ava and Linda); two never visited China (Sophia and Ben). Visiting Mainland China, Hong Kong or Taiwan provided them with an “authentic” or “objective” perception of China, by which they meant PRC, compared to mass media’s portrayal. Their experience in Mainland China, on the one hand, challenged the validity of portrayal of China (PRC) by American mass media; on the other hand, it pushed them to (re)negotiate their Chineseness against the hegemonic Chineseness in China and thus empowered them to assert their own identity.

6.4.1 Sense of Home—Pull

Many participants reported a sense of home when they visited their place of origin. Long being perceived as foreigners in the United States, either due to their “inassimilable” appearance or cultural practice, when they were surrounded by the people who looked like them, they felt a sudden sense of belonging. The felt comfort brought by shared physical resemblance and cultural familiarity pulled Chinese American students to their country of origin. It is important to remember that when asking about their experience visiting China, I specifically modified the term “China” to either “Hong Kong” or “Taiwan” accordingly. This reflected my caution to avoid tension with the participants, who may have different understandings of what “China” constitutes than
they might have assumed I did. While this strategy facilitated smooth connection with participants, especially with those from Hong Kong and Taiwan, it severely limited the possibility of exploring what “China” meant to Chinese American college students.

Reflecting on her Chinese trip, which was Angel’s first time after she moved to the United States since age seven, she said,

I just enjoyed, just kind of being around people that are kind of the same as me, you know it’s a nice comforting feeling and just knowing that that’s where I am from and that’s where my roots are, you know. It kind of gave me a sense of home.

Coming back to where she was born and blending in with people who looked like her provoked a strong sense of comfort and home for Angel. Ava, who visited Taiwan, but never Mainland China, multiple times, had a different understanding of home when commenting on her experience in Taiwan. She said,

It feels like home one because everything there seems to stay the same no matter how many times I go back. Like my grandma’s house is exactly the same; the street looks exactly the same; … Like the outdoor market there looks exactly the same; the subway station looks exactly the same; the guy down the corner who’s been cooking breakfast; the breakfast store for like twenty years is still the same guy. Haha. He still looks the same. Like I think maybe there … There is a sense of like home there, because I moved around a lot as a kid, but every time I went back [to Taiwan], it was the same.

The staticity of her grandparents’ house in her county of origin, which Ava craved due to her constant moving in the Unites States, gave her a sense of home. In addition, being exposed to a different aspect of her parents through observation of their social interactions with their peers in Taiwan instilled a sense of rootedness for Ava. She said,
I felt like home because I saw parts of my parents come out that I never see here, which is a little sad. But I think that makes a lot of sense like I see parts of them come around their family or even just around their old college friend. Like there is parts, ...sorts of like awakening and like I see a different side of them, that I kind of like this side. See[ing] them being like “wow, my parents are around their friends [is] so much fun.” Haha. ... I think there is a sense of history there. And maybe because there is a sense of history connected to my parents there. Like I said I am very close to my family, and so maybe because there are so much history for my parents there. It feels like there is roots there that maybe I am not a part of but they are part of, so I feel it too. Like some sense of rootedness there.

For Ava, Taiwan was a place where her parents’ young adulthood was spent, which Ava regretted that she was never part of. It was a place that could revitalize her parents’ youth for her by witnessing how her parents related to their friends. This enhanced her connection with her parents and this realization bestowed a strong sense of attachment to her country of origin.

While a sense of home can relate to physical familiarity, Amy felt it was the cultural congruence that brought her a sense of belonging in Hong Kong. She elaborated this multiple times, as noted in the chapter 3. She said “我觉得有家的感觉，在香港我会比较多。...因为那边的学生啊，真的拼命（笑）厉害的，所以我觉得跟他们在一起有点，我觉得，可以了解我”[I have a stronger sense of home in Hong Kong...because students there, who are also desperate about their study, can understand me (my devotion to study) when I was with them]. Due to the alienation by her peers in the United States because of her devotion to study, Hong Kong students’ similar practice in study connected her to them closely. Amy was quickly accepted by Hong Kong people as one of them due to her fluent Cantonese. When she visited China, though she was positioned
as biracial; some Chinese people considered her Chinese, as they thought she looked like Uighur Chinese.

6.4.2 Sense of Alienation—Push

Despite the felt sense of home, their socialization with people in their place of origin pushed the students to renegotiate their understanding of Chineseness, which generated a sense of alienation. This force of push derived from the incongruence of their embodied Chineseness and the accepted Chineseness in their place of origin. Chineseness, as a racial and cultural concept, has a hegemonic definition in China of what is “acceptable,” what is “not acceptable.” It is often related to certain linguistic abilities, physical characteristics and cultural practices perceived by general public. For those who look Chinese, they were assumed to possess the ability to speak Chinese and conform to the Chinese cultural norms. Once they were discovered otherwise, the validity of their Chinese heritage was questioned just like their American citizenship was doubted in the U.S. They cried out about being “stuck in the middle” and “I cannot win [in either places].” This sense of in-betweenness is shared by many people of Chinese descent living outside of China, as in Liu’s study (2015) on Chinese Australians and in Louie’s study (2004) on Chinese Americans. Like Li’s (1994) description of his experience visiting China, “The people were like me on one sense, but they were utterly different in many other important ways” (p. 219), the way they spoke, the way they looked, the way they dressed and what they chose to eat or not to eat immediately distinguished Chinese Americans from people in their country of origin, where the unspoken uniformity of Chineseness excluded people that did not conform. Angel said,
Like we are accepted but in the gransemo things. We are still different. But then we go back to our home country, like the native country, China, we are still not accepted, ‘cause we are still a foreigner. So we don’t feel like we kind of belong anywhere completely, …I mean when we go out to restaurant and staff, like they [were] confused like what we are, you know. So and I am not good at Chinese, so they realize I am a foreigner.

Angel realized that she was not fully accepted in the US, and in China she was different too because she could not carry out conversation in Chinese properly. Defining one’s identity based on one’s linguistic literacy has been widely recounted by many people of Chinese descent, such as the renowned cultural scholar Ien Ang. Ava also shared the awareness of her non-Chinese identity when she could not read menus in the restaurant in Taiwan. She said, “Oh, I am an American. I cannot really read Chinese.” The ability to speak and read the language became the yardstick to measure one’s Chineseness and determined one’s Chinese identity in Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

In addition to the perceived language deficiency that prevented them from claiming to be Chinese, other aspects such as food, and clothing also generated a sense of being out of place when they visited their place of origin. Peilin noticed the stares she got by wearing something that was different from the Chinese culture, such as leggings or oversized T-shirts. Ava also noticed that her physical difference immediately distinguished her from girls in Taiwan. She said, “I feel like I am a huge person, coz everyone if SO small and I am not, like at all, and so I feel gigantic. Haha. But I feel Humanga. …And there is like very high beauty expectations there is very strict of you being small and sometimes I feel a little like “Er, don’t look at me.” Furthermore, Ava reported her preference of food alienated her from the public in Taiwan. Her family in Taiwan would ridicule, “呀， 你是美国人!” (Ya, you are an American!). Ava cried, “I
cannot win; Everywhere I go, it’s like “Your food is very Asian” [in America] and when I was in Taiwan, they will be like “You are such an American.” Ava reflected “There is this weird sense of like I don’t completely belong there either.”

Elizabeth had the most uncomfortable experience when she visited her birth father in China during high school. She was denied adequate help and support from Chinese people, as her physical appearance was assumed to be related with Chinese language and cultural competency. But when her American identity and her linguistic limits were revealed to people in China, she reported experiencing discrimination. When she participated in the tourist group, she was denied living in the designated hotel as the rest of the tourists, who were Chinese. She was also prohibited using the shortcut to travel from the hotel that she ended up with to meet with the big group in the designated hotel. Elizabeth did not know the exact reason behind it due to her limited Chinese proficiency, but she assumed it was because of her American passport. She said, “This is crazy, because why are they [are] like discriminating me. [It’s] like you are an American, [so] we don’t like you.”

Louie (2004) said, “Ideas about Chineseness as a racial form of identification extending beyond the boundaries of the nation-state (in fact, predating) have allowed for the existence of a category of people of Chinese descent who no longer live on Chinese soil but who are still considered to be racially Chinese (hua)”(p. 51). This racial connation of Chineseness claimed all people with black eyes and yellow skin across nation-states to be Chinese. However, the cultural implication of Chineseness excluded the same group of people who did not conform to it. This contradiction put people of Chinese descent in a very difficult situation.
6.4.3 National Identity toward China

Chineseness, understood as a racial and cultural construct, has another layer of hegemony on people of Chinese descent. That is the implied nationalism toward the political entity of the People’s Republic of China. Louie (2004) observed that “The political changes that have occurred in China, especially since 1949, have politicized the concept of ‘Chineseness’ so that Chinese identity is no longer only a question of the inheritance or the preservation of tradition but also of political ideology and self-definition” (p. 52-53). This was especially true after China’s Opening up policy in the late 1970s when China utilized the historically rooted racial ideas of Chineseness and the assumed patriotism associated with it to call for the contribution of its patriotic sons and daughters overseas to build a modern nation of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” (Louie, 2004, p. 162). This sentiment was also prevalent in the general public and in popular media. In a study about general public’s response to the former U.S. ambassador, Gary Locke, who is of Chinese descent, more than half the people in his ancestral hometown took great pride in him becoming the U.S. ambassador to China, while a little less than half of them could not accept Gary Locke’s assertion that he was an American (Chen, 2012). The pride in Locke for shouldering such a prestigious position revealed Chinese public’s unspoken assumption that people of Chinese descent are one of them. Therefore, Gary Locke’s success was equated with the success of China and should be applauded by people in China. Chen’s (2012) research revealed the general sentiment the general public in China had, which was people of Chinese descent were essentially Chinese and should conform to the ethics Chineseness entailed.
Chinese American college students were very cognizant of this rhetoric of inclusion by Chinese people. They were also aware of the political connotation of being called “Chinese,” which tied to the political party and essentially to nationalism.

Emma, whose Chinese was good enough to pass as a native Chinese, said,

但是在中国，我就发现“oh, I am not really Chinese,”我并不是…就是因为中国人平时，中国人觉得你不管是什么地方的中国人，哦，OK，中国人就觉得你的家乡是中国，是大陆，那你就是中国人，所以他们就把所有的华人都当做中国人，其实华人跟中国人不一样，对不对。像我是美国的华裔，项目的朋友也是美国的华裔，他们其实，要说什么，额，根，可以说根吗？他们在美国也有很多根。比如说我说“哦，我这个暑假要回南昌看我亲戚，就是探亲”他们就会说“我要回纽约探亲，我要回纽约看我奶奶，我要回波士顿看我奶奶”

(But when I was in China, I found out that “oh, I am not really Chinese.” I am not… Chinese people tend to think no matter where you were born, they would think China is your home country, and that is Mainland China. Then you would be Chinese. So they consider all the people of Chinese descent Chinese. But people of Chinese descent are different from people in China, aren’t they? Like I am American born Chinese, and other friends in the program are also American born Chinese. They are…er, root, can I say root? They have a lot of roots in the US. For example, I would say “oh, I am going to Nanchang [a southern city in Mainland China] to visit my relatives this summer.” But they would say “I am going to New York to visit my relatives. Or I will go back to New York to see my grandma. Or I am going to Boston to visit my grandma.”)

Emma was acutely aware of the difference between Chinese and people of Chinese descent. She also saw the generational differences among people of Chinese descent and how that influenced their understanding of being Chinese. While she was proud of her Chinese culture and was eager to learn Chinese language and culture and incorporated Chinese history study into her future career path, she did not want to be associated with the political loyalty and nationalism implied by it. She said, “华人和中国人不一样，要是中国人跟我说“你是中国人“她就是指的中国大陆，那我就有点不舒服”(When Chinese people said to me “You are Chinese”, by that if they associated me with
Mainland China, I would be very uncomfortable). She identified herself foremost as an American. Her firm identification with her citizenship and nationality was illustrated below.

R: 那你覺得中國和美國對你來說都一樣? (You think China and the U.S. mean the same to you?)
P: No. 我肯定是把美國放在第一, if you are going to make that specific, 那我肯定是把自己看成我是一個美国人啊。(No. I certainly prioritize America. If you are going to make that specific, I will for sure prioritize America. So I certainly consider myself an American.)

This distinction between national identity and cultural identity for Chinese Americans has been respected in the Chinese scholarship (Li, 2012). People of Chinese descent in Southeast Asia were also respected for their localization in terms of cultural identification and nationality affiliation. Despite the anti-Chinese movement in Indonesia in the 1990s, Indonesian Chinese identified strongly with their country, Indonesia, but they still possessed a strong cultural identification with China, their country of origin (A. Wang, 2006). For people of Chinese descent, China was their country of origin, the country where they reside was their country. Whatever their performance or understanding of Chineseness was, it was not related to the imposed nationalism toward China. Like Louie (2004) said, “[F]or many, especially those whose connection to China is generations removed, it may no longer be possible to assume a congruence between the acknowledgement of a Chinese heritage and patriotic allegiance to the Chinese nation-state. The old narrative equating Chinese racial heritage with patriotism are being unraveled” (p. 168).
Despite the general acknowledgement of how people of Chinese descent identify with China, there were some variations. Amy, the biracial girl, voiced similarly about her nationality identification and cultural identification, but she was ambivalent toward the nation-state apparatus. She said,

我会说 nationality 是美国的嘛，在哪里出生就是，但 identity 真的是很难，因为我是文化上是 Chinese，但然后就是加了一点点，就几个 percent 美国人，但政府来说，我两边都不是.爱国主义…比较偏美国吧，但美国也有很多地方我是不同意的。然后身为一个基督徒，我觉得 patriotism 跟我是不太会，因为我是属于更高的那种，就是上帝的那种 laws 不是人的那种 laws,我也不不会把政府的领导人放的那么高，因为我知道人是有一个限度的。

(I will say my nationality is America, because it was determined by where you were born. But it is hard to talk about identity. Culturally, I am Chinese. I perhaps have only several percentages of American culture. Politically, I identify with neither of the two countries. My patriotism… is toward America, but there are a lot that I disagree with what America has done. As a Christian, I feel like my patriotism is not [restricted by nation]. Mine belongs to a higher level. (I am patriotic) to the laws of God not the human laws. I won’t expect too much from the government leaders, because I know human has limitations.)

Amy saw clearly her cultural identity with China and her national identity with America. Dissatisfied with both governments, she turned to identify with being patriotic to her religion. This was a choice to escape from the dual dominations of the two countries she constantly connected with.

Unlike Amy, who found it hard to identify with either government, one participant in the current research expressed strong patriotism toward China. Linda, who came to the U.S. at age seven from a northern province in China and considered herself a first-generation immigrant, attacked the U.S. media portrayal of China. She said,

要是美国说中国哪不好，我就觉得你凭什么说中国不好，但是要是中国的新闻呀说这个什么什么假不能吃，那个鸡蛋是假的，吃了会有什么毛病，我就
Linda almost employed a strategy of self-defense when attacking American media’s negative portrayal of China. She distinguished Chinese people including herself from the American people using “us” and “others.” This choice of lexicon immediately expressed her political and cultural loyalty. She further articulated the patriotism she had toward China: “就是新闻上说什么，我都说“哦，中国“（很激动的语气）哈哈，我现在还那样。爱国嘛” (whenever [Chinese] news reported things great about China, I would be like “Oh, China! (proud)” I am still like that now. I am patriotic!). Here, Linda clearly identified China with its political entity.

The attitude toward China, as understood as the People’s Republic of China, among Chinese Americans was not the same. Not all of them possessed political loyalty, which was the Chinese government long wanted; Not all of them expressed allegiance to their resident country, which was desired by their host country. L. Wang (1994) argues that the way people of Chinese descent develop their Chinese identity is determined by many factors such as race relations in the host country, public policy toward Chinese, the state of the host country’s diplomatic relations with China, and China’s policies toward overseas Chinese (p. 211). Linda’s patriotism toward China described above, though it was not the general trend, illustrated a striking similarity between the “old migrants” who migrated in the nineteenth century and the “new migrants” who migrated in the middle of
twentieth century. Despite many differences in terms of their motivation, their educational differences, and the challenges they faced in their host country (G. Wang, 2001, in his speech in The Fourth Overseas Chinese International Symposium in Taipei, translated into Chinese by Cheng, 2001), there were increasing similarities in terms of identity preservation. G. G. Wang (2000) said, “The newcomers (after 1960s) came as whole families and, although most of them were aware that they were immigrants planning to settle down in their host country, they behaved remarkably like the traditional sojourners who wanted to protect their Chinese identity abroad” (p. 103-104). He attributed this similarity to the new migrants’ higher educational background, the ease of communication, the possibility of affordable regular visits to Chinese territories, and the accessibility of Chinese books, magazines, films and electronic media, which helped to support a sojourner mentality among new migrants (G. Wang, 2000, p. 104). Most Chinese American college students’ parents in this research came as “new immigrants.” Therefore, their attitude toward China would have an influence on how their children perceive China, which is the focus of the following section.

6.5 China in Parents’ Eyes

Though this research did not focus on Chinese American college students’ parents’ experiences, their relationship with China and how that further influenced their American-born children’s attitude toward China was significant. I did not get the chance to interview every participant’s parents, and the question of their attitude toward China

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13 This non-profit organization was later renamed as ISSCO (International Society for the Study of Chinese Overseas)
was not even included in the research design. Nevertheless, how they identified with their place of origin surfaced in the interviews with them and with their children.

Among the thirteen participants, nine of their parents (Jack, Emma, Amy, Ava, Linda, Angel, John, Ben, Cindy) came to the United States as young adults, who migrated for economic reasons. Three of their parents migrated as teenagers (Elizabeth, Peilin, Sophia) and one was American-born-Chinese (Alice). Some came through pursuing advanced degrees, and others’ way of entry I was not informed of.

According to L. Wang (1994), the recent immigrants to the United States, especially those who left China in the 1980s, which was the time majority of the parents in this groups left China, developed “The Uprooted” (shigenqunzu) identity toward China. The majority of Chinese who left China either lacked faith in China’s ability to achieve modernization or admired the research opportunities and the freedom of expression abroad. L. Wang (1994) argued that for this group of Chinese people, they voluntarily chose to uproot themselves from China and were determined to settle down abroad. However, their intention of never returning did not necessarily mean their connection with China was cut off and that China remained distant to them. For some of the parents in this research, China continued to exert significant influences on their daily discussions. It is important to note that in this context, China refers to the People’s Republic of China in those parents’ mind.

In the previous chapters, the adoption of parents’ concerted cultivation in the “Chinese-speaking” Chinese Americans versus the “accomplished natural growth” in the “English-speaking” students illustrated, to a great degree, about parents’ attitude toward China and Chinese culture. I argued previously that parents’ different cultivation strategy
influenced significantly how Chinese American students viewed their ethnicity. “Chinese-speaking” students identified strongly with their ethnicity, while “English-speaking” Chinese American students identified strongly as American, with some variations. Due to the research design, most of the parents did not reveal their attitude toward China directly during the interview. Descriptions of their parents’ relationship with China were either inferred from their children’s interview, informal socialization or directly from the interviews with parents who chose to share it to me.

Jack’s father, as a naturalized American, possessed strong pride in China. Though I did not get to interview him, from Jack’s interview, his father had a strong patriotic feeling toward China. Jack called his father “a Chinese national.” In addition to his regular update with Chinese news and active discussion with Jack, his father’s social circles were mostly Chinese. Some of his friend circle belonged to the category of “astronaut” discussed in Ong’s studies (1993, 1999). They acquired citizenship for their family in the United States but shuttled between China and the U.S. to do business. Interactions with these “astronauts” updated and connected Jack’s father with current China about things that were otherwise not available to him. His strong identification with China exerted a strong pride in Jack.

Emma’s parents, who experienced the Cultural Revolution before coming to the U.S., developed a very critical attitude toward China. I was aware of their dissatisfaction with Chinese government, such as its inability to serve for the general interests of common good through socialization with Emma. However, I never heard Emma’s parents express these explicitly in front of me. Instead of criticizing China, they were very supportive of my decision to come to the United States to study and eagerly suggested
that I stay after graduation. I sensed their different opinions toward China from mine through multiple conversations with Emma. Emma was very cautious about expressing negative comments toward China (the People’s Republic of China in her mind) in front of Chinese international students. With me, she felt a little more secure to share these negative toward China, but still she would apologize by saying “I am sorry” right after she conveyed her opposition to what the government did, such as her conjecture that China is now returning to class struggles in the 1960s after Chairman Xi Jinping came to power. When inquired about her being apology to me, she admitted she would do this only in front of Chinese people but not in front of her American peers. Her hesitation and caution to criticize China was due to my Chinese nationality. Similarly, Emma indicated multiple times for me to talk to her parents, when she sensed disagreement between us about issues in China. She believed her parents would provide me with an “objective” picture in understanding China’s current situation instead of blind patriotism. It was from her multiple suggestions of me talking to her parents that I realized that her parents must possess similar critical attitudes toward China as she did.

Linda’s parents routinely discussed China and China related issues at the household. Linda’s parents expressed strongly about their patriotism when I interviewed them. Linda’s father acknowledged,

其实真的，就是来了美国以后好像我觉得为什么就是说中国人来了美国以后觉得更爱国了，就是觉得为什么吧，你最起码从你的潜意识里边你还是觉得把你和中国联系起来了，中国虽然在，不光光是一个符号，就是说真正的说，好像是一荣俱荣一损俱损的那种哈.

(Honestly, after moving to the United States, like many other people whose patriotism toward China became even stronger after migrating to the United States, I feel subconsciously that I still connect myself with China. China is not just a country, a symbol. Frankly speaking, it is like China’s success equals to my

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own accomplishment, and China’s failure is equivalent to my own loss. Our fate is closely tied to each other)

Though Linda’s parents had strong loyalty to China politically, they were acutely aware of China’s current social problems. Linda’s parents engaged intensively in talking about China’s future on a regular basis. While Linda’s father believed that the future of China lay in its ability to adopt democracy, “我觉得中国说句老实话真的应该更民主一点” (Honestly, I think China should be more democratic), Linda’s mother believed that democracy would create more chaos. This constant debate of China in Linda’s household and her parents’ patriotism toward China shaped Linda’s strong identification with China politically.

Coming from Taiwan, Ava’s mother acknowledged that she did not know much about Mainland China. She vaguely knew that the economy there was better than that in Taiwan. But she had a more positive attitude toward Mainland China than Taiwan, which was informed by her son’s interaction with students from both groups. Talking about her son’s study abroad experience in Japan, she said,

他看不起台湾来的人，他说台湾来的人呢，就是怕人家说她不好，然后又看你是在美国长大的中国人，台湾来的，又觉得嫉妒你，干嘛，他说反而有从大陆来的，因为他们很艰苦，所以他们很上进，他们都很 mature。我以前很喜欢台湾，我就觉得我很骄傲我是台湾来的，他说他去那 study abroad 看那些，他说这些人真是井底之蛙

(He said he looked down upon those students from Taiwan. He said they were afraid of being belittled but at the same time they were jealous of those Chinese growing up in America, who were originally from the same place as they were. He said, on the contrary, students from China were very hard-working and driven. They were very mature. He said “I used to like Taiwan and be proud that I was from Taiwan.” He acknowledged that after the study abroad experience, he realized people from Taiwan were narrow-minded like a frog in a well.)
Implicitly, Ava’s family’s confidence in Mainland China influenced how Ava perceived and connected with China. Ava was very strong about her Asian American identity. In fact, she never confessed even once that she identified herself as an American. She always identified with a hyphenated identity.

Elizabeth’s mother, who came to the United States as a teenager, though she did not express explicitly about her attitude toward China as a country, was very skeptical about how Chinese people did things. Expressing dissatisfaction toward the way her parents raised her in the United States, who isolated her from the American society, she said, “I tell you five years… of no contact [with] outside, I was like, when I was eighteen, and the day I touch[ed] the environment, American environment, what I do[did]? I change[changed]. I could change in one day.” Indicating the futility of segregating her from American society by her parents for fear of assimilation, Elizabeth’s mother endorsed strongly the irresistible influence of environment, which contributed to her philosophy of bringing her children up as Americans. She was also critical of Chinese people’s judgment on her when she visited China. She said, “But in China, at 12 to 2 o’clock, how [when] everybody take[s] a nap, I would run for 2 hour[s] and come back. They think I am crazy. They keep saying, “Yeah, you are [an] American.” Acutely aware of her difference from people in China, Elizabeth’s mother did not seem to hold a positive attitude toward China. On the contrary, she was very pleased with what her family had accomplished in the United States. During our interview, she expressed the confidence of surviving in the United States and thus encouraged me to not be afraid of the future living in the United States. She said, “What are you afraid of? This is America.
You could draw a food stamp; American [government gives] so many help. Don’t be afraid.” Her experience in China and her prejudice toward Chinese people contributed to Elizabeth’s bias toward her own country of origin.

Parents’ various attitudes toward China – be it proud, be it patriotic, be it critical – subconsciously influenced how their children perceived their cultural heritage and their country of origin. Their varying relations with China further demonstrated that there was no uniform experience for Chinese American students in relation to their country of origin. While their allegiance to their resident country was recognized and respected by the academia in China, nevertheless, some participants’ political and cultural pride in their country of origin demonstrated the limitation of citizenship in this globalized and transnational era. Unlike those wealthy Chinese overseas, who engaged actively in acquiring flexible citizenship in western countries to ensure flexible accumulation of wealth, Chinese American students in this study anchored themselves in the United States but looked to China for flexible citizenship. This different pattern was in part due to the economic surge of China in the world economy when its markets opened to the world in unprecedented ways in the 21st century. Similar to Hong Kongers in the 1990s who utilized a social understanding of citizenship – an entitlement to make a living with a minimum of controls, taxes political responsibility and the chance to compete for success in life (Ong, 1993, p. 755), some Chinese American students also employed this social understanding of citizenship to find places which were rewarding to practice their talent. While for many wealthy overseas Chinese, citizenship in the profound sense of duty or identification with a particular nation-state is minimal (Ong, 1993, p. 771), this research
raised questions about the fluidity of how American-born Chinese negotiated citizenship and nation-state identification.

6.6 China in Their Mind

Despite the experienced acceptance and alienation by Chinese American students during visits to their place of origin, the opportunity to visit their country of origin did increase their ethnic pride and consciousness. This elevated appreciation of their heritage was also reported by the Chinese American students in Louie’s (2004) study and by the Chinese Australian students in Liu’s study (2015).

Visiting their place of origin woke up their buried desire to connect with their heritage culture. Ava decided to learn Chinese language and declared her minor in Chinese after her trip to Taiwan in college. Visiting Taiwan as a young adult pushed Ava to realize the importance of preserving her heritage language if she wanted to gain more understanding of it. It is important to note that in Ava’s example, it was her experience in Taiwan that contributed to her increasing interest in learning Chinese.

Growing up trying to renounce her Chinese identity, Angel learned to accept her culture more and wanted to have more knowledge of it; she acknowledged that visiting China was “more of a fuller effect” for her to realize that. Coming back from her trip to China, Angel became more assertive of her culture and was proud to demonstrate her Chinese identity to her peers, which she had been reluctant to show previously. She said, “Now like I go to the Chinese supermarket, I would like buy food and cook Chinese food at home, [which] my roommate, [is like] “Oh, so it’s different, ‘cause I always cook American food.” Her Caucasian friend also witnessed Angel’s passion for Chinese culture after her trip to China. She noticed,
I know in freshmen year, she came back [from home] with like food from her dad, you know, and she wouldn’t always eat it… But now, like this year in our house, she is like “I really want to go home and I want my dad to teach me like how to do all the Chinese cuisines. She is like “I want to do this, I want to do that. I will be able to cook this for my kids. I will be able to learn, you know, how to cook authentic Chinese food. She is like I really want to learn about the Chinese culture.” She is like “I am embracing it. I am excited,” so she is like really try to learn more.

This increased pride in being ethnic Chinese not only urged Angel to learn Chinese cultural practices but also motivated her to pass them down to her future generation. In addition to the increasing interest for Chinese culture, the Chinese trip also changed Angel’s perception of her sexuality, as mentioned in chapter 4. Reflecting on her previous promiscuous relationship, Angel said,

Wow, maybe that wasn’t very good, you know, a good way to live. So like going to China and seeing people’s reaction, you know everyone wasn’t judgmental at all, like everyone still like “oh, ok, that’s cool, you live your life [that way].” But just that’s not the best way, you know. It’s not safe, and like seeing that culture like of being more—conservative and just, yeah, made me realize maybe I should take a step back and just calm down and er, be apromiscuous.

The opportunity to experience Chinese culture, especially to know its attitude toward sexuality enabled Angel to ponder her own sexual behavior and eventually led her to shift to an attitude that she deemed appropriate.

Equipped with the appreciation of their heritage culture and their actual experience visiting China, participants had a renewed understanding of their country of origin, which was free of manipulation by the public media in the United States. Chinese American students’ revised understanding of their country of origin again differed from one another. While most participants advocated for mutual understanding between the
two countries to ensure an objective presentation of China in the American society, some
expressed ambivalence toward how to process dictatorship in issues such as “censorship,”
which contradicted with the belief of democracy they embraced growing up in the U.S.

Due to their relatively closer and deeper ties and socialization with people of
Chinese descent and people in China, Chinese American students knew that what the
media portrayed about China and Chinese people did not come from a thorough
understanding of their country of origin. Elizabeth said “I mean a lot of people don’t
understand there are differences in culture… If you really step back to think like ‘Oh, you
know, they are just Chinese, like that is just their way to do with their culture,’ it makes,
it’s easier to understand.” Similarly, arguing against the Eurocentric view, Angle
commented,

I try not to focus on the media portrayal of China, because I know myself like
China is so much more than that the media has portrayed. It has so much culture
and history, you know… Things gonna work for us is not gonna work for them. I
think we should all respect each other in whatever we are, like however we
perform and go about things, you know.

Angel understood that how the media portrayed her country of origin derived from
different cultural and political motives, which was to prioritize western, namely
American values and impose them on Chinese society. She believed it was not right, as
the cultural differences between the two countries determined that there should be no one
way to do things.

Jack went further to express his objection toward the media’s political and
military motives to portray China. He defended China when he saw American mass
media expressed the “China threat” message. He said “那你从中国那边想，那你说你那么大一国家，必须有 leading 的军舰。是不是。”(If you think from China’s perspective, you will understand it. China, as such a big country, of course needs a leading warship [to protect itself]). Instead of accepting the “corruption” discourse adopted by the mass media in portraying China, Jack saw the current social problems as unavoidable from the social developmental point of view. He said “中国有好多这些事，可是你看不是中国的错，这就是 how society 就是这样来” (China has a lot of these problems, but you see it is not China’s fault, it is how society develops). To support his argument, he cited various social injustice practices adopted by several early American companies such as the Standard Oil Company on its exploit of its workers.

Unlike Jack, who defended China for its current social issues, Emma held very strongly about her liberal and democratic values, which put her in the middle on how to perceive her country of origin. Due to her research interest, Chinese history, especially on China’s Cultural Revolution, Emma constantly updated herself with current China. Commenting on the negativity that American mass media tended to portray China, she said “也不是都是负面的。 I am saying that,” “有的中国人是认为是负面的，我不一定认为是负面的” (I do not consider all these portrayal negative. I am saying that some Chinese people may consider it negative, but I don’t necessarily think so). She believed that because her identification with China was different from that of people from China, who have political loyalty for China, that she had contrasting reactions to the portrayal of China in the American mass media with people from China. Commenting on western media’s report on China’s censorship, such as the incident of Xiaobo Liu, she said, “I
think it’s very important…或者刘晓波的事情要让大家知道”(I think it is important [to report these stuff], and the story of Liu Xiaobo should be publicized to let people know). Though she understood Chinese government’s concerns in practicing censorship, she found herself hard to digest these from a liberal point of view. She acknowledged that she had to consciously remind herself to see things from different perspectives. She said,”“就是提醒自己要从各种角度来看中国。Specially now I am 要宣传，right?所以我看宣传的时候，我读宣传的时候我也要尽量了解中国，了解中国政府的角度 and why they are doing this? Why they are putting 可是 it’s also really hard.”([I need to] remind myself to look at China through various angles. Especially now I am looking at the propaganda [at the Cultural Revolution era], right? So when I am looking at those propagandas, I am trying to understand China more, trying to understand the perspective of Chinese government and why they are doing this? Why they are putting…but it’s also really hard). Struggling between the two beliefs: striving for democracy and being cognizant of not imposing Eurocentrism on China, Emma described her attitude toward China a “tough love.” From their reaction to American mass media’s portrayal of China, it is clear that their understanding of what constituted China is similar to what American media considered what China consisted of.

However, not all participants reached a thorough understanding toward their country of origin through visiting their place of origin and learning heritage language in college. Though some of them also incorporated China into their career, China, in their eyes, was still distant. John’s female Caucasian friend commented that in John’s mind, China meant the village in Fujian. She said,
When I asked him like oh, like what’s China like before I went there, it was all like “not China, just Fujian.” So, I was, I kind of get to feel that was sort of the only exposure, or that was as far as he was interested in identifying with China. Like that was the only way he could sort of bridge the gap.

In John’s mind, China = Fujian. That was where his parents were from and where he knew most. He admitted that despite the fact that he visited China multiple times, he did not venture to explore other parts of China. This strong ancestral village sentiment where he found comfort instead of the larger China society was also observed in Louie’s (2004) Youth Root-Search program. She states,

Most Roots interns identified with the particulars of their ancestral villages introduced to them on their trip that to them represented the Cantonese folk culture from which their families originated…The grandeur of Chinese culture [which was presented to them by the Chinese government] made many Chinese Roots participants [feel] lacked (Louie, 2004, p. 174).

Similarly, for Cindy and Ava, whose parents were from Taiwan, Mainland China was even more distant and even unrelated to them. Neither of them visited Mainland China. Amy, whose mom was from Hong Kong, however, had more aspiration for Mainland China. She wanted to work in Mainland China; she craved standard Chinese accent (Beijing accent); but she also acknowledged the complicated relations between Mainland China and Hong Kong, which put her at a difficult situation. Asked about what her opinion was when she read negative reports of China in the American media, she said “其实我也不知道怎么 take sides,因为我妈妈是香港人香港跟大陆的关系也不是很好，所以这样更复杂一点” (Actually I don’t know how to take sides. My mom is a Hong Konger and the relationship between Hong Kong and Mainland China is not so good. It makes it even more complex [to take sides]).
between Mainland China and Hong Kong made it hard for Amy to react to the American mass media’s negative portrayal of China, which she believed pertained to Mainland China. For Amy, the term “China” used in the American media did not include Hong Kong. This explains her ambivalence toward American media’s negative portrayal of China. Her understanding is different from the political rhetoric in China that Hong Kong is part of China. Born in the United States, with her heritage from Hong Kong, Mainland China seemed difficult for her to be included in her identity construction. These unique experience of Cindy, Ava and Amy raised sensitivity toward the complex nuances created by the historical relations between Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China and how people of Chinese descent from these places identified with Mainland China.

Though China as a country might be distant in their daily life for some participants, Chinese food and Chinese elements were always closer to them. All participants reported eating Chinese food at home with their parents. All of them expressed a special love for Chinese food and a constant search for Chinese food when they were away from home. Their diet preference of eating Chinese food at home also translated into their passion for the other ethnic food in the United States, such as Thai, Italian and Mediterranean food. They hang out with Caucasian friends who had the same passion for ethnic food or went with their Asian friends to try ethnic food together. Chinese food was the most important pull factor for them to identify themselves as Chinese.

However, they had little interest in other Chinese elements that their families presented to them. A lot of families respected and performed certain rituals at home, such as religious ceremonies and certain festival celebrations. They all favored certain festivals
such as receiving red envelopes on Chinese New Year’s celebration. All the other
Chinese ritual things their parents did seemed less comprehensible to them, like bowing
to the pictures of their ancestors or burning symbolic materials for their ancestors on
specified occasions. This was not uncommon in the Chinese diaspora (Tuan, 1998). Their
home display of Chinese art such as Chinese paintings and scrolls were just one of the
many ordinary decorations to them. They knew those were Chinese related but did not
appreciate their beauty through a Chinese aesthetic.

6.7 Conclusion

Examining the role of China in Chinese American students’ construction of
ethnicity highlights the struggles between multiple cultures that this group of students
experienced. They not only had to negotiate their Chinese identity against whiteness in
the United States, but also against the perceived expectations and dominant performance
of being Chinese in China. China or their place of origin functioned as both pull and push
force in Chinese American college students’ ethnicity construction. Participants differed
significantly in how they engaged in that push and pull. For most participants, China was
just their cultural heritage, America their country. But some participants demonstrated
flexible citizenship in their nationality identification. While the American mass media, to
some extent, manipulated their understanding toward China, their direct contact with
their country of origin aided by the ease of transnational movement provided them with
agency to acquire a more objective understanding of it. Participants in this study did not
seriously raise the complicated relationship between Taiwan, Hong Kong and Mainland
China, which is controversial among Chinese diasporas and western countries. While
Chinese American college students chose not to engage in this political issue, their
responses in this chapter indicated that their understanding of China is similar to an American representation of China, referring to the People’s Republic of China and excluding Hong Kong and Taiwan. Their identification with China mostly rested in the place where their parents came from, be it Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Mainland China.
CHAPTER 7. DISCUSSION

This qualitative research focused on thirteen traditional-aged Chinese American college students who have enrolled in Chinese language class in college. It investigated what their understanding of Chinese identity was, how they performed their Chinese identity, and how they negotiated their ethnic identity in higher education setting. The in-depth interviews with primary and secondary participants along with the language class observations and informal socialization revealed that these students varied vastly in what being Chinese meant to them and in how they chose to perform their Chinese identity.

This study found that through negotiating the differences between them and their white Caucasian peers as well with their peers from China, Chinese American college students developed a hybrid identity in college. Some incorporated their ethnic identity by embracing a “both a Chinese and an American” identity; others identified themselves mostly as American but had learned to integrate their heritage identity into who they were in college. This finding supported Coppel’s (2013) statement that “Chinese around the world have become localized and have adapted their ethnic and cultural identities in different ways. In that sense, they are all indeed hybrid” (p.346).

Contrary to the previous research that Chinese overseas had a sense of rootlessness and homelessness (Li, 1994), participants in this research did not have such bewilderment. Though they felt caught in-between, as the culture embodied by them was not entirely American nor Chinese, broadly defined, they developed a strong identification of being Chinese American, an identity that was not imposed by the society but rather, one that had significant meanings to them. They had learned to embrace this hybrid, “third space” identity that was unique to them. In addition, they asserted that
America was their country and China was just their heritage country. Their “loyalty” to America paralleled Wong’s (2013) research on Chinese Americans in the west coast in the United States. Chinese American college students in this research neither longed to return to their heritage country when they were old (Luoyeguigen) nor were they uprooting their heritage (zhancaochugen); they had settled in and accommodated themselves to the host country, at the same time trying to maintain their heritage culture. Wong’s (2013) field work also documented that Chinese Americans wanted to sustain their Chinese culture and at the same time participated actively in all walks of life in the U.S. society as citizens (p. 301). The characteristics of the post 1965 immigrants, including their education levels, enabled them to sustain heritage culture relatively easily, albeit with gradual change to what of that culture they sustained. The increased ease of communications with and affordable regular visits to Chinese territories further accelerated heritage ethnic links. According to G. Wang (2000),

The newcomers (after 1960s) came as whole families and, although most of them were aware that they were immigrants planning to settle down in their host country, they behaved remarkably like the traditional sojourners who wanted to protect their Chinese identity abroad (G.Wang, 2000, p. 103-104).

Participants in my research considered themselves foremost Americans albeit with Chinese heritage and wanted to be seen by Americans as one of them. This self-perception challenges the common misunderstanding of Chinese Americans in the United States that they will always be “seen as Asians, not Americans, and come to embody whatever threat the land of their ancestry allegedly poses to the United States” (E. Lee, 2015, p. 318).
In addition, the intersectionality of their multiple identities refuted any essentialized representation of Chinese Americans. Their unique individual variations deserved attention and respect. The general public needs to see them as individuals instead of lumping them together and imposing an uniform experience on them. Thus, the intragroup variation needs to be recognized and appreciated.

This research, bridging the scholarship on Chinese studies and ethnicity studies in the U.S., provides a platform for the two disciplines to communicate on issues concerning Chinese Americans. With American discourse focusing on assimilation and Chinese rhetoric on loyalty (L. Wang, 1994), this research suggests a different understanding of this population. Though Chinese Americans refuse to assimilate totally to the dominant society through abandoning their heritage culture, their adherence to their heritage does not translate into political loyalty to their heritage country. Their understanding and performance of Chineseness should be respected, as Tuan (1998) stated, “Traditional Chinese culture was not simply transported across the ocean to the United States and then preserved in the same state as when the first Chinese came” (p. 50). In fact, later generations of Chinese and Japanese Americans considered participating in an ethnic bowling or baseball league, golf club or even attending a Christian church with a predominately Asian congregation qualified as a cultural activity (Tuan, 1998, p. 58).

Unlike the participants in Tuan’s study, who believed that culture ultimately resides within a sense of community and association rather than the ability to speak Chinese or Japanese, practice rituals, or prepare ethnic foods, participants in this dissertation research still closely correlated these cultural practices and language ability with being Chinese. This difference was in part due to their generational status and in part
due to the region which they resided in. Chinese Americans in places like California, where there are a mix of later generations of people of Chinese descent and immigrants, are able to claim their ethnicity and sense of community in the absence of cultural and linguistic practices. But in a region where the number of people of Chinese descent is low, the absence of these practice makes it harder for them to claim their ethnicity with meaning.

7.1 Implications on Representations of Chineseness

This research provided empirical evidence demonstrating that Chineseness is not fixed as its meaning varied across the thirteen participants. This supports scholars’ research in Chinese studies (Tu, 1994a,b; Quah, 2009; Ang, 2001; Shih, 2013), each of whom argues for the fluidity of Chineseness. Chinese American college students in this research spoke different forms of Chinese languages taught by their parents. They varied in celebrating Chinese festivals and respecting cultural norms. Some strived to achieve academically, others chose to focus less on study; some valued filial piety and family, others emphasized individual freedom. Nevertheless, they identified themselves Chinese Americans. The generational difference in presenting Chineseness in Quah’s research was also revealed in this research. Of the thirteen participants, seven of them were second generation Chinese American; two were 1.5 generation who came to the United States at 7 and 8; three were 2.5 generation and one was 3 generation Chinese American. As the generation progressed, the likelihood of them incorporating Chinese identity grew slimmer. This was foremost demonstrated through their heritage language competency. This gradual heritage language loss also supported previous research that heritage
language loss occurs rapidly as generation progressed (Cho, 2000; Fishman, 2001; J. Lee 2002).

Chinese American college students’ different presentations of Chineseness were indeed related to the political and economic surroundings of the country they lived in, as argued by Blanc (1997). Chinese American college students’ parents’ understanding of being a Chinese in the United States was influenced by political and economic surroundings. Their own experience along with their particular perception of the United States mirrored how they raised their children. In addition, multiple participants had lived in different parts of the United States, such as Maryland, Pittsburg, and Texas, where the Chinese population was larger than the research site, before they moved to the Mid-west of the United States. Their different experiences in those big cities also had an influence on what their understanding of Chineseness was. Participants’ different presentations of Chineseness were indeed “molded by the local circumstances in different parts of the world, where people of Chinese ancestry have settled and constructed new ways of living” (Ang, 1998, p. 225). Therefore, one shouldn’t judge the authenticity of one’s Chineseness. It was also not acceptable to claim one was more Chinese or less Chinese, as there should not be a standard to measure Chineseness. In other words, overseas Chinese’ varied presentations of Chineseness should be respected for localization or hybridity since its meaning was fluid and not fixed both inside and outside of China.

Recognizing this along with acknowledging the intersectionality with their other identities as discussed in chapter 5, the research suggests how Chinese society and American society should view Chinese Americans. American society should value the varied presentations of Chineseness and avoid any single display of Chinese Americans
in the mass media. They deserve to be represented for who they are individually instead of a uniform image. The release of the “Crazy Rich Asians” in the American film industry was vehemently embraced by the research participants as great representational progress. The film, in their eyes, not only marked the representation of Asian Americans in the dominantly White film industry, it also broke the essentialized portrait of Asian Americans in the mass media. Ava posted a long blog expressing her excitement about the film and her race being accepted in the American society “No, No way. Is this really happening? Is this real? It's too good to be true…I feel so known and seen and heard and understood. And there are very few times I can say, in my life, I have EVER felt like this.” The variations of Chineseness presentation in the American mass media will help promote mutual understanding between the dominant and the minoritized, and more importantly it will boost the sense of belongings of its own citizens, Chinese Americans.

This respect and understanding should also be applied to Chinese people living in China. It is vital for them to remain open-minded in viewing people of Chinese descent and avoid an essentialist point of view in judging their Chineseness. While the academia in China has increasingly recognized the localization of people of Chinese descent (A. Wang, 2006; Wu, 2004), the general public continues to impose Chinese values on this group of people and continues to include them as Chinese. In addition, the government’s policy from the 1990s to call for people of Chinese descent to contribute to the modernization of China by naming them “the daughters and sons of Chinese nation” (Zhao, 2018); this, too, must be reconsidered.
7.2 Implications on Heritage Language Learning

This research found that heritage language learning did have an important role in enhancing Chinese American students’ ethnic identity development. This confirmed the previous research on the importance of heritage language education (Peyton et al., 2001). This research also found that the more proficient (speaking) one is at his/her heritage language, the stronger he/she embrace Chinese ethnicity, confirming J. Lee’s (2002) research. Those who spoke Chinese had incorporated their Chinese identity into who they were to a greater degree, while for those who chose to speak English, Chinese identity was more like a label and did not mean significantly to them. However, this does not suggest a clean cut between heritage language proficiency and ethnic identification. As Fishman (1998) stated, “Language is both merely marginal and optional (i.e. detachable) vis-à-vis their ethnicity (and that of “others” as well)” (p. 330). The examples of Ava, Peilin, John and Ben in this study as well as Tuan’s (1998) study also confirmed that heritage language ability can be irrelevant to ethnic identification. In addition, this study, though with limited number of participants, also observed heritage language loss along the generational status, confirming previous studies (Cho, 2000; Fishman, 2001; J. Lee 2002).

Nevertheless, taking the heritage language class and Chinese culture classes in college woke up the Chinese identity in Chinese American college students, who had limited heritage language proficiency, and pushed them to think further about what being Chinese meant for them. In that sense, learning heritage language could accelerate ethnic identity development. The heritage language/culture education played a significant role in increasing this group of students’ ethnic identity awareness. For students who already
were fluent in their heritage language, the language class was limited in helping their ethnicity development, partly because of their prior familiarity with Chinese language and culture. However, they reported the systematic Chinese culture classes inspired them to know more about their heritage. Future research can further investigate the role of heritage language education in enhancing ethnicity by comparing students taking the heritage language class with those who did not.

Taken together, this research found the positive influence that ethnic language and culture classes had on enhancing minority students’ sense of belonging, as reported by Vasquez (2005). The inclusion of their heritage language and culture classes in university gave them a sense of empowerment in claiming their heritage (Wang, 1996), which also enabled a sense of belonging in the educational setting. However, further questions need to be asked about how ethnic language and cultural classes could better help minority population with different needs. What attitude should the language teachers have toward heritage language speakers in terms of their understanding of their heritage language and culture? Participants reported that they were assumed to be good at their heritage language by their professors at the beginning of the class and this caused subtle burdens on them. Some of the participants even reported being denied taking the language class and/or feeling excluded in the class by their professors because of the assumed language ability. This pertains to how to detach a “Chinese face” with the Chineseness that was presumed to be associated with it.

Further, the university heritage language program should also think about how to incorporate a wider range of Chinese culture/language representation in the language/culture class, instead of focusing on the Chinese culture in a certain region or
ethnicity, such as the region of Yellow River and Han culture. Participants implied that their capability of speaking a local Chinese language at home was not valued by themselves and in the heritage language class due to larger society’s perception of what constitutes of Chineseness. They all inspired to speak the official Chinese language, Mandarin. However, what they were not aware was their language is also one of the many Chinese languages that is spoken in Mainland China nowadays.

In addition to including various languages, different cultural representations should also be included in what constitute of Chineseness. One participant specifically reported that the way her family celebrated Chinese holidays was not included in the language and culture class, implying that the instructor was also essentializing Chinese culture when educating students about China. Heritage language educators should be aware of the different representations of Chineseness to avoid a sore reflection of it determined by people from certain ethnicity or in certain region, which is what Chinese studies scholar Tu (1994b) strongly argued against. The meaning of Chineseness should reflect more broadly the Sinophone speaking world, including Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan as well as people of Chinese descent in addition to Mainland China as proposed by Shih et al. (2013).

This research also found that Chinese American students associated the ability to speak Mandarin, the official language in China, with being Chinese. Participants, especially those in the latter group, who started to learn to speak Mandarin in college, reported feeling more Chinese than before. Participants in the first group also reported feeling more Chinese than other Chinese Americans when their Mandarin was perceived better. This finding was interesting. On one hand, it stressed the importance of being able
to speak Chinese, in this case, Mandarin, in helping Chinese American students’ ethnic identity development; on the other hand, it revealed the ability to speak Mandarin, not other Chinese language variations, in determining one’s ethnic identity. This emphasized the hegemonic role of Mandarin in the Sinophone world, which scholars like Tu Weiming and Ien Ang strongly oppose. This raised a challenge for the heritage language program, if the various representation of Chineseness were not to be essentialized: how would the heritage language program reflect those scholars’ calling?

7.3 Implications for Minority Immigrant Families

This research highlighted the importance of the family dynamic in helping Chinese American college students’ heritage language maintenance and ethnic identity development. It confirmed the central role of family in enhancing minority students’ ethnic belonging. This research, however, confirmed the importance of family cultural practices and community support in students’ ethnicity development (Brown et al., 2013; Juang and Syed, 2010; Brittian et al., 2013; Nguyen et al., 2015; Umaña-Taylor and Guimond, 2010). Among family’s cultural practice, this research highlighted the importance of parents’ parenting strategy of “concerted cultivation” versus “accomplished natural growth” in affecting their children’s ethnicity development. Whether parents consciously took the efforts to help their children maintain their heritage or not was found to be important in students’ ethnicity construction. Despite the many difficulties of maintaining heritage language, such as the pressure to assimilate and the exclusion of Chinese learning in the formal education curriculum (Wang, 1996), some parents in this research demonstrated strong determination to help maintain their children’s heritage language. They spent time reading Chinese stories with their children;
they consciously spoke Chinese with their children at home; they took their children to visit their heritage country frequently for them to learn the language and to experience the culture. Their conscious efforts enabled their children to speak the heritage language, Mandarin or Cantonese. And their heritage language ability was transferred to embracing their ethnic identity, as demonstrated in the five participants in the first group, who have learned to appreciate both their heritage culture and their American culture. Though this research has limited participants, it still provides immigrant families with directions if they deem maintaining their children’s heritage important.

While whether to maintain heritage culture can be optional depending on each immigrant family, how to raise Chinese American children, whose racial and ethnic identity are, in spite of their will, imposed in the United States, can be challenging. Participants in this research reported dissatisfaction regarding their parents’ “too Chinese” parenting style, such as too much emphasis on academic performance, authoritative discipline, honor and shame, and different treatment between genders among the siblings. Chinese American college students’ parents also reported confusion, loss and disappointment when raising their children in the United States. Common to immigrant parent-child relations, language barriers and values differences impacted cross-generation continuity. How to take into consideration the social environments their children grew up with and adjust their parenting strategy accordingly while not losing touch with their heritage culture is a challenge for every immigrant family.

### 7.4 Implications for Higher Education Institutions

Though this research has demonstrated the importance of family dynamic in helping minority students’ ethnic identity development, the crucial role of various college
environments was also manifested. This research found that college years was indeed an important period that Chinese American college students actively negotiated their identity through extracurricular activities (Inkelas, 2004; Harper and Quaye, 2007; Tasi and Huligni, 2012), ethnic peer interaction (Santos et al., 2007) and ethnic curriculum and future career path (Vasquez, 2005; Syed, 2010). College provided both academic and extracurricular arena for Chinese American students to negotiate their ethnic/racial identity. Most of the participants commented that the diverse college environments provided them with a sense of comfort of being Chinese as compared to their hometown; some developed an identity to appreciate both cultures, while others just began to include Chinese in perceiving who they were in college.

Despite the open culture of college in fostering minority students’ ethnicity, this research found that college is not a place where students can be free to be who they are. This study showed that not all participants were comfortable about themselves in college. Two of the participants who came from more diverse hometowns, were keenly aware of the whiteness of the institution. They were constantly hurt on campus by the racist remarks that their peers were not even aware of. This pointed to the necessity of how to educate the larger society on the ramifications of unconscious bias on Asian students. This also points out how the biased or stereotyped environment can be detrimental to people, especially minority students. While moving from home to college opened a wider door for most participants to negotiate themselves, the relative white state and white university posed more burdens on them for being minorities, as revealed in Ava’s experience during audition, which was discussed in chapter 5. This reflects the deep-seated racism of white privilege prevalent in the American society (Tatum, 1997). This
also further confirmed what Bush (2011) argued about the prevalence of whiteness in people’s everyday lives. The fact that this incident happened at a higher education institution, which was supposed to be a front runner of social justice, was even more alarming. Stacy Lee (2005) has studied the perpetuation of whiteness in high school settings and how it influenced Hmong American students’ ethnic/racial identity. My research illuminates the positive effects of higher education in minority students’ ethnicity development, but also indicates the effect of the dominant whiteness in shaping minority students’ identity development. Future research needs to investigate higher education constructively to unravel how whiteness is produced/reproduced in minority students’ identity construction.

All the participants have reported being asked multiple times the “famous question” on campus by their white peers “Where are you from?” This assumed foreign status unless they proved otherwise created a lot of psychological anxieties for them. When these “trivial” inquiries become routine in their lives, systemic racism surfaces. This constant assault can be detrimental to students because it deprives them of claiming their identity. Instead, their “foreigner identity” is repeatedly imposed by these inquiries (E. Lee, 2015; Tuan, 1998). Going back to how Chinese Americans are to be seen, my research has demonstrated that participants all considered themselves American citizens. They are Americans who embrace their ethnic culture. Embracing one’s heritage culture does not contradict one’s citizenship. This was also supported by the previous research that Chinese Americans are “committed citizens with a cultural heritage” and that they are experiencing a form of “multicultural citizenship” (Rosaldo, 1989) with feet in two
cultures but citizenship rooted in one national state (Wong, 2006). Therefore, there is “no divided loyalty” (Wong, 2013 p.306).

The recognition that they are “committed citizens with a cultural heritage” (Rosaldo, 1989) and not filial “daughters and sons of Chinese nation” (Zhao, 2018), needs to be recognized by the Chinese public. While the Chinese government and its general public continue to impose this rhetoric on people of Chinese descent, my research found that Chinese American college students did not accept that calling. China is only their heritage country; it was where their parents or grandparents were from. It is not their country and they refused to identify with China politically, but only culturally.

This misunderstanding between the people of Chinese descent and people in China also illustrated the urgent need for higher education to distinguish the differences within groups and to develop programs to address their unique needs. As Stewart (2015) wrote, “Higher education administrators should study relationship within racial groups, not just between racial groups” (p. 255). This is especially true for Asians, as more Asian international students are studying in the American higher institutions. The inability of higher education to recognize the differences among these students and to address the needs of Asian American students and Asian international students separately can seriously influence students’ academic success and sense of belonging.

7.5 Implications on Gender Difference

With three male participants and ten female participants, this research did not find a definitive gender difference in ethnicity development among participants. However, this research did point to female minority students’ greater passion for their heritage than male participants. During the years of this research, from 2014-2018, altogether seven
male Chinese American students enrolled in the Chinese language class, none of whom declared Chinese as their major nor minor. All of these young men studied their heritage to satisfy the foreign language requirements in college. Of the sixteen Chinese American young women who took the Chinese language class, a large portion of them majored/minored in Chinese. In addition, for students from the same household, the young women more commonly chose to study Chinese whereas their brothers showed no interest in the language class. This suggests a different attitude between male and female Chinese American college students towards their heritage. This echoes previous research on gender difference in embracing ethnic identity such as Nguyen et al., (2015) and Surez-Orozco and Qin (2006).

Furthermore, this research found gender differences in roles and expectations imposed on female Chinese American students compared to that on male students. Parents practiced different parenting styles towards their sons and daughters: girls were expected to do more housework; girls experienced restrictions in terms of dating; girls were expected to pass their heritage language to their children. These different parenting strategies indirectly shaped how female students constructed who they were at an early age. Thus, gender identity became salient for female participants. This was in line with Bem’s gender schema theory (1981) in that the daily family practices at home reinforced the gender role culturally. This was not only true in Asian families but also in Latino families (Umaña-Taylor and Guimond, 2010).

7.6 Implication on Student Identity Theory

This research supported the environmental influence on identity development for college students, proposed by Chickering (1969). Participants’ understanding of who they
were changed dramatically from home to college. The various campus environments indeed affected how they viewed themselves. However, their agency in constructing their ethnic identity was even more important. Participants revealed their numerous struggles and reflections concerning their being ethnic Chinese among their peers and came to negotiate actively for who they were. They were not passively accepting society’s labelling; on the contrary, they sought vigorously to explore and developed a hybrid identity that was unique to them. Once again, though college was embraced by student identity theorists to be an important period for student’s identity exploration, in the case of Chinese American college students’ ethnic identity negotiation, more research is needed to investigate whether higher education continues to produce and reproduce the hegemonic whiteness that might hinder Chinese American students’ sense of belonging.

In addition, echoing Steele’s (2010) research on stereotype threat from which he coined the term identity threat, Chinese American college students in this study reported various negative stereotypes, such as social awkwardness, female exoticism, and the negative consequences of being labeled “model minority.” This research has demonstrated how these stereotypes influenced their struggles to negotiate their ethnicity and how they chose to socialize with their peers.

Furthermore, the white institution they attended provided cues that mattered in how Chinese American students perceive themselves. The various cues presented in their higher education institution included the degree of the setting’s inclusiveness, whether powerful people in a setting share their identity, and whether the cues signal prejudice (Steele, 2010, p. 141). As Steele (2010) articulated,
Places like classrooms, university campuses, standardized-testing rooms, or competitive-running tracks, though seemingly the same for everybody, are, in fact, different places for different people. Depending on their group identity, different people would simply have different things to contend with in these places—different stereotype threats, different ambiguities about how to interpret their experience, different goals and preoccupations (p. 60).

Focusing on Chinese American college students’ ethnicity negotiation, my research demonstrated how the stereotypes within the society including on the higher education campus influenced their understanding of who they were. However, Chinese American college students in this research also demonstrated their agency in negotiating their identities against the hegemonic whiteness and Chineseness in defining who they were. They did not just passively accept the social norms used to define them. On the contrary, they analytically engaged in these discourses, conditioned by their own cultural, political, geographical and economical situations. This constant negotiations with social norms allowed them to achieve a maturing understanding of who they were.
Appendix A

What is Chineseness in Chinese American College Students’ Eyes? A Study on Heritage Language Learning and Ethnic Identity Formation

To be involved in a study about language learning and identity development

Are you over 18 years old?
Have you ever taken Chinese class at University of Kentucky?
Do you have at least parent who is of Chinese descent?

If you answered YES to all of the questions above, you are eligible to participant a study about language learning and identity formation.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between language learning experience and college students’ perception of their ethnic identity.

This study will be conducted at University of Kentucky, KY and your participation in this study will be confidential.

If you are interested, please contact Yan Wang at yan.wang80@uky.edu for more information.
Appendix B

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

What is Chineseness in Chinese American College Students’ Eyes? A Study on Heritage Language Learning and Ethnic Identity Formation

You are being invited to take part in a research study about heritage language learning and ethnic identity formation. You are being invited to take part in this research study because one or both of your parents are of Chinese descent and you are enrolled in a Chinese class at University of Kentucky. You must be over 18 in order to participate in this study. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about seven people to do so.

By doing this study, we hope to learn about college students’ ethnic identity formation in relation to their heritage language learning.

The person in charge of this study is Yan Wang of University of Kentucky Department of Educational Policy Studies & Evaluation. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Beth Goldstein. There may be other people on the research team assisting at different times during the study.

The research will be conducted at the University of Kentucky. You will be asked to participate in 2-3 interviews during the next 2 years. The interviews will take place at the researcher’s office at University of Kentucky or any quiet place of your convenience. Each of those interview visits will take about 1 hour. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 2-5 hours over the next 2 years.

During the interviews, you will be asked to discuss your heritage language learning experiences and your experiences of ethnicity growing up in the US. After the initial interview, the researcher may ask to conduct a follow-up interview with you. The researcher may also ask to conduct an interview either with your close friend (introduced by you) or a family member. If possible, the researcher will go to your Chinese language class to observe its regular classroom practice.

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

There is no guarantee that you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. However, some people have experienced a stronger motivation in continuing to learn their heritage language when sharing their learning experience with an outsider. Your willingness to take part, however, may, in the future, help society as a whole better understand this research topic.

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights
you had before volunteering. As a student, if you decide not to take part in this study, your choice will have no effect on your academic status or grade in the class.

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

There are no costs associated with taking part in the study.

You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

This study is anonymous. That means that no one, not even members of the research team, will know that the information you give came from you. In addition, the results of the study will be confidential.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. All interviews will be audiotaped by a hand-held recorder (no internet function). The audio recording will be immediately transferred to a password-secured computer, and the original audio recording will be removed from the recorder. Encryption and firewall will be installed in the password-secured computer to protect the confidentiality of the Interview transcripts. The printed interview transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet; only the investigator has access to it. The principal investigator’s advisor may access the data as appropriate. Data will be kept for seven years following completion of the research.

We will keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. However, there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, when the research is published, the information provided by you will be shown to the public. Also, we may be required to show information which identifies you to people who need to be sure we have done the research correctly; these would be people from such organizations as the University of Kentucky.

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

There is a possibility that the data collected from you may be shared with other investigators in the future. If that is the case the data will not contain information that can identify you unless you give your consent or the UK Institutional Review Board (IRB) approves the research. The IRB is a committee that reviews ethical issues,
according to federal, state and local regulations on research with human subjects, to make sure the study complies with these before approval of a research study is issued.

Do you give your permission to be contacted in the future by Yan Wang regarding your willingness to participate in future research studies about heritage language learning and ethnic identity formation?

☐ Yes     ☐ No     _______Initials

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, Yan Wang at yan.wang80@uky.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the staff in the Office of Research Integrity at the University of Kentucky between the business hours of 8am and 5pm EST, Mon-Fri. at 859-257-9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428. We will give you a signed copy of this consent form to take with you.

_________________________________________   ____________
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study          Date

_________________________________________
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

______________________________________                                 _______
Name of (authorized) person obtaining informed consent          Date


Appendix C

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

What is Chineseness in Chinese American College Students’ Eyes? A Study on Heritage Language Learning and Ethnic Identity Formation

You are being invited to take part in a research study about heritage language learning and ethnic identity formation. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are a relative or friend of someone who is studying Chinese and is already a participant in this study. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about fifteen people to do so.

By doing this study, we hope to learn about college students’ ethnic identity formation in relation to their heritage language learning.

The person in charge of this study is Yan Wang of University of Kentucky Department of Educational Policy Studies & Evaluation. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Beth Goldstein. There may be other people on the research team assisting at different times during the study.

The research will be conducted at the University of Kentucky. You will be asked to participate in 2-3 interviews during the next 2 years. The interviews will take place at the researcher’s office at University of Kentucky or any quiet place of your convenience. Each of those interview visits will take about 1 hour. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 2-5 hours over the next 2 years.

During the interviews, you will be asked to discuss your friend/child’s heritage language learning experiences and your socialization with them about their experiences of ethnicity growing up in the US. After the initial interview, the researcher may ask to conduct a follow-up interview with you.

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

There is no guarantee that you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. Your willingness to take part, however, may, in the future, help society as a whole better understand this research topic.

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering. As a student, if you decide not to take part in this study, your choice will have no effect on your academic status or grade in the class.

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.
There are no costs associated with taking part in the study.
You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

This study is anonymous. That means that no one, not even members of the research team, will know that the information you give came from you. In addition, the results of the study will be confidential.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private. The results of this study will be confidential.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. All interviews will be audiotaped by a hand-held recorder (no internet function). The audio recording will be immediately transferred to a password-secured computer, and the original audio recording will be removed from the recorder. Encryption and firewall will be installed in the password-secured computer to protect the confidentiality of the Interview transcripts. The printed interview transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet; only the investigator has access to it. The principal investigator’s advisor may access the data as appropriate. Data will be kept for seven years following completion of the research.

We will keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. However, there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, when the research is published, the information provided by you will be shown to the public. Also, we may be required to show information which identifies you to people who need to be sure we have done the research correctly; these would be people from such organizations as the University of Kentucky.

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

There is a possibility that the data collected from you may be shared with other investigators in the future. If that is the case the data will not contain information that can identify you unless you give your consent or the UK Institutional Review Board (IRB) approves the research. The IRB is a committee that reviews ethical issues, according to federal, state and local regulations on research with human subjects, to make sure the study complies with these before approval of a research study is issued.
Do you give your permission to be contacted in the future by Yan Wang regarding your willingness to participate in future research studies about heritage language learning and ethnic identity formation?

☐ Yes    ☐ No    ___________Initials

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, Yan Wang at yan.wang80@uky.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the staff in the Office of Research Integrity at the University of Kentucky between the business hours of 8am and 5pm EST, Mon-Fri. at 859-257-9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428. We will give you a signed copy of this consent form to take with you.

_________________________________________   ____________
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study          Date

_________________________________________  
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

_________________________________________   ____________
Name of (authorized) person obtaining informed consent          Date

参与科研项目知情同意书

华裔中国大学生眼中的中国性:一项关于汉语语言学习和种族身份的研究

您被邀请参加一个有关汉语语言学习和种族身份形成的研究，因为您的孩子或者您的朋友参与本次科学研究。如果您愿意参加这个科研项目，您将会是十五个参与者的其中一位。

通过本次科研项目，我们希望探索出大学生的种族身份发展和学习自己种族语言的关系。

本次科研项目的负责人是肯塔基大学教育政策与评估学院的在读博士研究生王艳。此次研究在王艳的导师 Dr. Beth Goldstein 的指导下进行。参与此项研究的有可能有其他人员。
本次研究主要是在肯塔基大学进行。在未来的两年内，会对您进行 2-3 次采访，每次采访大概一个小时。因此，您参与本次研究大约一共需要 2-5 个小时。采访地点可以在研究者在肯塔基大学的办公室或者在您方便的安静的地方。

采访的问题主要集中于您的孩子或者朋友学习自己种族语言的经历，和你们之间的有关于种族身份主题的交往经历。每次采访之后，研究者有可能会再次和您联系进行跟踪采访。

根据我们的了解，参与本次科研项目不会对您的生活带来风险。

参与本次科研项目也不能确保您会受益。如果您愿意参与此次科研项目，在未来会帮助社会更好地理解本次研究课题。

如果您参与此次研究，那是基于您的意愿。如果你不愿意参与，也不会对您的生活造成影响。您可以在任何时间决定退出此次研究，而不会对您造成影响。如果您是学生，您决定是否参与本次研究也不会对您的学习或者成绩造成影响。

如果您不愿意参与本次研究，您没有别的选择，只有不参与本次研究。

参与本次研究没有费用。

参与本次研究也没有礼物或者金钱收入。

您是匿名参与本次研究。也就是说任何人，包括科研小组的成员都不会知道您提供的信息来源于您。科研的结果也是保密的。

您提供的信息和其他参与者提供的信息会被整合在一起撰写科研论文。您的个人信息不会泄露。我们会发表科研结果，但是我们不会泄露您的个人信息。

我们会尽最大的可能的确保科研小组成员之外的任何人不会得知您参与此次科研或者得知您向我们提供的信息。所有的采访都会被一个便携录音笔录音（没有联网功能）。采访录音会在第一时间存入一个有密码保护的电脑中，在录音笔中的原始录音将会立即被删除。电脑会安装防火墙和编码以保证数据的安全。打印出来的采访稿会被锁在文件柜中。只有科研人员才能有权限打开文件柜。科研人员的导师在特定情况下有可能有权对数据进行查阅。数据将会在研究进行完毕之后被保存七年。

我们会遵循法律保护您的私人信息不被泄露。但是在有些情形下，我们无力完全保护。例如，当我们发表此次研究成果的时候，您提供的信息会被大众知晓。当我们被有关机构要求证实研究进展的正确性时，我们可能会展示您提供的信息。这些应该是来自诸如肯塔基大学之类的机构。

如果您参与此次研究，您有权利在任何时候退出研究。科研人员不会区别对待退出与不退出的参与者。
在未来，我们有可能会和其他的研究者分享您提供的信息。如果这种情况发生，我们所分享的信息将不会包括任何您的个人信息，除非得到您的允许，或者肯塔基大学机构审查委员会通过。机构审查委员会根据联邦法律及州法律对从事人类研究的研究项目审查种族问题，以确保研究遵从法律的要求。

您是否愿意继续参与王艳负责的关于语言学习和种族身份的进一步研究？

☐ 是  ☐ 否_________名字的首字母缩写

在您决定参与本次研究之前，请提出任何您有疑虑的问题。以后，若您有问题，建议，或者担心，抱怨，您可以直接和研究人员王艳通过邮件联系，yan.wang80@uky.edu. 或者和肯塔基大学机构审查委员会的工作人员联系。他们的联系方式是东部时区周一到周五上午八点到下午五点。电话 859-257-9428 或者免费致电电话 1-866-400-9428. 我们将请您保存一份签过名的知情同意书。

________________________________________
参与者签名
时间

________________________________________
参与者规范书写签名
时间

________________________________________
研究者签名
时间
Appendix D

Interview Protocol for primary participants

1. What is your experience of learning Mandarin or your Chinese dialect?
   --when did it start?
   --how did you learn Chinese?
   --what is the motivation to learn Chinese?
   --Who else uses Chinese in your family and with whom? When do you use and
   with whom in your family? (spoken and/or written)
   --Describe when else you use Chinese outside of your formal learning experience.

2. Introduction
   American society is considered as either a melting pot, where people from
different backgrounds assimilate into the society or a salad bowel, where people
keep themselves ethnically distinct. Given that one of your parents is from China,

   How does your family fit into this picture?
   How is your family different from other American families culturally?
   --Do you have any symbolic Chinese elements in your family?
      Material culture decoration in the home, furniture, layout, painting, words, etc.
   --When you are not with your family, what are the ways in which Chinese culture
   is part of your daily or seasonal life?
   How do you celebrate Chinese festivals? --Who is in your family’s circle of
   friends? How do they communicate with each other?

3. What is your friend network like? (both old friends and new friends formed in the
   university)
   --Who is your best friend? (explore ethnicity within the friendship)
   --What differences have you noticed between how you spend time with your
   American friends compared with “Chinese” friends? Ask for specific examples.
   --What differences do you perceive between your American friends and friends of
   Chinese descent? (attitudes, behavior, preferences, topics of conversation,
   language use, gender interactions, etc)

   Introduction here:
   Most American people think Asian people are the same. For example, they don’t
distinguish among Japanese, Chinese and Koreans. When people speak of Asian-
Americans, what do you think of?

4. How do you distinguish Chinese people from other Asian people?
   Given this, how do you yourself fit?
   Can you give some examples of how you express this identity?
   Can you give examples of how other people seem to define your ethnicity and
   expectations they have as a result?
Have you traveled to China? If so, discuss Chinese language and identity within that experience.

5. What is your general feeling of growing up as a Chinese American in the US? How do other people know you are a Chinese American? Do you want them to know your heritage?

6. What is your major? Why you choose that major? Do you think your ethnicity plays a role in your major choice?

7. What campus organization are you involved in? What do you do in that organization? How your being Chinese American fit into that organization?

8. Do you want people to know you have Chinese heritage? How do people tell that you have Chinese heritage? What would you do to show people that you are Chinese American?

9. What courses in relation to China/Chinese have you taken? How does that help you understand China and your ethnicity and heritage?
Appendix E

Interview protocol for friends/family members

For interviewing friends

1. You are X’s close friend, how did you get to know each other and become close?
2. How do you socialize with each other?
3. X suggested I talk with you as part of my research project on the relationship between studying heritage languages and ethnic identity. X is studying Chinese in part because of her/his personal identification with the language. Do the two of you ever discuss her/his Chinese language classes? Her/his ethnicity? If yes, can you share a story with me?
4. When you think of X, how would you describe her/his ethnicity?
5. What do you think X’s attitude toward his/her ethnic identity? Can you share a story with me?
6. Any particular story between you and X that you want to share with me?

For interviewing family members

1. Describe X’s childhood.
2. What family values are emphasized at home? What are your expectations of each family member in relation to the well-being of the family?
3. What are your family customs and practices that relate to your Chinese heritage? Give some examples.
4. How do you discuss issues related to your Chinese heritage within your family?
5. What questions has X raised regarding his/her ethnic identity? In what ways do you perceive X expressing that ethnic identity? What struggles have you perceived X having with that identity? What changes over time?
6. What do you wish for X in the future in relation to your/X’s Chinese heritage?
7. Have you ever experienced any difficulty in the US because of your Chinese heritage? If yes, please explain/give examples.

针对朋友和家人的采访问题

采访朋友的问题：

1. 你是 X 的好朋友，你们是怎么认识并且成为好朋友的？
2. 在你的眼中，X 和其他的同学有什么不同？
3. 你觉得 X 的种族身份是什么？为什么？
4. 你认为 X 对他/她的种族持有什么态度？你能和我分享一个故事来说明吗？
5. 你们平时是怎么交往的？
6. 你有没有什么特别的关于你和 X 的故事想和我分享？

采访家人的问题：

1. 作为家庭成员，你觉得你们的家庭和别的美国家庭有什么不同？
2. 你们家庭的价值观念是什么？X 的行为是否符合你们家的家庭观念？
3. 你们是怎么养育教育 X 的？
4. 你们怎么和 X 讨论关于中国的话题？
5. 你有没有注意到 X 在关于他/她自己种族身份认同上有过挣扎？
6. 你觉得 X 和她/他的同龄人有什么不同？
References


Guidroz (Eds.), *The intersectional approach: Transforming the academy through race, class, and gender.* pp. 100-117. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press,


VITA

Educational Background

Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics (Beihang University), Beijing, China

   Master of Arts in Foreign Linguistics and Applied Linguistics

Henan University, Kaifeng, China

   Bachelor of Arts

Professional Positions Held

Department of Modern and Classical Languages – University of Kentucky

   Instructor of Chinese language instructor

China University of Geosciences

   English language/culture instructor

Professional Publications


Yan Wang