CULTURING ON THE BORDERLANDS—A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY ON
TAIWANESE AND CHINESE TRANSNATIONAL PRACTICES

Hsin-I Cheng

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2006

Committee:

Alberto González, Advisor

Robert M. Buffington
Graduate Faculty Representative

Bettina Heinz

John T. Warren
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ABSTRACT

Alberto González

The U.S.-Mexico border has long been a site for cultural intermix and struggles as the global territories become more connected for capital flows. Such a space has drawn researchers from various disciplines to understand the impacts of the high as well as unequal volume of traveling. This ethnography critically examines the everyday communicative activities enacted and cultural identities (per)formed by a group of Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists who arrived to the borderlands of El Paso and Juárez in the beginning of the 21st century. Rather than viewing culture as static, this research approaches it as an active creature which changes and grows through communication—traveling and dwelling on the border.

This dissertation narrates daily interactions where space such as El Paso is (re)constructed during daily interactions in relations to places of Taiwan, China, Mexico, and the United States. Moreover, these relationships are ordered hierarchically, thus places are fixed in to ranked spaces. This spatial hierarchy then serves as the logic determining which communicative activities are to be engaged in on the El Paso/ Juárez border. Drawing mainly from S. Hall, H. Bhabha, and G. Anzaldúa, cultural identities are understood as processes of hybridizations. In the midst of traveling and dwelling in between borders, my transnational friends (re)invent and (per)form various cultural activities such as Baptist rituals, festival celebrations, and language learning. Cultural identities are strategically (dis)articulated through everyday activities. Cultural values such as Confucianism and Christianity are selectively hybridized for more mobility.
DEDICATION

To my parents, 鄭成發 Chen-Fa Cheng and 陳來有 Lai-You Chen, and my brothers 鄭文逵 Wenquei Cheng, 鄭文選 Wenxuan Cheng, and my sisters-in-law 鄭嘉 Jia Cheng, and 蘇意晶 Yijin Su.

To my deceased Grandmother 陳簡阿月 who raised me and showed me the strength and bravery a woman can possess.

To all parents who struggle everyday to make better lives for the next generations.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation tells stories about relationships built through interactions. I am grateful for meeting friends who traveled from Taiwan and Chinese to El Paso, TX. In sharing their lives with me, I came to understand their daily struggles and blessings living on a foreign land as an employee, a supervisor, a father, a mother, a daughter, a son, an (im)migrant—a transnational agent.

I am forever enriched by the experience of living with the warm peoples who inhabit in El Paso, TX.

I have the deepest gratitude to my adviser, Dr. Alberto González for his continuous patience and insights into my (re)search. My great appreciation to the best dissertation committee I could ever ask for—Dr. Bettina Heinz, Dr. John Warren, and Dr. Robert Buffington, for their inspiring suggestions and encouragement on bettering myself as a researcher/human being.

A transnationalist myself, I could not have been who I am without my mentor Ms. Pauli Taylor-Boyd who made it possible for me to study in UW-Milwaukee where I dared to begin to dream. I thank Dr. K.E. Supriya who taught me the true meanings of humanity. My forever and deepest gratitude to them for introducing me to issues of justice, love, and human dignity.

I am indebted to the extraordinary friendship during my journey at Bowling Green for Omedi Ochieng, Ako Inuzuka, Thomas Fuchs, Chris Bollinger, Mike McGill, Amy Heuman, Linda Cantu, Tang Qi, Chin-Chung Chao, Yahuei Zhang, and Yuping Mao who are unfamiliar with the meaning of thriftiness when it comes to sharing support and
intellect with me. I appreciate (apologize for?) our endless conversations on issues of scholarship, human conditions, and civil societies.

My most sincere love and gratitude to my partner Darren Johnson for his great sacrifice and complete support for my dream while putting his own on-hold. Many thanks to Mr. and Ms. Thomas and Patricia Johnson, and family: Kim, Paul, Danette, Jeff and Sam for including and loving me as a family member.

My forever love and indebtedness to my parents, brothers, and sisters-in-law who not only allow but also encourage me to live, explore, and experience life. Thank you for letting me be and continue to become.

I appreciate the blog of Fu-Jen Catholic University 1998 graduates where I find energy and warmth in the process of writing and reading. YY and Kay, thank you for your love and I am grateful to grow with you.

Lastly, much longing and gratitude belongs to my hometown Taipei, Taiwan where I learned how to love, care, and be passionate about the peoples of the world.
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PREFACE

A Glance at the Research: Why Study Taiwanese and Chinese in El Paso/Juárez?

There is an emerging plethora of research pertaining to issues on the border of Mexico and United States. Studies range across a number of academic fields from sociology to ethnic studies, from anthropology to education. Academics are drawn to border regions because of the increasing amount of economic, political, social, and cultural cross-border activities due to the de-territorialized boundaries between nation-states. This widespread interest impacts and furthers scholarly understandings of culture, identity, communication, and their intersections. This study took place on the border of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua and El Paso, Texas where a growing number of Taiwanese and Chinese (im)migrants,\(^1\) recently arrived and started new lives. With the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, a treaty between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico that eliminates tariffs on products and offers easier restrictions on the mobility of business executives and professionals (Myers, 1998; *World Almanac & Book of facts*, 2006), the faces on the border have become much more diverse. Taiwan is among the Asian countries including Japan and South Korea that own *maquiladoras*—assembly factories that enjoy special duty-free status. There are 104 Taiwanese firms based in Mexico (2004, [http://www.taiwanheadlines.gov.tw/20010925/20010925p3.html](http://www.taiwanheadlines.gov.tw/20010925/20010925p3.html)) and according to “The Complete Twin Plant Guide,” as of July 2001, Taiwan was one of the top ten countries that own *maquiladoras* (2004, [http://www.mexonline.com/border/maq/htm](http://www.mexonline.com/border/maq/htm)).

Pac Tide, Inc., a Taiwan-based multinational corporation established its first *maquiladora* in Juárez, Mexico, at the turn of the 21st century. In order to ensure that

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\(^1\) The *American Heritage College Dictionary* (1993) defines *immigrant* as following: “1. A person who leaves one country to settle permanently in another, 2. A plant or an animal that establishes itself where it previously did not exist.” *Migrant* is defined as “ 1. One that moves from one region to another by chance, instinct, or plan. 2. An itinerant worker who travels from one area to another in search of work” (p. 863).
the maquiladora’s product and service meets its U.S. client’s demand, a group of Taiwanese and Chinese managers consequently traveled across the Pacific Ocean. These Taiwanese and Chinese extend their journey from Taiwan to the borderlands of El Paso, TX and Juárez where they dwell and commute on a daily basis. Their frequent traveling and living among Mexico, Taiwan, China, and the United States creates interactions in which multiple cultures are constantly intermingled, negotiated, and complicated within political-economic transnational systems. For the multiple/different experiences and ideologies that one acquires as one lives, the individual’s sense of self is constructed and constantly changes (Tanno & González, 1998). Cultural identity is therefore the product as well as tool in the process of which these Taiwanese/Chinese struggle to assert their existence on multiple borders. As Vila (2000) stated, voices and experiences of cultural groups other than those of Mexican or Anglo origins have been underrepresented in U.S.-Mexico border research. The Taiwanese and Chinese communication experiences of living and traveling between nation-states were the main focus of this study and a journey of an ethnographic inquiry including a six-month of fieldwork was launched.

Ethnography is an approach that generates knowledge from both the researchers and the researched “community.”² It requires researchers to spend an extensive amount of time with the community’s daily communicative practices to understand deep cultural meanings (Geertz, 1973) with critical reflections and dialogues upon how the knowledge is produced and engaged in. Ethnographers have

² According to Raymond Williams’s (1976) explanation of community, it usually shares a “commonality such as identity and characteristics by a group of people with a particular relationship is underscored” (p. 65-6). This study uses the term “community” in Anderson’s (1991) as well as Rouse’s (1991) sense, for its figurative and imaginative effect and does not refer to the Taiwanese/Chinese community as an intact and homogenous group whose members all share a commonality whether defined by nationality or the Chinese culture. Nor do I suggest that there is a confined and tangible boundary in which the community can be found. In fact, this study will strive to illustrate the fragments and contradictions within it as well as its shifting fluidity.
suggested that researchers need access to enter the field and many have been introduced to the community through friends, relatives, or associates (Kondo, 1991; Pacanowsky, 1988). My ticket to this community was given by my uncle who works as the Managerial Director at a maquiladora in Juárez. I moved to El Paso, Texas in August 2004 and lived in the community until February 2005. In this study, the group of Taiwanese and Chinese who travel and live in between borders of multiple nation-states and their everyday negotiations, interventions, and comprehensions of cultural identity became key elements in my inquiry.

All representations are from somewhere. Therefore, my understanding and interpretations of the ways in which the Taiwanese and Chinese perform and cultivate their identities are to be situated in terms of my perspectives toward studying culture and communication at this global conjuncture. The first chapter explains my comprehension toward the interdependent active relationships between culture, identity, space, and postcoloniality. It argues for perceiving culture as an active culturing process “as [it is] our proclivity to construct new and different meanings, understandings, and practices so as to reckon with the world’s infinite ambiguity and quantum nature that constantly destabilize extant meanings, understandings, and practices” (Rodriguez, 2002, p.1). In viewing culturing as an interactive process of understanding, communication is then the locale in which the culturing process occurs. The culturing process is a series of communicative performances.

I am interested in learning the culturing processes of the Taîwanese and Chinese transnationalists while living and traveling on the El Paso/Juárez borderlands. Moreover, I intend to understand what various cultural strategies were invented or performed while they adjust to this new environment. Therefore, I explore how Chinese communication has been investigated in scholarship to provide a context that
this research hopes to engage. Publications on Chinese communicative behaviors and philosophies provided by Chinese Communication Association are analyzed for recurrent themes. The introductory chapter ends with an explanation of my choice of critical ethnography as the methodology performed for this inquiry.

The term “contextualization” is imperative in understanding all human communication, including communication scholarship. Conquergood (1991) reminded researchers that “disciplinary authority is a matter of rhetorical strategy not scientific method” (p. 191). The main goal for the first chapter is to contextualize my theoretical and methodological perspectives. I first argue to conceptualize culture as culturing processes in which human beings are constantly forming new identities and meanings as they are surrounded in the high volume of mobility in a globalizing world. Further, in relating to major scholars within as well as outside the field of Communication Studies, I delineate my trend of thought in selecting and approaching the crucial theoretical/methodological elements for this study.

Chapter two serves to provide another layer of contextualization. That is, by juxtaposing stories of place and time, various peoples whose lives might not seem to relate at the first glance are interconnected under the ramifications of political economy. Further, I describe the development of specific research questions along with a narration on my initial (lack of) interactions with potential participants for the study through describing my own adjustment to the environment. From a general research question about the Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists’ lived experiences on the border, I arrive to more focused inquiry: (a) How is the space of El Paso perceived, understood and constructed by this group of Taiwanese and Chinese in everyday interactions, and then (b) how do they cultivate their identity in attempting to better fit into this space? To close this chapter, I discuss various
methods employed to gain information and better understanding of the members’ lives in the El Paso-Juárez border.

Chapter three details the ways in which the meanings of El Paso/Juárez constructed a discursive space in the Taiwanese and Chinese community. Conquergood (1992a) wrote the importance of unpacking how “macro forces of political economy impinge on micro realities of lived experiences” (p. 93). The ways in which these Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists attribute meanings to and subscribe understandings from their new environment is described in relation to the historical and global geo-political structures.

Chapter four provides stories of the transnationalists with various forms of capital culturing in the new environment as constant travelers. Their experiences and strategies adopted while crossing borders of nation-states as well as social and legal status are described. Chapter five narrates cultural practices and strategies being enacted in these newcomers’ dwelling in the space of El Paso-Juárez. These cultural activities performed are analyzed from Hall’s (1992, 1996a, 1996b) concept that cultural identity in this highly mobile world is performed and (re)articulated through the everyday communicative process. That is, identity formation is about “a matter of becoming and being” through communicative acts (Hegde, 1998).

In the Conclusion, I provide a summary of the critical interpretations generated and their relation to the scholarship of culture and communication, particularly that in Chinese Communication research. As Shome (1999a) wrote, intercultural communication researchers must interrogate the “issue of positionality” in the process of knowledge producing. That is, various negotiations of “her or his own privileges in relation to those she or he claims to name and to give voice to” are to be made clear (Shome, p. 173). This ethnography rests in a self-reflection. As a
critical researcher, I discuss the implications of my positionalities during the process of researching and writing.
CHAPTER ONE: STUDYING CULTURE IN THE TIME OF TRANSNATIONALISM

A Tale of Culture: From Wisdom Keeper to Interactive Player

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) described culture as something that
“denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of
inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men [sic]
communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life”
(p. 89). Philipsen (1992) explained that culture is “socially constructed and historically
transmitted…. [and] like all socially constructed inheritances, individuals do not choose
the cultures to which they are initially exposed” (p. 8). In other words, cultural meanings
are created symbolically and learned communicatively one generation after another. The
complex yet systematic order of culture is illustrated in Geertz’s famous analogy of
culture as “webs of significance” spun by man and in which “himself [sic] [is] an animal
suspended” (p. 5). Hence, the task of those who strive to understand culture is to
determine the social ground and import of these social events spun by people (Geertz,
1973, 1983). These valuable insights suggest to view culture as the deeply learned
meanings and acts instead of something autochthonous innate. As a researcher interested
in learning about cultural practices and identity negotiations in a Chinese and Taiwanese
community, I do not take any cultural knowledge or interactions for granted. Its deeply
rooted significance and power in driving people’s feelings and actions is never to be
overlooked.

Culture has been approached from various perspectives and given myriads of
definitions in intercultural communication. After WWII, research on intercultural
communication focused on translating abstract anthropological concepts to provide
utilitarian skills and facilitate agents in international arenas of business, technology development, and foreign affairs (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990; Moon, 2002). Moon researched how the understanding of culture has changed in intercultural communication scholarship. She realized that with the social issues actively discussed in the U.S. during the 1970s, culture was often defined “in terms of gender, race, and social-class identities” and cultural researchers aimed to unpack culture as “unproblematically [sic] shared” within groups based on these identifications (p. 14).

Such an understanding of culture changed with the new leadership of the U.S. and the U.K. in world politics during the 1980s. Culture became synonymous with nationality. In the wake of this mentality, intercultural communication researchers strove to provide knowledge for bettering interpersonal communication between individuals of different national backgrounds. Equating nationality and culture has drawn the attention of critical intercultural scholars who express caution about the dangerous overgeneralization of heterogeneous and complex composition of groups within any geographic confinement, as well as across the increasingly fluid boundaries of nation-states (Collier, Hegde, Lee, Nakayama & Yep, 2002; González, Houston & Chen, 2004; Lee, Chung, Hertel & Wang, 1995; Martin & Nakayama, 1999; Ono 1998; Tanno & González, 1998).

As it would be appalling to claim a cultural essence being shared and represented by all individuals within man-made national boundaries, it would be extreme to claim that no cultural realities are shared within a space. Thus, Moon (2002) proposed in viewing culture as a “contested zone,” where cultural reality is shared, contested, negotiated, and constructed with different groups struggling to protect their interests (p.
In other words, there are always some overlapping cultural realities coexisting with differences to some degree. It is a site of struggles.

When culture is understood as sites where shifting tensions are constantly present, its certainty and purity as *a priori* to any interaction is open for contestation. As the editor for the 25th volume of International and Intercultural Communication annual Collier (2003) described culture from numerous centers such as national, racial, ethnic, and gender representations and identifications; geographic locations; biological ancestries; cultural ideologies; memory and spaces; social justice movements; and Internet usage. Cultural understanding is always partial and culture can only be understood when multiple group identifications and their intersections are attended to in the research.

*Culturing* while Moving.

Culture and communication constitute one another. González, Houston, and Chen (2004) explained culture as “an idea that is creating and being recreated symbolically” and that the process of cultural creation is public because cultural meanings are publicly shared (p. 5). The idea of culture as continuously renewing itself and being renewed for and by the collective is in concordance with Said (1993), who stated that culture

… includes a refining and elevating element, [and] each society’s reservoir of the best that has been known and thought…. In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates “us” from “them,” almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that, as we see in recent “return” to culture and tradition. These “returns” accompany rigorous codes of intellectual and moral
behavior that are opposed to the permissiveness associated with such relatively liberal philosophies as multiculturalism and hybridity. (p. xiii)

Said further argued that there has been “a gathering awareness nearly everywhere of the lines between cultures” and such dividing space not only allows us to discriminate based on cultures but also enables “us to see the extent to which cultures are humanly made structures of both authority and participation, benevolent in what they include, incorporate, and validate, less benevolent in what they exclude and demote” (italics original, p. 15). Being man-made, culture does not deny its force in demarcating boundaries and hierarchies between selves and Other (Abu-Lughod, 1991). Communal solidarities, at times extreme atavism within groups and hostility against outsiders could simultaneously co-exist and be communicated in the name of cultural identifying/differentiating.

Said’s (1993) view on culture as an idea replete with possibilities to connect and divide seems to be shared in the communication field. As critical scholars Martin and Nakayama (2004) explained, culture is at times shared understandings, learned patterns, and power-laden “site of struggle for contested meanings” (p. 85). Martin and Nakayama (1999) wrote that “[c]ulture is not just a variable, nor benignly socially constructed, but a site of struggle” where “authentic” cultural meanings and dominant ideologies are fought over by various interests groups (p. 8). Thus, research that aspires to complex cultural understanding is greatly facilitated when it recognizes the competing and contradicting ways in which our cultural senses are constructed and in turn, constructing our senses of realities.
Conquergood (1989) stated that cultural research must be a process-centered way of knowing culture and in that, ethnographers should attend to the “irreducible and evanescent dynamics of social life” through listening and performing cultural meanings instead of pinning down abstract concepts (p. 83). He further encouraged researchers to view culture as, instead of a noun, an active verb by explaining that “cultures and persons are more than just created; they are creative” (1989, p. 83, 1991). Culture could then be conceptualized as never starting/stopping conversations that constantly evolve with structure and agency that humans as conversers inevitably contribute to (Rosaldo, 1989). Rosaldo valued the “processual analysis” (italics original, p. 92) for cultural research in order to comprehend the messiness and dynamic process of cultural formation replete with interplay socioeconomic inequalities, cultural differences, and political struggles.

Cultural anthropologist and critic Raymond Williams (1997) argued that all communities have some shared culture and that “culture is [in the] ordinary” instead of being possessed by the educated few and stressed the non-stop expansion of culture with new lived experiences from all socioeconomic strata (p. 5). Culture is not a fixed factor to a location (e.g., nationality, gender, race, ethnicity, class, religion); it is in constant motion as an active creature reinventing and multiplying itself through power-laden communication, particularly in the current era referred by Appadurai (1991) as “deterritorialization” culminated in colonies’ independence after WWII (p. 192).

In commenting on how culture could be understood through learning with and from “informants” as local interlocutors in the “community,” Clifford (1992) reminded cultural researchers that ethnographers are not the only travelers. Many “informants” as “natives” themselves are becoming cosmopolitan travelers with their own
“‘ethnographic’ proclivities and interesting histories of travel” (p. 97). As more individuals are becoming more mobile and including more cosmopolitan cultural views, Clifford encouraged researchers “to rethink cultures as sites of dwelling and travel, to take travel knowledges seriously” (italics original, p. 105). Traveling is conceptualized from two aspects. One is the literal movement in which travelers, some being materially privileged while others are oppressed, move (in)to cultures under “strong cultural, [historical,] political, and economic compulsions” (p. 108). They enact and interconnect different cultural lives in their leaving and returning home. Their traveling stories are complex, for each has different positionalities and motivations to travel.

Further, travel also refers to “forces that pass powerfully through—television, radio, tourists, commodities, armies” (Clifford, 1992, p. 103) to those who dwell in the local environment. In this regard, travel “denotes a range of material, spatial practices that produce knowledges, stories, traditions, comportments, music, books, dairies… and other cultural expressions” (p. 108). These two ways of conceptualizing travel may serve as a critical lens in understanding culture and identity as a dynamic process with myriads of influences due to increasing mobility and technologies.

Critical communication scholars Drzewiecka and Wong (1999) furthered Clifford’s “culture as travel” concept and proposed to view culture as culturing to emphasize its dynamic process where individuals, communities, commodities, and practices are experienced in traveling. Examining the processual culturing, which includes one’s “traveling-in-dwelling and dwelling-in-traveling” in this interconnected world, one’s understanding of culture and self may be, as Clifford (1992) wrote, “more polythetic… like a habitus, a set of practices and dispositions, parts of which could be
remembered, articulated in specific contexts” (p. 115). It is through traveling across time and space that one’s cultural views are (re)molded and (re)negotiated in quotidian lives. Such a perspective greatly facilitates in my project to map the traveling/dwelling experiences of the Taiwanese and Chinese culturing processes.

**A Tale about Modern Place: From Colonial Space Making to Post-colonial Decentering**

To unpack the process of culturing experienced through traveling/dwelling in between places, one cannot assume that geographic locations are neutral entities naturally existing without human interferences. Rather, places are bestowed with identities constructed by people in the nexuses of unequal relations. As Gupta and Ferguson (1992) stressed that

> [b]y always foregrounding the spatial distribution of hierarchical power relations, we can better understand the process whereby a space achieves a distinctive *identity* as a place. Keeping in mind that notions of locality or community refer both to a demarcated physical space *and* to clusters of interactions, we can see that the identity of a place emerges by the intersection of its specific involvement in a system of hierarchically organized spaces with its cultural construction of a community or locality. (italics original, p. 8)

Thus, the making of spaces/places is an interactive process in which power relations are always involved in the formation of spatial identities.

Modernity has been associated with the place called “the West” as historian Mitchell (2000) argued so cogently and such a connection “gives modern geography its
order, an order centered upon Europe” (p. 26). After WWII, globalization carried with its predominant forces sweeping from the “modern” nations to the others in the name of civilization and development (Bruner, 2002; Massey, 1999a; Mitchell, 2000; Verhelst, 1987). The story of globalization is (re)told from the European centered modernity and such a unidirectional story naturalizes and stabilizes the seemingly causal relations between “Modern”/time and “West”/space. The West is constructed as a temporal object as much as a spatial one (Mitchell, 2000). That is, in this singular story, modernity is designated to the place labeled as “the West/the First World,” by the West as well as for the West. The non-West is relegated to the marginal regions whose temporal and spatial movement has to follow and be defined by the “West’s uniform” (Mitchell, p.7).

The prevalent understanding of a geographical location is confined to a nation-state consistent with a linear projection of modernity, progression, and globalization (Bruner, 2002; Massey, 1999a, 1999b; McKerrow, 1998; Verhelst, 1987). Such a construct has sparked much interdisciplinary discussions from anthropology, geography, history, international relations, to communication studies (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Massey, 1992, 1995, 1999a, 1999b; Mitchell, 2000; Jandt & Tanno, 2001; Ono, 1998). Critical scholars admonish this imperative and contest the intact notion of contained, bounded, and homogenous geographic places. They assert that boundaries are always shifting. They are abrupt and polyvocal in the unequal global power nexus. As Bennett, Grossberg, and Morris (2005) explained, space and time represent “physical phenomena, social practices, and symbolic ideas” (p. 331). The dominant thought on the “natural and neutral” relations between a place/nation-state, its cultural group, and its development is in need of careful examination (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Massey, 1995, 1999a).
Geographical space is not innocent nor is it a fixed essence. Rather, it is constituted in multiple, oftentimes contradictory, cultural stories (Massey, 1992, 1995; Foucault, 1980, 1986). Mitchell (2000) pointed out that the story of modernization is preoccupied with colonial discourse that centers Europe and the United States as the start and finish of civilization. He further criticized that such an unquestioned fiction on racial, cultural, and social identities in the making of spaces appropriated various forms of exploitations on raw materials, labor forces, and creation of national debts, which lay the beginning of the modern West. In not contesting colonization and oppression in the story of modernization and globalization, the homogenous view of the West and its inferior Other maintains legitimacy and an illusion of neutrality.

In the current high volume of global interactions, the traditional center-periphery trope is no longer adequate in the current study of cultures and peoples. Rouse (1991) mapped the contradictions and displacement of Mexican community of Aguililla in Michoacán and Redwood City in California in relation to the narrative of transnational economic development (i.e., “First” versus “Third” Worlds). Rouse’s social landscape of diasporan subjectivities in the postmodern world depicted the impossibility of viewing “center/First World,” versus “periphery/Third World” as oppositional boundaries that communities are contained within. Today, extreme poverty exists in the so-called “First World” societies as elite cosmopolitans live and work in the “Third World.” In discussing transnational (im)migrations, it is imperative to view such (im)mobility as “cultural issues surrounding the mapping of otherness onto space” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992, p. 20). The questions of how spaces are (re)made into places with particular identities at particularly historical (dis)juncture are at heart of understanding cultural practices and
ideologies embodied by various communities. In my study, the Taiwanese and Chinese (im)migrants who recently arrived at the El Paso/Juárez borderland formed their community through negotiating identities that were very much influenced by the perceptions toward various places such as Taiwan, China, El Paso, and Juárez. The kinds of relationships established between these places and modernity are an influential drive in their everyday activities.

**Spatial Hierarchy Transcends Time**

In his groundbreaking work *Orientalism*, Said (1978) decontextualized the discourse of Orientalists scholarship which has been authorized and legitimized for centuries in representing the “East” without problematizing the central position of the “West.” Said commented on an important observation of Vico that “men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have made, and extend it to geography: as both geographical and cultural entities” (p. 5). The internal consistency of ideas and knowledge on the Orient, which Said called “Orientalism” as well as information on the Occident were produced by Western institutions. He wrote that “the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of complex hegemony…. [in which] the Orient was Orientalized… because it could be…made Oriental” (pp. 5-6).

Based on the Orientalism archive—institutionalized knowledge on the “East,” the identity of the place called “Europe” was created and made as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures. Such a construction of the European identity grants it the “flexible positional superiority,” (Said, 1978, p. 7) the upper hand in all relations with the Orient in producing and perpetuating more coherent
and essential traits assigned to the Orient. Unequal relations between geographic locations such as the East and the West are imaged and produced with the assistance of unequal discourse production which brings material consequences.

Said (1978) argued that the systematic research on the Orient was buffeted by a will to create geographic division between the superior West and the inferior East, which “elides the Orient’s difference with its weakness” (p. 204). Western intellects based their Eurocentric knowledge on human history according to the racist belief in “the cultural-racial categories of savagery, barbarism and civilization” (Young, 1995, p. 38). They emphasized the ahistorical interlinking between locality of a place/nation-state and its people’s culture “according to the situation of the place, the circumstances and occasions of the times, and the nature or generated character of the people” (Young, p. 38, italics original). In so doing, they on the one hand conflated culture and nation through homogenizing geographical location, race, tradition, and language usage. On the other hand, they labeled themselves as cultural developers for cultivating and civilizing the Other, their antithesis, in different regions of the world “within a linear, hierarchical, progressivist notion of [culture or] civilization” (Young, p. 46).

Today, people travel between different geographical locations that remain positioned in unbalanced power relations politically, economically, culturally, morally, and intellectually. The colonial relations imbued with unequal exchange demand to be the foreground in all representations at both individual and institutional levels. For example, a British trader’s accounts of Egypt were under sheer lopsided power-relations in which his visit was to “one of the British colonies” instead of simply to “Egypt” (Said, 1978).
The discourse of Orientalism impacts people from both the West and East. One consequence of this impact is the production of Orientalists as native informants who often received education in the United States and continue to disseminate Orientalism in the service of the Western mainstream ideology based on Modernity, Progress, and Civilization. As Said (1978) wrote, the pervasive cultural dominance of the West is interlinked with sheer economic repression and Oriental consent. Such a phenomenon is revealed in the lack of research on the imperial dominance itself as well as the astonishing phenomenon of standardized cultural tastes for the booming consumerism in the East. In other words, “the modern Orient, in short, participates in its own Orientalizing” (p. 325).

Further, the oppositional values designated to the West and East remain at work even in the early part of the 21st century. JanMohamed (1985) illustrated how the Manichean allegory is enacted in colonial writings to create oppositional stereotypes. European colonizers/master are given positive traits (i.e., civilized, intelligent, moral, rational) while their colonized/slaves as the Other are their antithesis (i.e., fecund, emotional, backwards, evil). These conflated characters are stabilized. With Manichean allegory at work, groups in unbalanced power relations are posted in hierarchically opposite spaces out of economic and political motives. The product of social and cultural differences is presented as characteristics naturally inherent to their race.

Henry Gates (1990) provided an example of Alexander Crummell who reproduced the hierarchical values by enacting the Manichean allegory as a subjugated minority to the Western humanist discursive practices. As a pioneering nineteenth-century pan-Africanist, Grummell marked the black vernacular as inferior to the civilized
Anglo-Saxon languages for lacking cultural and moral “ideas of Justice, Law, Human Rights, and Governmental Order…. which regulate the lives of Christians” (as cited in Gates, p. 78). He proposed for Africans to master the “civilized” language as the only way to prove themselves as also beings of the human race. Grummell’s belief attests to the scope and depth of Orientalism that Said (1978) examined and criticized.

Cultural differences are produced and maintained in unequal power relations as spaces and places are. Spaces such as nation-states are made and organized hierarchically through historical agency within the parameter of unbalanced power relations (Wiley, 2004). They are imagined, contested, and enforced through processes in which various socio-political structures are implicated. In the de-territorialized (or globalized) age, the ways in which people “confound or reinforce the established spatial orders either through physical movement or through their own conceptual and political acts of re-imagination” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992, p. 17) are central for any research on people’s dynamic culturing, identifying, and communicating processes. Legacy of colonialism remains its effects on all human relations at present time. Specifically, Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists inhabited on the border of El Paso and Juárez formed various relationships through their traveling under the parameter of colonial and imperial power nexuses.

(Post)coloniality Meets Transnationalism: Dispersed Groups with Diverse Stories

Said (1978; 1993) has demonstrated how colonialism was largely a political and cultural project of control that produced unequal cultural knowledge and relations of colonial power on its conquest as antithesis opposites. According to American Heritage College Dictionary 3rd edition (1993) “Colonialism” is defined as “A policy by which a
nation maintains or extends its control over foreign dependencies” (p. 275). Bennett, Grossberg, and Morris (2005) explained that the term “colonialism” refers to the ways in which Western including European states as well as Japan inexorably exercised their “military, economic, and political forms of power based on a host of cultural technologies” to dominate and rule political entities often in Asian and African territories (p. 43). Conceptualizing colonialism from these explanations, the classical form where one nation’s peoples, culture, economics, and politic-social systems under centralized control seems to no longer exist.

After movements of de-colonialization in the twentieth century, the term “post-colonial” was adopted to describe the current world condition in which classic colonialism is no longer legitimate. However, some cultural critics and scholars argued for the remaining prevalence of internal colonizing conditions where marginalized groups with marked identities such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, class, and sexuality remained disadvantaged and subjugated to the majority ruling group within nation-states (Anzaldúa, 1990; hooks, 1984; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983; Trinh, 1989). Further, the term “post-colonialism” may overlook many forms of cultural imperialism and dominance, aggregated and deepened by new technologies and communicative media in today’s world. The legacy of colonialism such as imperial knowledge (e.g., Orientalism and Manichean allegory) and socio-political, economical, and cultural practices carries significant impact on the relationships between the former colonized and colonial nations to this day.

With the view of colonial and post-colonial conditions as temporally and spatially fluid, overlapping, and impossible to be divided into two separate eras/areas in mind, I
employed the term “post-colonial” in this research to describe the world’s condition penetrated by globalization. That is, the inequities experienced and lived by the former subjugated peoples due to colonization are not to be erased or forgotten with the term of “post-colonial era” even though former geographic boundaries have been (re)drawn. Many of these unequal power relations are corporally experienced to this day in the world replete with movements and interactions in particular directions and patterns (e.g., the South moves toward North; capital holders employ cheap laborers; elites move from former colonized nations to metropolis centers).

Transnational Practices and Global Communication

Bennett, Grossberg, and Morris (2005) explained that there have always been interactions and social systems extending its influence in other parts of the world prior to the 20th century as anthropologist Chee (2005) pointed out that Chinese transnational families and global contacts had long begun centuries ago. However, it was not until the mid-20th century where globalization was made into a topic of government policy promoting a free and deregulated market; limited governmental provision in social affairs; and virtually no interference in transnational corporations under discourse of neo-liberal capitalism (Bennett, et al.; Ong, 2005). Such an encouragement on consumerism creates constant transnational flows of people, ideologies, cultural goods, practices, and commodities where the nation-state territories became de-territorialized, which may be viewed as “an interdependent world marked by borrowing and lending across porous national and cultural boundaries that are saturated with [communication as well as] inequality, power, and domination [imposed on regulating certain bodies/products]”
Borderlands such as that of El Paso/Juárez became a preeminent milieu demonstrating Appadurai’s (1990) theory on the “global cultural flow” (p. 6).

Appadurai (1990) used five “scapes”—ethnoscape, technoscape, finanscape, ideoscape, and mediascape to capture the mobility and fluidity of global interactive relationships. These relationships cannot be taken as neutrally given as Appadurai explained; rather, they need to be understood in the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness where multiple actors such as nation-states, multinational institutes, and diasporic communities are at constant motion and interaction. Under the de-territorialized era in which capital shifts in international terrain, technology produces new consumer needs, and governmental policies on regulating bodies change rapidly; the traditional transcendental nation-state boundaries and identities provide little help in comprehending the governmental strategies or in people’s “exaggerated and intensified sense of criticism” (Appadurai, 1991, p. 193) generated from conditions such as labor populations move to the lower-class sectors of relatively wealthy societies. The Taiwanese and Chinese newcomers to the El Paso/Juárez borderlands are one of those whose relocation corresponds to these movements.

Since the traditional analytical lens of fixated nation-states is no longer adequate in the current global relationships where the local-global nexus is interconnected and hybridized in the process of “glocalization” as Bennett, Grossberg, and Morris (2005) phrased (p. 149). At a time when the power of geographic confinement decreases, it is imperative to connect the (post)colonial experiences to the current transnational practices when communicative acts such as identity formation and culturing process are mapped and unpacked, for no persons or places exist in a vacuum with no attached meanings. As
Grossberg (1993) pointed out, communication cannot be understood as something transcendental. Rather, it is a continuous negotiation with struggles in which communicative actors are subjugated to the larger structures of temporality and territoriality while at the same time creating meanings for their realities, particularly for this ever-changing and increasingly complicated world.

Diasporic Groups in the Era of Transnationalism

Globalization as lived experiences is “a process [italics added] of negotiation [or] hybridization” (Bennett, Grossberg & Morris, 2005, p. 149) through transnational contacts. High-volume flows of people, commodities, and technology create intermixing cultural ideologies, practices, and diasporic communities. Diaspora originally refers to the specific Jewish experiences as an exiled, dispersed people longing for a homeland to return (Clifford, 1994; Cohen, 1997; Safran, 1991). Being forced to leave their home nation, diasporic groups experienced isolation and alienation in the host society by which they felt they cannot be fully accepted (Safran, 1991).

Diasporic groups commit to keep their original homeland safe and prosperous while maintaining cultural practices and values in the host nation. As Drezewiecka and Halualani (2002) pointed out,

[d]eterritorialized dispersed groups carry with them practices and memories that mix and fuse with, or contest, new local ways of life. When dispersed but differentiating and changing groups maintain their identification through established cultural, ethnic, and national labels, the referents of these labels are not uniform but fluid and heterogeneous. Thus, diasporas participate in translocal and dynamic processes of cultural
recreation and reinvention. Simultaneously, however, the turning towards
the diaspora reinforces the nation-state as principal political and cultural
units. (pp. 346-7)

Thus, diasporic groups are positioned in between the “triangular relationship” among “the
diaspora, the homeland, and the host society” (Safran, 1991, p. 92). They are
simultaneously present in more than one space and time in which the cultural practices,
identities, ideologies, and capital flows are intricately connected and transfigured.
Through being “here” as well as “there,” diasporan subjectivities are always in the
making and remaking as Hall (1996a) asserted “[d]iaspora identities are those which are
constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and
difference” (p. 120). Diasporic groups often challenge the idea of a fixed and
essentialized subjectivity via traveling back and forth in between multiple fragmented
worlds while at the same time, they may strive to maintain or reinforce the “authentic”
cultural traditions.

As new generations and groups arriving at the host land, diasporic groups face
new dilemmas in negotiating the “authentic” way of being and living to maintain their
cultural traditions and that of the practices in the host nation in order to be accepted.
Wong (2004) unpacked the complexity and heterogeneous cultural, socio-economical and
political agendas played out in the group (self)-identified as “Chinese Americans.” That
is, the assumed Confucius practices and beliefs were preserved by the older generation of
Chinese immigrants in the United States while less embodied by some of the wealthier
new comers as cosmopolitans from metropolises in Asia. Hegde (2004) delineated
“hybridization of cultural forms” practiced by diasporic groups from India performing
rituals such as religious ceremonies or wedding celebrations in U.S. cities (p.156).

Diasporic identity is not a position of disadvantage where dislocated groups are stuck in either one of the identifications (i.e., homeland vs. host society), particularly after generations of disperse, forced or volunteered alike. As Gilroy’s (1993) example of the Black Atlantic diasporic experiences demonstrated how through rooting and routing African cultural practices and identifications are in constant transformation and renewal. The multiple meanings of being black creolized and hybridized as a myriad of experiences beyond geographical boundaries within the interconnected historical conditions of the “African Diaspora” represented in the dynamic cultural expressions in art, music, language, and traditions.

**Chinese Diasporic Groups in the U.S. under Transnationalism**

In such a “glocalized” condition, numerous groups migrate (emigrate and immigrate) to other geographic locations from their homeland voluntarily as business expatriates, students, or travelers (Bennett, Grossberg & Morris, 2005, p. 149). Others left under political, or economical forces such as migrant agricultural workers, political refugees, or exiles. The Chinese have been perceived as one of the classic examples of diaspora (Bennett et al., 2005; Clifford, 1994; Cohen, 1997; Safran, 1991) as Cohen identified it as a trade diaspora. Throughout history, numerous Chinese were forced to flee the Mainland China at different historical moments due to desperate famines or wars. Working in harsh conditions either as railroad workers in the U.S. or agricultural labors in Hawaiian plantations, many were able to return at some point in time yet chose to stay in the host nation as many Jewish people did in Russia after the establishment of the state of Israel (Clifford, 1994; Safran, 1991). Pending on the policies of immigration, these
groups may start to bring their kin to join them in the host nation such as Chinese and Taiwanese immigrants in the United States.

After the 1965 Act, which eliminated the 1924 quota system applied to Asian immigrants in the U.S., more skilled workers and professionals were allowed to immigrate to the U.S. under such a “preference system… [which increased the] duality of Chinese immigrants” (Chee, 2005, p. 41). Between 1984 and 1994, there were 614,711 immigrants coming from Taiwan (23.6%), Hong Kong (13.9%), and China (62.3%) to the United States. In the fiscal year of 1994, the amount of immigrants admitted for occupation-related reasons was from Taiwan, Hong Kong and China was 71,748. More than half of whom were in professional, specialty, technical, executive, or administrative/managerial jobs, with the percentages being Taiwan (73.6%), Hong Kong (60.19%), and China (47.79%) respectively (Ng, 1998).

Clifford (1994) proposed a more inclusive definition for diasporia that is “traveling or hybridizing in new global conditions” in addition to those being exiled (p. 306). While I agree with Clifford’s call for inclusion, I deploy the term transnationalists or transnational groups in referring to the recent Taiwanese and Chinese professionals and their family members who chose to move to the U.S., more specifically the El Paso-Juárez borderland for bettering their lives with mobility and various types of capital. This is not to exclude them from being among the diasporic who are “travelling or hybridizing in the new global conditions,” nor to erase the alienation many diasporic exiles had experienced in the host society. Further, the term “transnationalists” recognizes the frequent connections they retain with their homeland via technologies such as the telephone, fax machine, and new media. My usage of the term is a conscious choice to
appreciate the complexity of diasporic experiences particularly in current global conditions. Unlike their ancestors who traveled with scarce options, the Taiwanese and Chinese as agents and travelers in the late 20th century often choose to do so with adequate amount of capital in pursuing their ideal lives. Even though many of the Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists relocated to El Paso/Juárez under the pressure of their companies or the political tensions between China and Taiwan, very few were forced to leave their home nations under extremely dire political or economical forces as many of the early Chinese immigrants.

**Identity and Transnational Border Crossing/Dwelling: Hybridity, La Mestiza Consciousness, & Articulations**

In my research, (im)migrants from both Taiwan and China struggled with making sense of who they are after arriving to the El Paso-Juárez border. Through their traveling across and living on various borders, their identities are (re)constituted and (re)negotiated. Identity invokes a sense of belongingness and sameness that excludes the different whether it is based on race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, nationality, or even particular lifestyle and tastes. It is an active process of sorting out elements for unity and coherence. Although such a perspective may easily fall into the trap of essentialism in which differences are radically homogenized and polarized, the crucial element of “points of sameness at certain time and condition” in doing identity needs to be kept in mind. As Tanno and González (1998) explained “identity is about the ‘I’ and the ‘we.’ It is about the rituals and rules, the idioms and ideologies, and the languages and experiences of the multiple ‘I’s’ and ‘we’s.’ Such is the complexity and the richness of identity” (p. 3).
Through active communicative practices, the relation with collective individuals for a sense of belongingness is continuously negotiated and culminated.

Cultural critic Stuart Hall (1992, 1996a, 1996b) conceptualized identities as positions being constantly disarticulated, articulated, and rearticulated. Such an understanding would avoid the pitfall of reducing the complexity of cultural identities formation to essentially fixated social positions such as one’s class or religion. The concept of articulation facilitates the understanding of identities as ideologies being strategically connected with various social forces at certain historical moments for the interests of the particular groups. Our identities are the constant process of (non)necessary (dis)articulations through positioning ourselves under different historical-social forces.

As Hall (1996a) wrote, “[c]ultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning [italics added]” (p. 113). This process of positioning is crucial in Hall’s theory of articulation as Slack (1996) explained how “articulation is not just a thing (not just a connection) but a process of creating connections [italics added]” (p. 114). The seemingly unified identity is not the connection between two different elements. Rather, it is the continuous strategic linking with and separating from certain ideologies and practices under particular social forces. Hall (1996a) illustrated it with the concept of the “doubleness” of “is and is not” as a way of resisting the stable binary opposition of same/difference and us/them, for “at different places, times, in relation to different questions, the boundaries are re-sited” (p. 114).
Critical culture and communication scholars have approached (re)searching identity formation as something strategic, fluid, plural, intersected, contradictory, processual, and highly unstable. Collier (1998) critically traced her negotiations of academic identity. Bi-ethnic and multiple cultural identity constructions performed through daily ritual practices or interactions are to be understood through historicizing diasporic groups (Chen, 2004; Hedge, 2004; Nakayama, 2004; Wong, 2004; Yep, 2002). Lee (1998a, 1998b) deconstructed the rhetorical violence of (anti) colonial and patriarchic discourses performed on Chinese women’s bodies and naming practices as sites for asserting Chinese women’s identities. Lee, Chung, Hertel, and Wang (1995) insisted on centralizing and contextualizing historical and socio-economical differences and similarities in cross-cultural interpersonal interactions. Flores (1996) articulated how the act of reclaiming a space called home in the Chicanas movement provided this marginalized group a collective sense of belongingness. These are a few exemplars in which the complexity of identity construction is contextualized and interrogated at various sites.

Movements and contacts generate opportunities for cultural imbrications and hybridization such as consciousness of diasporic and in-betweenness (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bhabha, 1994, 1996; Hall, 1992, 1996a, 1996b; Pratt, 1991, 1992). The word “hybrid,” originated in the 19th century with strong biological and botanical associations related to fertility (Young, 1995, p. 6). As Young wrote, “[a] hybrid is a cross between two species… a mulatto: miscegenation and amalgamation…. into a mongrel breed…[a] hybrid race” (pp. 8-9, 17). It developed cultural and social meanings in the 20th century with Bakhtin’s “linguistic model of hybridity… [which] delineates the way in which
language… can be double-voiced… Hybridization is to describe the ability of one voice to ironize and unmask the other within the same utterance” (Young, pp. 20-1). That is, words frequently belong to two languages, two belief systems, two meanings, two accents, and two contradictories as hybrids that are ambiguous, subversive, and conflicting. Further, all languages will eventually mix with other ones and merge into something new as an “organic hybridity” (Young, p. 21). Languages as intentionally and unintentionally hybrids provide agency to uncover the unified authoritative meaning as well as to breed for creating new forms and content.

Bhabha (1996) incorporated Bakhtin’s double-voiced hybridization to describe the intermediate moments and interstices as a “space of enunciation” for negotiation between actors in unbalanced power relations (p. 58). Hybridity, according to Bhabha (1994) may be conceptualized as

a difference ‘within’, a subject that inhabits the rim of an ‘in-between’ reality. And the inscription of this borderline existence inhabits a stillness of time and a strangeness of framing that creates the discursive ‘image’ at the crossroads of history and literature, bridging the home and the world. (p. 13)

Hybridization is therefore a strategy refusing to accept the totalizing binary relations between the dominated and the dominant. Bhabha (1996) described “strategies of hybridization” as a survival means gaining the subjugated an “interstitial’ agency” to engage in a dialogue with the authoritative discourse as hybrid agents (p. 58).

With the subversive power as a camouflaged mimic man, a hybrid agent as a “subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86)
translates cultural knowledge transnationally so that cultural differences are not only recognized as equal under celebrative multiculturalism, but also genuinely respected with particular historical and temporal memory (Bhabha, 1996). The task of translation of cultures as a minority “whether assimilative or agonistic, is a complex act that generates borderline affects and identifications” and it “proposes a social subject constituted through cultural hybridization, the overdetermination of communal or group differences, the articulation of baffling alikeness and banal divergence” (Bhabha, 1996, p. 54).

Recognizing “the process of identity constituted by historically sedimentation,” Bhabha (1994) enacted hybridity as an interstitial space in which the univocal, disclosed narration is mimicked and subverted by cultural hybrids in an unbalanced power relation as the master’s double who constantly negotiates and translates the performative narratives replete with ordinary people’s quotidian resistance. Cultural hybridization is a survival, subverting, and resisting strategy when the hegemonic attempts to homogenize, harmonize, and totalize experiences are prevalent.

Thus far, cultural identification is approached as a subversive empowering tactic of translating and negotiating cultural difference through “cultural hybridization” (Bhabha, 1996, p. 54). It is also perceived as a transformative process of (dis)articulating various positionings in temporal and spatial (re)locations described in Hall’s (1996b) explanation on the Black diasporic experience which results in “the process of unsettling, recombination, hybridization, and ‘cut-and-mix’ – in short, the process of cultural diaspora-ization” (p. 447). Any attempt to discuss cultural identity therefore must be an incoherent account, for it is a partial, cultural translation of fragmentation, hybridization, and contradictions. Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) work *Borderlands La
*Frontera: The new Mestiza* offered yet another powerful theoretical and analytical lens in capturing fluid and contested identity formation processes.

Describing the scene on the U.S.-Mexican border as “*una herida abierta* [an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds,” Anzaldúa (1987) asserted the legitimacy of Chicano/as’ right to the land even under current militant patrol of the “unnatural boundary” (p. 3). The man-made U.S.- Mexico border is a space imbued with transcultural interactions under imperialistic relations. It is also a space that is “in a constant state of transition” and labeled by white Anglos as a location for the transgressed, the alien, and the outlawed. Such a space has nurtured a “new hybrid [cosmic] race [the *mestizos*] who inherited Central and South America” through intermarriages (Anzaldúa, p. 5). On their stolen land resulted in the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848, *mestizos* have since experienced hostility, discrimination, aggression, violence, exclusion, oppression, and exploitation. Anzaldúa expressed her experiences of being belittled, excluded, oppressed, exploited— Othered as a brown-skinned agent speaking in multiple languages. She thus called for the *new mestiza* consciousness in *la raza* that has survived and continues to thrive as inhabitants in at least two cultural worlds and constantly crosses boundaries as multi-tongued translators.

Border is conceptualized in Anzaldúa’s (1987) work as more than a confinement. It is where complex and sophisticated identities are intermixed and cultivated. The arbitrary division cannot separate thousands of years of shared history, culture, and memory. Nor can it deny Chicano/as or Mexitanano/as as equal and legitimate on their stolen land. Chicano/a feminists in the United States and Mexico have been reclaiming their home through artistic and political expressions as ways of performing *new mestiza*...
consciousness as Anzaldúa (1987) wrote “nothing happens in the ‘real’ world unless it first happens in the images in our heads” (p. 87; Alarcón, 1983; Flores, 1996; Gutierrez, 1999; Carrillo, 1983; Moraga, 1983; Quintanales, 1983; Rosaldo, 1989; Valerio, 1983). By remembering, reflecting, and reenacting the historical and present memories, the U.S.-Mexico borderlands serve as a space where resistance and plurality is bred to reclaim the dignity and identities of the marginalized.

As a space of multiplicity, any authentic and transparent cultural self is challenged as Rosaldo (1989) described how cultural agents on the borderlands are constantly involved in “creative processes of transculturation [which] center themselves along literal and figurative borders where the ‘person’ is crisscrossed by multiple identities” (p. 216). Borderlands are not simply a place fixed between stable unities such as nations, cultures, or societies. They are an interstitial zone of displacement and deterritorialization imbued with at times, incommensurable contradictions that shape the cultural identities of the hybridized agents. El Paso/Juárez is such a fluid space where members of the Taiwanese and Chinese community in my research experienced “processes of transculturation” where articulations between positionalities occur in various contexts for different reasons in their mundane living.

**Empowering? Co-opting? Or Both?**

The processes of identification have been examined from various perspectives to contextualize all possible hegemonic forces (e.g., colonial, imperial powers; racism; sexism; classism) driving various identity constructions of “the multiple ‘I’s’ and ‘we’s’” at different historical conjunctures (Tanno & González, 1998, p. 3). With the influence of transnational interactions or globalization, understanding how cultural identities are (not)
becoming ought to be articulated to conditions in which the relocated or dispersed groups are and the impacts of their mobility. The discussed concepts of cultural hybridizing, border crossing, and position articulating shed new light on approaching identity crafting from a historical, political, and communicative perspective. The marginalized are able to question the imperialist and colonialist notion of purity and assert their voices through subversive intermixing and interrelating to the taken-for-granted center.

No one is innocent or excluded from the machine in which power constantly regenerates itself (Foucault, 1980). It may be fair to say the same for any theoretical or analytical concepts. With recognition of the significant contributions of concepts that raise resistant forces such as Anzaldúa’s (1987) *la mestiza consciousness* on the borderlands or Bhabha’s (1994) cosmopolitan *hybridity* as the third place of talking back to the master, scholars have cautioned border studies to be aware of the risk of treating borderlands as a homogeneous space for hybrid agents while actual material effects are overlooked and romanticized by exclusively focusing on cultural blending and the empowerment of border crossing (Ahmad, 1995; Chapin, 2002; Heyman, 1994; Kraidy, 2002, 2005; Salzinger, 2002; Vila, 2002).

Scholars (Ong, 1999b; Rouse, 1991; Vila 2000, 2002) cautioned that a definite line in between the oppressed and oppressors ought not to be drawn when engaging in research on the borderlands, for such a clean and rigid division runs the risk of perpetuating forces that silence multiple voices. As Vila (2002) wrote, research on borderlands identified “a subject who is clearly and undoubtedly ‘resisting,’ [as a hybridized agent to] a structure of power that, without contradictions, is always ‘oppressing’” (p. 325). Such an absolute division, according to Vila, “makes us lose sight
of the much more complicated picture of the actual border, where people constantly move from positions of ‘resistance’ to positions of ‘oppressed’” (p. 325).

Vila’s (2000, 2002) argument revealed the other side of “border crossing,” which is “border enforcing” and directed researchers to avoid falling into the predispositions of any oppositional binary that leads to reductionism. The residents of Cd. Juárez and El Paso in Vila’s (2000) research demonstrated how their positionalities are constructed through discourses around them and are simultaneously feeding back to their own discourses. For example, the metaphor “sister cities” for Cd. Juárez and El Paso has been a hegemonic discourse that manufactures the sense of themselves and realities for both “Juarenses and El Pasoans” (Vila, 2000, p. 167). On the other hand, this metaphor is sometimes being attacked and at other times being reinforced according to whether Juarenses and El Pasoans are attempting to break away from each other. No categorical label or stand can contain a pure and stable position.

Forms of oppressive ideologies which carry concrete material consequences are practiced by all cultural groups. As a female American professor of Cuban descent, Behar (1993) in Translated Woman: Crossing the border with Esperanza’s story interpreted the implications of patriarchy being left unchallenged by Esperanza (un)consciously in her relationships with her daughter-in-law. A renowned anthropologist Kondo (1991) narrated various male-centered and class based ideologies and practices many Japanese women workers experienced. Kraidy (2005), an international/transnational communication scholar documented daily strategies that Lebanese metropolitan teenagers adopted in their hybridization of the traditional and Euro-American cultural practices. Critiques from postcolonial perspectives on interpretations from Euro-centric standpoints
that sometimes oppress various voices from the represented have been raised (Alcoff, 1991-92; Mohanty, 1994; Supriya, 2002). Such critiques demonstrate the incompleteness and ineluctable biases existing in any interpretation (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). Marxist critic Ahmad (1995) admonished researchers to be vigilant of becoming the insidious complicit by equating cosmopolitan cultural hybridity to resistance against the powerful as a default.

Without denying the possibilities of the politics of cultural hybrids and transcultural negotiation, scholars cautioned the danger of co-optation when resistance is articulated through empowering only a few elites. In addition, no ethnic or cultural group can be treated as a homogeneous entity where oppression is absent. Critical anthropologists Ong and Nonini (1997) reminded researchers “one should not assume that what is diasporic, fluid, border-crossing, or hybrid is intrinsically subversive of power structures” (p. 326). Thus, in the de-territorialized era, how and why certain negotiation and culturing processes proceed during cultural groups’ traveling and dwelling in or between borders raises more-than-ever interesting challenges in mapping identity formations (Kraidy, 2002, 2005; Steyn, 2003). Moreover, the selections of which traveling stories to tell bring yet another critical aspect to such volatile scholarship.

Vila (2000) noted the lack of research on lives of those other than the White American, Mexican Americans and/or Mexican cultural groups’ experiences of living on the Mexico-U.S. border. The trajectory of the Taiwanese and Chinese participations through interacting and culturing with this environment could add new knowledge to this burgeoning research area. More specifically, mapping the ways in which members of the Taiwanese/Chinese community as new arrivals to the El Paso-Juárez borderlands are
culturing and relocating to a complicated web of local and global relations may contribute to the deeper understanding of identity crafting and strategizing. The following discussion will first describe several aspects of how Chinese identities have been constructed in intercultural communication research. Such discussion aims to provide basic understanding of a few primary representations of the researched Chinese-ness.

**Communication Studies on Chineseness**

**Conflating Nation-States with Confucianism**

Hofstede in his groundbreaking work examined IBM in 72 countries from 1967-1973 and concluded four major cultural patterns such as power distance, individualistic versus collectivistic, feminine versus masculine culture, and uncertainty avoidance among these national cultures. Confucian dynamism was identified when he later collaborated his work with the Confucius Connection Group (Gannon, 2001a).

Following Hofstede’s work, there has been a great amount of intercultural communication research based on these findings to generate cultural protocol and rules in order to manage the anxiety and uncertainty that occurred during intercultural interactions. Nationality is usually used as the independent variable in examining the Chinese’ interactive behaviors and communication styles. China, Hong Kong and Taiwan are the three nation-states most frequently used in studies on Chinese communication. Much knowledge has been produced from exploring the salient Chinese identity and communicative patterns using surveys, open-ended questionnaires and interviews for empirical data collecting and analyses (e.g., Chen, 1995; Chen, Shaffer & Wu, 1997; Hilderbrandt, 1988; Krone, Chen, Sloan & Gallant, 1997; Krone, Chen & Xia, 1997; Krone, Garrett & Chen, 1992; Lee & Barnett, 1997; Lee & Chen, 2000; Ma, 1992). An
example would be the finding of how Chinese culture tends to be more collectivistic with a tight power structure in which indirect tactics are often adopted for managing conflicts. Such a practice may overlook how other Chinese-speaking communities such as in Singapore (77% of the population is ethnic Chinese), Malaysia (32% is Chinese), or Indonesia (5% is Chinese and they control 95% of the GNP) negotiate being Chinese within each unique historical and geopolitical context (Chua, 2003; Gannon, 2001b).

As discussed above, scholars have voiced concerns toward the usage of nationalities as a contained category to explain and even predict communication outcomes. They cautioned that such a practice could produce reductive stereotypes. Nation and dominant culture are conflated such as in constructing the coherent and essentialized meanings of Chineseness across boundaries without interrogation for specific historical/political/social/economical information in the process of cultural knowledge production. People who shared vastly different experiences within geographically bound nation-states are projected as possessing the same traits of Chineseness in the same way. Such a conflation erases other voices and experiences co-existing in or beyond the nation-state (e.g., non-Chinese ethnic groups in China; Chinese-ethnic groups in Malaysia; class, gender, age, and sexual orientation differences with a Chinese-ethnic group).

Confucianism is frequently treated as the fundamental and transcendental cultural essence in research on Chinese communication in Western studies as Lu (1994) pointed out and such a focus might overlook the other influences. Although other Chinese ancient philosophical thoughts such as Taoism, the Legalist School, and Buddhism have been incorporated in better understanding their cultural impacts on Chinese communication
(Dance, 1981; Dreher & Grump, 1952; Garrett, 1993; Lu 1993; Lu & Frank, 1993; Reynolds, 1969; Xiao, 1996), Confucianism remained to be employed as the ubiquitous value in explaining Chinese communicative styles (e.g., Chang & Halt, 1996; Chen, 1995; Chen, L., 1993; Chen & Chung, 1994; Krone, Chen & Xia, 1997; Krone et al., 1997; Krone, Garrett & Chen, 1992; Xiao, 1996; Huang, 2000). Its influence has been discussed from topics of interpersonal connections in business settings (e.g., Chang & Holt, 1996; Chen & Chung, 1994; Krone, Chen & Xia, 1997; Krone et al., 1997; Krone, Garrett & Chen, 1992; Lee & Barnett, 1997; Huang, 2000) and practicing Confucius and Taoist indirect manners to manage conflicts and interpersonal relationships (e.g., Chang, 1999; Chen, 1995; Chen, 1993; Ma, 1992). It is often employed with few specificities and/or providing whose Confucianism has been referred to as the Chinese cultural identity and practice among these studies (Lee, Chung, Hertel & Wang, 1995).

**Eastern Chineseness vs. Western Americanness**

Besides homogenizing Chineseness, the construction of “East vs. West” is often actualized in Chinese communication research where cross-cultural comparisons were conducted. The differences between “American” and “Chinese” self-disclosure patterns, discontented message expressions, conflict and management styles are some of the areas in which Chineseness is constructed as something “Other” than Americanness (Chen, 1993; Ma, 1990; Ting-Toomey, 1999). Within this oppositional trope, Chineseness is a homogeneous entity that inherits Confucianism for the most part, Taoism, the Legalist School, and Buddhism. The “West” on the other end of the spectrum, is often construed as another coherent group mutually exclusive from the Chinese. The overall assumptions of research on Chinese communication are based on the ontological differences between
the two groups, the North Americans (e.g., United States, Canada) and the Chinese (e.g., China, Hong Kong, Taiwan). Positioning groups based on oppositional spectra runs the risk of oversimplifying the complexity of human communication processes and it projects a danger of essentializing all the Americans, the Canadians, or/and the Chinese (Lee, Chung, Hertel & Wang, 1995). Such a structure inevitably creates a binary system in which Chineseness is understood by distinguishing from what it is not.

**The Masculine Chineseness**

Besides the theoretical assumptions of Chineseness construction, questions such as which groups’ experiences would be chosen for the research and to produce knowledge representing the Chineseness could be problematic to some extent. For instance, issues of adjustment to a new culture (Lee & Chen, 2000), management techniques (Chang & Holt, 1996; Chen & Chung, 1994; Hildebrandt, 1988; Krone, Chen & Xia, 1997; Krone et al., 1997; Krone, Garrett & Chen, 1992; Wang & Chang, 1999), cultural constructs of *guanxi* and self disclosure in interpersonal communication (Chang & Holt, 1997; Chen, 1995; Fong, 1998; Ma, 1992; Yum, 1988), and Chinese philosophical influences on rhetorical practices in communication (Chang, 1999; Chen, 1993; Huang, 2000; Garrett, 1993; Lu, 1993; Lu & Frank, 1993; Xiao, 1996) were those being investigated. Much of the Chinese communication research included participants such as immigrants, expatriate managers, or students attending (graduate) schools in English-speaking societies with more forms of capital.

These studies undoubtedly contributed valuable information about Chinese communicative styles, adaptation process, and cultural values. However, by not including individuals who are politically and socioeconomically deprived or neglected within these
communities simultaneously manifests a homogeneous, that is a middle/upper-class based representation of Chinese communications. Anthropologist Aihwa Ong (1999b) contended the need to critically explore the transnational Chinese identity in examining the flexibility and mobility (e.g., those who hold several passports). In so doing, the stereotypical images of either the oriental “fresh off the boat” Chinese or the well-to-do, hard working model minority are unavoidably challenged. Further, Ong (1999b) claimed that the exclusion of the poor and women in the studies of transnational cultural groups consequently erases their role in the “masculinist studies of globalization” (p.12). The privileged elites and their often male-centered locations in the global structure are to be mapped out when “an emerging global elite, mostly urban-based and interconnected in a variety of ways, is amassing great wealth and power, while more than half of humanity is left out” (Ong, p. 11).

Ong and Nonini (1997), both critical anthropologists, pointed out that the use of Confucianism in explaining the underlying Chinese identity structure is pervasive and encouraged researchers to connect these cultural values to power relations in a larger structure while examining Chinese identity construction. Ong (1999b) examined how the various Chinese diasporic groups articulate their cultural logics through agencies they select to meet their ends. For example, these groups propagated the traditional Confucian practices such as hardship as a model to accumulate capital in various Chinese societies. Such a model simultaneously opposes the Western hegemony and subjugates those who do not practice Confucianism. Ong’s focus on the cultural practices of these mobile Chinese capital holders in connection with the infrastructures of globalization illustrated another story of Chineseness under the logic of transnationalism. The ways in which
Chineseness is represented from a particular philosophical and cultural perspective such as Confucianism needs to be critically connected to the political, economical, and sociohistorical relations. In other words, the scholarship that Nonini and Ong suggested is the imperative to (de)construct the Chinese identities in relation to not only ancient values and norms but also to strategic power struggles across time and space.

Ong (1999b) illustrated how Chineseness may be viewed as an articulation between Southeast Asian nation-state governmentality and Confucian capitalism in order to counter against a West led by the United States and Great Britain. She provided a quote of a comment made at the overseas Chinese economy conference stating

[t]he big question is not Greater China, but [the fact] that there are Chinese people inside and outside China [in Southeast Asia and elsewhere]. Overseas Chinese have same language and same ancestral strock (tongwen tongzhu) as we do; they are like the married-out daughter... who still has feelings... for home [italics added]. They are the same kind of people (tongzhong)”…. as mainlanders. (p. 65)

Ong unpacked how overseas Chinese, regardless of the various types of cultural/geographical/social/historical/political locations are discursively put into the category of “married-out daughters” who remain the same as the Chinese in Mainland China based on the shared blood and sentimental ties. Ong critiqued that such a category not only feminizes overseas Chinese but also neglects the particular histories belonging to different Chinese groups. It seems that the rhetoric of building a collective Chineseness on the shared blood of family members does opaquely paint a Confucian family where attachment and loyalty lasts forever. Thus, by omitting the specificity and contexts of the
locations various Chinese groups within/across a nation-state have (not) experienced, Chineseness depicted in communication research may run the risk of perpetuating the masculine Chinese identity under the overarching values of Confucianism.

**Essentialized Chineseness**

Homogeneity serves as the recurrent concept throughout the discussion on the ways in which Chineseness has been delineated in communication research. Chinese peoples are often constructed as an essentialized group with the same salient cultural traits across political, geographical, class, gender, and sexuality boundaries as opposed to those in the “West.” Without articulating the multiple meanings of being Chinese in relation to the larger macro-structures and temporality, Chinese communication research risks a conflation that creates “the Chinese fraternity” (Ong, 1999b, p. 65) as the outcome of “the inscribing of the Chinese national racial essence into the new field of Chinese ‘culture’ *(wenhua)*” (p. 59). As Ong (1999a, 1999b) described Chineseness has become an open signifier acquiring meanings in dialectical relation to the practices, beliefs, and structures encountered in the space of people, commodities, technologies, and ideologies flow across nations and markets. There is an ever-growing pluralizations of Chinese identities, and people in Mainland China, no less than other Chinese subjects—diasporic or not are finding their division by gender, sexuality, class, culture, aesthetics, spatial and social location, politics, and nationality to be extremely meaningful (Ong, 1999b, p. 24). Contextualized knowledge is greatly needed in order to avoid such a glorifying, harmonious image of Chineseness that reinscribes cultural essentialism and obscures inequalities within the identity constructed. The lack of scholarship on the struggles over resources and ideologies among various communities as Ong and Nonini (1997) and Ong
(1999a, 1999b) pointed out, consequently creates a tinted picture of Chinese identity and meanings. Moreover, studies that “discovered” the different interactive patterns between the Chinese and their western counterparts constructed Chineseness with a rather apolitical and historically truncated cultural product instead of a strategic means, which could be oppressive in serving the interests of the dominant.

Inspired by critical scholars such as Ong and Nonini, I view Chineseness not as an ontological essence but a strategic practice enacted for particular purposes in different occasions. The meanings of being Chinese are polyphonic, shifting and often articulated with other ideologies embraced by the dominant cultural groups. Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists living on the El Paso-Juárez border perform the type of Chineseness congruent with prevalent cultural structure and norms in mainstream U.S. society. Such a strategy of (per)forming identity increases benefits and reduces discrimination imposed onto these newcomers to the border zone between Mexico and the United States.

**Culture Identity (Chineseness) and Ethnic Superiority (Whiteness)**

Eurocentricity and white supremacy have been interrogated by many historians and culture critics such as Fanon, hooks, Morrison, Gilroy, Said, and Spivak. Winant quoted Roediger who was one of the first to use the word Whiteness (Johnson, 1999) to illustrate that de-centering white privileges is imperative, for

it is not merely that whiteness is oppressive and false; it is that whiteness is nothing but oppressive and false… It is the empty and terrifying attempt to build an identity based on what one isn’t and on whom one can hold back. (as cited in Winant, 2004, p. 10)
Winant explained that whiteness is certainly “an over-determined political and cultural identity nevertheless, having to do with socioeconomic status; religious affiliation; ideologies of individualism, opportunity, and citizenship; nationalism, and so forth” (p. 11). Race theorist and feminist Frankenberg (1993) described that “whiteness refers to a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced and, more over, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination” (p. 6). Whiteness consists of various violent and oppressive forces intermarrying one another in perpetuating dominance and hierarchy.

Interrogation white privileges and its assumed normalcy has been launched in communication studies during the mid-1990s from various perspectives such as social scientific interpretations, rhetorical and performance criticism, historical and cultural critiques (Bahk & Jandt, 2004; Lee, 1999; Nakayama & Martin, 1999; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Martin, Krizek, Nakayama & Bradford, 1996; Warren 2001, 2003). Being a construction produced by the powerful majority, whiteness demands to be critically examined as a living organ that constantly renews and reconstitutes itself in different shapes and forms to assert power. Its discursive territory has been marked to underscore the omnipresence as an invisible center (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). In his publications, Warren unpacked the ways in which the power of being white is repetitively embodied and displayed in classroom settings as students construct their understandings of self/Other. Such a superior normalcy is fluid as Moon (1999) and Drzewiecka and Wong (1999) traced how Whiteness travels beyond boundaries of class, gender, or nation-state to articulate with other forces in perpetuating dominance and normalcy. These scholars
mapped the volatile mechanism of Whiteness in interconnecting with various power positionings during our daily interactions and cultural practices.

Cultural critics have pointed out that racial oppression in the United States has been framed in terms of a “Black versus White” issue (Guinier & Torres, 2004; Ong, 1999b; Wu, 2002). During the nineteenth century, class was racialized with the assistance of Whiteness (Ong, 1999b) and such a mechanism continued being deployed on recent immigrants from the South and East of the globe (Guinier & Torres, 2004; Ong, 1999b). Guinier and Torres described how some non-white elites could be attracted to “racial bribe,” which they defined as

a racial management strategy that invites specific racial or ethnic groups to advance within the existing black and white racial hierarchy by becoming “white.” The strategy expands the range of physical characteristics that can fall within the definition of “white,” in order to pursue four goals: (1) to defuse the previously marginalized group’s oppositional agenda, (2) to offer incentives that discourage the group from affiliating with black people, (3) to secure position of “whiteness” appear more racially or ethnically diverse. (p. 412)

Through strategically including and excluding racialized classed groups, the ideology of Whiteness remains intact in dividing and conquering cultural groups to serve the dominant privileges.

Whiteness has affected both white and non-white groups as Frankenberg (1993) wrote “to speak whiteness is… to assign everyone a place in relations of racism” based on the black-white logic (p. 6). Ong (1999b) illuminated ways in which recent Asian
immigrants to the U.S., according to the dominant hierarchical evaluations on cultures within the white-black polarities, are placed as desirable citizenships or not. For example, new comers from Asia who practice Confucianism often are deemed as “whiter,” therefore, more desirable as citizens of the United States.

By no means do I suggest the ideology of Whiteness is a U.S.-owned property confined to U.S. soil. The construction of racial categories and its insidious interconnectedness to assert superior ways of life and cultural groups are practiced elsewhere. As Kapoor (1999) illustrated, whiteness as a symbolic power travels in the international arena in discourses of civilization, modernization, and progress. Ong (1999a) critiqued that “Chinese antagonism toward ‘barbarians’ and ‘foreign devils’ has always been based on an ideological sense of the constructed racial and cultural exclusivity of the minzu (race/nation)” (p. 56). There seems to be a parallel between these ideologies, both carry the symbolic power to divide and conquer. Chineseness is perceived as a superior identity to that of the “barbarian” non-Chinese. Whiteness often connects to other repressive discourses to further its dominance in promoting hegemonic way of being as normalcy (e.g., individual hardworking for monetary rewards). Hence, the ways in which whiteness is perhaps implicated and practiced by newly arrived transnationalists at the U.S.-Mexico border from Taiwan or China are to be further explored. More specifically, analyses on how these dominant cultural ideologies are being intermixed and displayed in their day-to-day culturing process on the border of El Paso-Juárez would provide insights in unpacking the insidious power in which repressive ideologies continuously (re)articulate with one another.
The purposes of the prior discussions are three-fold. First, I presented how culture is conceptualized in this research as a volatile manifest through traveling and dwelling between places. Hence, the centrality of spaces and places producing within unbalanced power relations is underlined. Secondly, I discussed three theoretical perspectives (articulation, hybridity, *la mestiza* consciousness) in understanding cultural identities in the era of postcolonial condition with increasing transnational practices. Lastly, Chinese identity constructed in communication research was briefly discussed in relation to other dominant cultural practices such as white privileges. These discussions were to provide theoretical perspectives to the overall research question: How do these Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists understand their culturing experiences on the border of El Paso and Juárez? How is living on and crossing over borders comprehended and negotiated? What strategies are invented and/or enacted while living and traveling at the El Paso and Juárez borderlands? A critical ethnographic approach was deployed to better understand the complicity of people’s everyday living. The rest of this chapter discusses the reasons as to why I deem this approach as best equipped for addressing the question.

**Ethnography and Communication about Peoples in Societies**

Ethnography according to Spradley (1979) is “the work of describing a culture” (p. 3). The essence is to learn from people and to seek understanding of the meanings of actions and events by observing, participating, and making inquiries (Spradley, 1979, 1980). Our everyday communication serves as a primary means in which culture and identity are expressed, interaction patterns are (re)shaped, and resistance and acquiescence to dominant social relations are consummated (Moon, 2001). Ethnography has been used as a way to gain a deeper understanding of people’s everyday lives through
fieldwork (Geertz, 1973). Speech activities and their functions within a community (i.e., ethnographic field) have been documented as a way to understand cultural differences expressed during daily interactions (Carbaugh, 1988, 1993, 1999; Philipsen, 1975, 1987, 1992).

Throughout the years, concepts such as “fieldwork,”1 and “writing up report on cultures,” and “knowledge about the Other” have been politicized and critically reflected upon in terms of the underlined assumptions and impacts such as “perceptual and discursive imperialism” imposed onto the researched “Other” by cultural researchers and the texts produced (Jandt & Tanno, 2001). Scholars from various disciplines critique the continuous imperialistic understanding enacted by ethnographic research and call for acute awareness and interrogation of the ways in which ethnographers’ specific locations affect their understanding and representation of a cultural group (Behar & Gordon, 1995; Clifford, 1992; Conquergood, 1980, 1991, 1992a; Jandt & Tanno, 2001; Kondo, 1991).

Being able to understand other peoples’ perspectives and knowledges therefore requires the researcher to contextualize and engage viscerally both in individual experiences as well as disciplining structures of family, society, nation, and global capitalism (Fiske, 1991; Conquergood, 1992a, 1992b, 1994). In order to better understand the experiences of these Taiwanese and Chinese who travel and dwell in between borders of multiple nation-states and their everyday identity negotiations, a six-month long critical ethnographic research was launched.

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1 Scholars such as Clifford (1992), Conquergood (1991), Rosaldo (1989), and Pratt (1986) have critiqued the notion of ethnographers doing “fieldwork” over there and writing here as if clear and discrete boundaries could be drawn. I use the word “fieldwork” with discretion as a way to refer to the interactions took place during the six-month stay in El Paso/Juárez.
Critical Ethnography and Communicative Situations

Communication scholars have engaged in the ethnographic way of knowing and since generated great knowledge about cultural structures and interactive patterns through analyzing people’s everyday speaking and living. Philipsen (1975, 1992) constructed the ways in which cultural codes are being expressed by Teamsterville men and women’s everyday talks. Carbaugh (1993, 1999) interpreted the ways in which cultural dimensions such as attitudes toward place/space are interdependent to the particular communicative style (e.g., Donahue show; Blackfeet’s interaction with space). Trujillo (1992) encouraged ethnographers to engage in multiple perspectives to excavate polyvocal meanings in human experiences. González (1989) examined the rhetorical intervention of incorporating cultural values developed in a Mexican American radio station in which two cultural groups (i.e., Mexican Americans and Anglos) were invited into participating. Scheibel (1992) and Corey (1996) discerned the ways identities are managed and performed in public spaces such as an Irish pub for gays/lesbians and the entrance of a California club popular to heterosexual members of college Greeks. Ethnographic studies by Lum (1996) and Lu (2001) each provided a window to see (or hear) how some Chinese diasporic subjects maintain and negotiate their cultural identities while adjusting to their life in the United States through cultural activities such as Karaoke or language lessons.

All the research has generated important knowledge about cultural identity performances. Each illustrates communicative strategies of forming, asserting, and inventing a shared sense of (non)belongingness. With great cultural knowledge being provided, scholars encouraged ethnographers as social actors to further relate cultural
activities and knowledge interpreted and produced to the economic and socio-political environment in which they are created (Conquergood, 1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1994; Fiske, 1991; Jandt & Tanno, 2001).

Ideologies permeate in all social fields, including scholarship that strives to scientifically understand human behaviors (Lee, 1993; Thomas, 1993). French philosopher Bourdieu (1977, 1990, 2001), also a sociologist and anthropologist mapped the interconnectedness between the social agents as “structured products (i.e., \textit{opus operatum})” gaining dispositions within the social fields where the process of “structuring structure (i.e., \textit{modus operandi})” occurs. Moi (1995) explained that a field may be perceived “as a competitive system of social relations which functions according to its own specific logic or rules [of legitimacy]” (p. 192). Each field generates its own \textit{habitus}, which Bourdieu defined as “a system of dispositions adjusted to the game [of the field]” (as cited in Moi, p.192). \textit{Habitus} with dispositions is acquired through familiarizing with practical experiences in the field producing legitimacy and recognition. As Moi (1995) stated, “for Bourdieu, \textit{habitus} is an active, generative set of unformulated dispositions, not a store of passive knowledge” (p. 193). \textit{Habitus}, according to Bourdieu (1977), is the product of the work of inculcation and appropriation necessary in order for those products of collective history, the objective structures (e.g., of language, economy, etc.) to succeed in reproducing themselves more or less completely, in the form of durable dispositions, in the organisms (which one can, if one wishes, call individuals) lastingly subjected to the same conditionings, and hence placed in the same materials conditions of existence. (p. 85)
Individuals as agents in the social world struggling for obtaining various styles of capital pending on her/his *habitus* are oftentimes influenced by the inherited capitals, as well as opportunities offered to her/him by the social world in terms of choices for strategies according to the relationship to power (Bourdieu, 1990).

The concept of *habitus*, which affects an agent’s “practical relation to the future which governs his [sic] present practice,” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 64) in addition to that of cultural identities accomplished in constant motion of articulations, hence disarticulations, serve as an analytical lens in discerning the strategies being generated and deployed when social agents travel and dwell between borderlines with varying amounts as well as types of symbolic and economic capital (e.g., tastes, judgments, distinctions).

Although Bourdieu himself was not critically reflected on his positionality and its implications in representing his researched participants (i.e., the colonial relations between French and Algeria are not interrogated,) his critical theoretical and analytical perspectives shed light on conducting ethnographic research that makes connections to symbolic and material power relations embedded so pervasively in larger social-political worlds. His ethnographic approach microscopes the social agents’ mundane everyday life details and maps those to various structured and structuring forces. Such an approach serves greatly to this research in discerning what and how certain strategies are practiced to cultivate a specific kind of *habitus* for the Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists in the El Paso-Juárez borderlands during their culturing processes.

Ethnographic studies generate knowledge from both the researchers and the researched community (Conquergood, 1991, 1992b, 1994). In such a globalized world, ethnography is always multi-sited as Marcus (1998) noted. It requires researchers to
viscerally learn about daily communicative practices and cultural meanings by being with the community over an extensive amount of time. Such a process of learning requires critical reflections upon dialogues with both perceptual, theoretical as well as methodological assumptions as to how cultural knowledge is produced, presented, and engaged in to hopefully bring about action and change (Greenwood & Levin, 2000). Accountability for knowledge generators has been underscored so that the insidious relations between power and communication such as whiteness and male-centered ideologies can be traced and marked. Critical scholarship in addition to cultural interpretive work advances ethnographers to carefully incorporate reflections into structural relations where each individual is involved. It demands ethical accountability while producing knowledge about cultural groups.

**A Critical Ethnographic Researcher/Writer**

I chose to conduct my research and a six-month fieldwork from a critical ethnographic perspective to learn about some Taiwanese and Chinese’ culturing processes in this particular historical moment and geopolitical location of the El Paso-Juárez border. As Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) explained, critical ethnography encourages emancipatory activism that brings critique on the inclusions and exclusions of the historicization and socialization of our everyday lives. Using Geertz’s (1973) famous term “thick description” (p. 27), a critical ethnography may reach the goals of not only thickly describing cultural meanings but also allowing interpretations of the interconnectedness between individual communication and the larger structures and its implications (Geertz; Moon, 2001). By tracing various forces driving people’s everyday interactions, hence being driven by them, individual agent’s practices are articulated to
systems which produce such acts that draw boundaries to include or exclude some but not the others.

I perceive my role as a researcher co-performing in constructing the culture in the community with my specific historical situatedness and various positionalities, as Conquergood (1980, 1991) advocated. Further, I believe that by being keen to my role as a co-actor whose actions and presence affect the surroundings of the community facilitate the goal of the research. In other words, critical ethnographic inquiry demands the constant, acute awareness of my own communicative practices and its impacts on the community and research outcome. Such demand aids a more self-reflexive and critical examination of my own as well as others’ everyday interactions in the community.

Besides being critical to the “data” produced and interpreted, critical ethnographers are asked to always examine her/his own scholarship. Questions such as “What kinds of knowledge/writing/data/interpretations are included or excluded in my research with what kinds of implications? What kind of effects do my interpretations/writings have on the culture researched and at whose expense?” are always in the spotlight of my process of doing/writing research. For example, Behar’s self-reflection on her fear of perpetuating (or even intensifying) the stereotypes of Mexican culture as essentially macho and chauvinistic illustrates the material effects of ethnographic writings. Ethnographers’ interpretation of others is always subjected to her/his own biases with possibilities in silencing the other. A critical ethnographer makes herself accountable in her researching and writing by consciously politicizing, contextualizing, and reflecting on her choice of affiliation (Villenas, 1996).
Goodall (2000) explained that stories about the culture observed from the participants in the field have to be balanced and written in relation to stories of the researcher’s personal experiences of growth from doing the ethnography. It is through the act of writing that an ethnographer comes into knowledge and translates “that watchfulness, that inwardness, that solitude into words” (Goodall, 1999, p. 472). Language possesses the power that determines what gets to be communicated or isolated and ethnographers are power holders who use language to translate, to classify, to name, to construct meanings and realities (Thomas, 1993). As Kondo (1991) illustrated, the journey of fieldwork has to shape and be shaped by storytelling practices in more or less a linear fashion in which “order and meaning gradually emerge from initially inchoate events and experiences… sometimes order and meaning can be imposed when you have left the field, in a sometimes violent attempt to recover meaning in the flux and chaos of everyday life” (p. 7).

Hence, the critical ethnographer’s task is to examine the language of the data and the language of how the data are spoken about in order to identify the ways culture provides access into our mundane life and to further bring alternative thinking to make a difference (Thomas, 1993). The ethnographer’s biased ideology is inevitable in her/his learning and writing of which researched culture is partially represented. Ethnographers’ self-critiques are necessary. Through self-reflexive writing, her struggles, discomfort, doubts, biases, and political stands are no longer transparent in the “authoritative” interpretations and evaluations of other ways of life.

Throughout the research, my various positions and their impacts on both my biased knowledge and the researched community are constant as how Kondo (1991) and
Behar (1993, 1996) narrated their culturing experiences with their vigilant eyes always gazing back at themselves while also on others. Being a self-reflexive critical ethnographer is to be accountable for her/his writing by explicitly locating her/his partial knowledge and power even though it makes her/him vulnerable. Thus, my reactions and thoughts during the interactions with the Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists are incorporated in writing of the accounts. A discussion with deeper reflections on the implications of my positions to this ethnography is provided in the final chapter.

**Coming Back to the Beginning**

In this chapter, I illustrated various theoretical and methodological perspectives which inevitably affect my way of understanding culture and identity (per)forming in the current space and time. They guided my interpretations and interactions with the group of Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists as we were culturing together in the El Paso/Juárez borderland. As Rosaldo (1989) wrote, borderlines should no longer be perceived as “analytically empty transitional zones [instead as] creative cultural production that require investigation” (p. 208). The following chapter offers stories on two of the betwixt and between frontiers— the Mexico/U.S. border and Taiwan being constantly (re)produced by peoples, policies, and armaments throughout history.
CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXTUALIZING CONTEXTS

As mentioned in Chapter one, the Taiwanese/Chinese people who recently arrived at the El Paso/Juárez area interact with people of various historical backgrounds with their own histories. The spatial and temporal interconnectedness must be interpreted to better understand the contexts in which the Taiwanese/Chinese community is located, for neither culture nor communication exists in a vacuum. I chose to provide a brief history of the El Paso/Juárez area, as well as various peoples inhabiting this borderland in the hopes of illustrating its complexity. More specifically, this chapter maps a “chronotopic” story, in Bakhtin’s (1986) term; that is, included are the temporal and spatial aspects, of the historical and geographic trajectories of peoples of Mexican cultural origin and of Chinese/Taiwanese cultural origin. Past stories about El Paso/Juárez and Taiwan facilitate the foreground of how these places have been lived. These experiences cannot be separated from one another for all of us are products of historical forces, especially in the contemporary social relations within the local/global nexus.

Each space is historically, culturally and politically constructed. Interpreting residents’ experiences of these places allows a peek into the interactive processes of human lives in the space making. In this chapter, I first provide a brief account on the Mexico-U.S. border zone and Taiwan both replete with intermingling and contradicting relations, experiences, and values. I then describe how I arrived at the research questions by narrating my initial interactions with specifically four members of the researched community after my arrival to this highly mobile and fluid transcultural contact zone (Pratt, 1992).
Stories Told from Somewhere

Collective memories and interpretations of history provide different receptions and enact different behaviors for various peoples (Martin, Nakayama & Flores, 2002). The historical events discussed in this chapter serve as a resource for multiple interpretations for how groups of peoples from Mexico and Taiwan might come to be in a place already full of memories. These events also serve to respond to the calling for “broader knowledge of global histories” (Martin et al, p. 77), in hopes of better understanding communication in various cultural contexts and contacts. As Ngai (1999) explained, labels of peoples and their cultural meanings are constructed (i.e., a brown-skinned person in the U.S. is an illegal migrant from Mexico). These constructs are in need of historicizing and contextualizing, for they carry significant implications on how persons relate themselves to others. Such a belief echoes Shome and Hegde (2002) in pointing out that postcolonial theories “deconstruct privilege and account for the complex interconnections between power, experiences, and culture” (p. 263). They confirmed the imperative to firmly reject the one-dimensional Euro-American metropolitan model of the “world-as-emporium” (p. 263), and to reinscribe the complicated meanings of present global interconnections between cultures and nation-states.

Cultural anthropologist and historical scholars such as Kearney (1991) and Martínez (1994) observed that the borderlanders of Mexico and the U.S. are innovating new ways of living due to the historical forces that produced numerous cultural exchanges and transculturation (Pratt, 1999). In understanding the Taiwanese/Chinese

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2 Mary L. Pratt (1999) promoted the term transculturation originated by Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz in the 1940s. She explained that transculturation describes a process in which marginalized or subordinated members are agents in selecting and inventing materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture.
peoples’ culturing and communicating on the border of El Paso and Juárez, the historical, social, political, economic, and racial dynamics of the peoples are to be excavated. For example, the unbalanced resources such as water allocation and electricity between El Paso and Juárez have drawn a great concern (Bath, Tanski & Villarreal, 1994; Vila, 2000). With half of Ciudad Juárez population, El Paso uses twice much water, which left people in Juárez especially the poor with insufficient water supply for daily uses (Ortíz-González, 2004). Further, groups on the borderlands are not always along at contest or opposition throughout history. As Martínez (2001) wrote, the Filipino union and the Mexican union joined the United Farm Workers Union (UFW) in 1966 in resisting exploitation and the impoverishment of workers. The struggles and cooperation between as well as amongst groups need to be contextualized in its own history for “the encounters of the everyday are framed by the larger narration of political, economic, and cultural processes” (Shome & Hegde, 2002, p. 262).

The chronotopic stories discussed in this chapter are not to claim victimization of particular groups. Rather, they are to depict a larger yet incomplete narrative about the places in which the Taiwanese/Chinese recent (im)migrants inhabit or used to inhabit. As Richardson (2000) explained, the partial and constitutive nature of languages and the making of this narrative inevitably involves values as to “what to produce, what to name the productions, and what the relationships between the producers and the named things will be” (p. 925). In other words, stories told in this chapter stem from particular points of view and schools of knowledge that are neither neutral nor apolitical. I chose to include stories of the Chinese, Mexican, and Taiwanese cultural groups because their collective

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Pratt further asserted that this term replaces the reductive concept of acculturation and assimilation in characterizing culture under conquest.
memories most pertain to my research agenda—to understand a recently arrived group of Taiwanese/Chinese transtionalists’ lives on the borderlands of El Paso/Juárez.

Lindlof (1995) explained *intertextuality* means that “the production and use of a text depends on a creative combination of parts of other texts” (p. 52) which aids critical researchers to discern the connections between texts and contexts. The historical events described were elicited from various sources (e.g., accounts from anthropologists, economists, historians, law specialists, political scientists, sociologists) in hopes of ensuring their trustworthiness. My criteria for selecting historical events included considering relevance to the events of this study. Thus, major events that occurred in the mid-19th into 20th century to peoples of Mexican and Chinese origins at the U.S.-Mexico border, specifically the El Paso/Juárez area, are included. For historical accounts on Taiwan, I selected major incidents under each colonial and imperial regime since the 16th century. My second consideration was to achieve truthfulness. The selected historical events were described in all sources. Therefore, these experiences had significant impacts to peoples in these two locations. I recognize that there are many more stories on other Taiwanese groups, as well as on various groups residing in Mexico and the U.S.

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3 For more detailed discussions on Taiwanese history after WWII, specifically its relationship with Beijing government, as well as significant events such as Hong Kong’s return and various reforms in both KMT and Beijing policies, please see “Taiwan in World Affairs” edited by Robert Sutter and William Johnson (1994); “Taiwan: China’s Last Frontier” by Simon Long (1990). For narratives on struggles of Taiwanese indigenous and other ethnic minority groups, please see “Is Taiwan Chinese?: The impact of culture, power, and migration on changing identities” by Melissa Brown (2004). For China’s recent rise in the world affairs, please see “China’s Rise in Asia: Promises and Perils” by Robert, Sutter (2005). For more history on Taiwanese/Chinese in the United States, please see “The Taiwanese Americans” by Franklin Ng (1998); “Taiwanese American Transnational Families: Women and kin work” by Maria, Chee (2005); “Yellow” by Frank Wu (2002); “Chinese America: The untold story of America’s oldest new community” by Peter Kwong & Dušanka Miščević (2005).

would help to depict a much fuller picture in contextualizing the geopolitical and
historical conditions of our globalizing world. Such neglect may sacrifice the complexity
of the environment each group is conditioned to. Further, it may jeopardize the
heterogeneity of each cultural group, and consequently void some perspectives, for
various interests exist in any group. However, I had to set a limit as to providing crucial
elements to contextualize the scope of my research. Hence, stories provided in this
chapter on these two cultural groups and places they have been are partial and even
somewhat reductive. Nevertheless, the provided historical and geographical background
foregrounds the lives of the community I joined during my six-month field research from

**El Paso--“A Frontier to the North”: The Past and Present over Here and There**

El Paso is located at the west point of Texas with a population over 600,000. It
was the oldest settlement in 1581 in the region prior to the Republic of Mexico or the
United States (Ortíz-González, 2004). As the twenty-third largest city in the United States,
El Paso was one of the ten poorest cities “with only 58 percent of the national average per
capita income figure” (Ortíz-González, p. xv; Staudt, 1998). As Ortíz-González explained,
all border cities serve as a space for “multiple flows of people, goods, materials,
technology, and capital” (p. xvii). El Paso/Juárez is a stage on which transgression,
interaction, contradiction, and fiction are played among its interdependent inhabitants.

From the Spaniards’ exploration in the sixteenth century, El Paso/Juárez arrived at
its current status as an urban, international contact zone as a result of aggressive
expansionism, disputes, negotiations, and concessions between the Spanish, the United
States, and the Mexican governments. The turmoil on the current Mexico and the U.S.
border became most feverish during the Texas rebellion in the 1820s-1830s. In 1834, European-Americans and their slaves outnumbered the Tejanos/as at 23,700 to 4,000 and violence toward Tejanos/as has since continued (Martínez, 2001). The European-American led insurrection of Texas ushered in the U.S.- Mexico War in 1846. The United States annexed and later purchased one-half of Mexico’s territories after the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the Gadsden Purchase in 1853 (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998; Martínez, 1994, 1996, 2001; Ortíz-González, 2004). The loss of the territory was taught as an “Invasion from the North” in Mexico’s elementary school textbooks (Staudt, 1998). Upon the 1960s, borderlines of Mexico and the U.S. were drawn and redrawn between two unequal nations of which the weaker Mexico had few options when the U.S. denied its proposal. These ambiguous, shifted, yet arbitrary borderlines forced many to leave their home. Those who were left on borderlands were forced to learn the regulations, languages, and cultural customs of both nations (Martínez; Ortíz-González, 2001). Due to the unpredictable nature of Rio Grande that was used as the divider, the border between the U.S. and Mexico has had disputes since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. The Kennedy administration signed the “Chamizal pact” where both Mexico and U.S. “opened a new concrete-lined river channel and complete an exchange of lands” (Martínez, 1988, p. 29). A more comprehensive agreement called the “Treaty of 1970” was signed where mechanisms to settle future problems were provided and the boundaries drawn remain to the present (Martínez, p. 29).

*Chinese People on the Borderlands of Mexico and the United States*

People of Mexican heritage, European-Americans and their slaves were not the only cultural groups inhabiting the Mexican and U.S. border. The desire for a cheap labor
force to work on railroads, mines, and farms brought Chinese people to the borderlands on both sides of the border in the late 1800s (Hing, 1993; Farrar, 1972; Martínez, 1996, 2001; Rhoads, 1977; Staudt, 1998). After the Civil War, the U.S. government encouraged importing Chinese labors to substitute for their former slaves (Hing, 1993; Rhoads, 1977). In the 1880s, Chinese arrived in El Paso, TX upon the introduction of the Southern Pacific Railroad (Farrar, 1972; Rhoads, 1977; Timmons, 1990; Yu, 1958).

Approximately 1,200 “pig-tailed” (Farrar, p. 3) Chinese railroad laborers, almost entirely men, came in hopes of prosperity. These Chinese laborers soon encountered hostility from other labor groups:

On one occasion, Mexican section hands outside El Paso beat up a group of them and ran them off. On another, an Irish laborer near the Pecos murdered one of them, giving rise to Judge Roy Bean’s notorious finding that there was no law in Texas against “killing a Chinaman.” Yet other hazards confronted them. On December 31, 1881, a band of Apache Indians swept down upon a surveying gang of eleven Chinese at Eagle Pass and killed them all. (Farrar, p. 10)

In addition to racial animosity from other workers, Chinese in the U.S. experienced exclusion in all aspects of life. In 1870, Congress refused to extend naturalization rights to Chinese (Hing, 1993). In 1882, Chinese became the first group banned from entering the U.S. based on their physical appearance, when Congress passed the first Chinese Exclusion Acts. It passed the Geary Act in 1892 and extended the 1882 law for ten more years (Hing, 1993; Ngai, 1999; Rhoads, 1977; Shah, 2001).
Many Chinese labors came to the U.S. for job opportunities and left their wives home because they intended their stay to be temporary. With the Exclusion Act, their wives were not allowed to join their husbands in the U.S. In 1880, Chinese were added to the California antimiscegenation law that prohibited marriage between a white person and a “Negro, mulatto, or Mongolian” (Hing, 1993, p. 251). By 1890 the ratio of men to women among Chinese Americans was almost 27 to 1. With the completion of the railroad in 1883 and the Chinese exclusion laws, Chinese were no longer needed in the southwest U.S. They either fled eastward or flocked to Chinatowns to avoid the virulent anti-Chinese agitation (Rhoads, 1977). Chinatowns provided a safer space for Chinese people to protect themselves from being victimized by racism and repressive laws against them. Chinese were not allowed for most activities practiced by the majority in the society. Numerous regulations aimed to confine Chinese and keep them at an arm’s length (Chung, 1988; Hing, 1993; Shah, 2001). Landlords and realtors refused to rent or sell to Chinese outside of Chinatowns. Chung provided an instance where a newspaper editor tried to find housing outside of Chinatown but failed to do so. When his family finally found a landlord willing to rent him an apartment, “one of the tenants—a black family—strenuously objected” (Chung, p. 38).

Besides housing, Chinese were excluded from social, economical, and political arenas in the United States. For Chinese, Chinatowns provided resources in addition to shelter. For Americans, Chinatowns reduced their growing fear for the unknown “Oriental” power and kept the Chinese confined (Hing, 1993; Shah, 2001). On the other hand, Chinatowns were blamed for disseminating diseases. They were under strict regulations and frequently thorough raids for the “public good” (Shah, p11). The
Chinatown’s predominately all-male life style, due to the oppressive regulations were perceived and rumored as a morally degrading bachelor society that one could get the plague from simply by passing it.

As Farrar (1972) explained, while the El Paso Chinatown represented a refuge to the Chinese, “it was perceived as a place of evil—of gambling joints, opium dens, hatchet-men, tong wars, unsanitary conditions, and Chinese laundries” by many El Pasoans (p. 6). After the completion of railroads, the remaining Chinamen in El Paso engaged in various occupations as did the other Chinese in the U.S. Being confined to the urban setting, they often operated restaurants, laundry services, barbershops, and Chinese merchandise stores. Some worked as cleaners and some did market gardening on the leased lands due to the prohibition of land ownership by Chinese (Farrar, 1972; Hing, 1993; Liu, 1981; Rhoads, 1977; Timmons, 1990). The monopoly of laundry stores by the “imported heathen” (Farrar, p. 14) Chinese generated great resentment from the El Pasoans (Rhoads, 1977). Farrar provided an instance where Mrs. Lucy Madden refused to pay for her washing because of the assumed missing articles. She drew a gun and ran after the Chinese laundry man who complained about her refusal of paying. Several El Pasoans bestowed her with a silver cup, which seemed to encourage other ladies to start shooting Chinese fearlessly. Further, El Pasoans added a reminder in the newspapers that “there would be no more cups unless they bring in scalps” (Farrar, p. 15). The fermenting resentment toward Chinese was spoken loudly through not only the tolerance but the encouragement of harming Chinese. Hence, Chinese as a people was rhetorically positioned in the non-El Pasoans, or even nonhuman category to be mercilessly slaughtered.
Chinese in the U.S. recognized that they were segregated and excluded. In order to survive and fight for equality, they started to organize groups such as “The Chinese American Citizens Alliance (CACA),” “the United Parlor of the Native Sons of the Golden State,” and “the Chinese Six Companies.” These organizations facilitated the various needs of Chinese communities. For example, the CACA provided “a death benefit/insurance program” to promote “the general welfare and happiness of its members and the Chinese communities” (Chung, 1988, p. 45). In addition to economic benefits, the CACA functioned as social agents by holding their own athletic tournaments, picnics, dinners, and dances. Since many of the early members were white-collar educated Chinese businessmen or lawyers, the CACA had a significant influence in fighting for the Chinese civil rights prior to 1965 when the Chinese Repealer was enacted (Chung, 1988; Hing, 1993; Limerick, 1995). The main goal of these Chinese organizations was to fully integrate into the American society with no reservation and complete acculturation. Discrimination against Chinese communities remained strong in the early 1900s and did not start to decrease until China and the U.S. established friendship during World War II (Chung, 1988).

Chinese on the other side of the El Paso, TX border were not living carefree lives either. Mexico is famous for its fecund sliver mines (Yu, 1958). Around the 1860s, large amount of Chinese arrived in Mexico from southwestern U.S. to build the railroad from El Paso to Chapultepec, and the Chinese population reached its apex in the early 1900s with the approximate amount being 40,000 to 50,000 (Lui, 1981; Yu, 1958). In 1909, the Mexican government signed contracts with the U.S. Americans in bringing Chinese laborers to cotton farms, mines, and railroads. Thus, the amount of Chinese people
increased. Almost all of them came from Guandong province in China and most stayed in Oaxaca to build the railroad, in Cananea for copper mining, and in Mexicali as cotton laborers. Chinese in Sonora and Sinaloa were the most economically powerful for Chinese businessmen owned almost all the grocery stores.

According to Yu (1958) and Liu (1981), animosity toward the Chinamen’s ownership of wealth was generated and soon there were many instances in which violence was done to the Chinese in Mexico. The massacre of 303 Chinese at Torreón in May 1911, the robbery and slaughtering of Chinese during 1911 and 1916, and the expulsion of Chinese in Sonora and Sinaloa between 1930 and 1932 were among the most severe (Liu, 1981; Rhoads, 1977; Yu, 1958). In 1913, revolutionist Pancho Villa was on the rise and the Chinese were killed, imprisoned, or expelled. Their properties were taken away. According to Liu, there is no accurate count of Chinese victims due to the lack of transportation at the time and scarce official records. Because of exclusion and violence, most Chinese fled to other nations. The Chinese population in Mexico was significantly reduced to approximately 30,000 in 1917 (Rhoads, 1977). Many stayed in Chiapas, Terrecon, and Cd. Juárez in Chihuahua (Yu, 1958).

Subjugated under the Chinese Exclusion Acts, some Chinese went to Mexico to obtain citizenship in hopes of eventually migrating northward to the United States (Staudt, 1998). Chinese in El Paso determined the exclusion acts unjust and organized to smuggle Chinese in from Juárez. The El Paso Herald wrote in 1904 to warn its public the necessity to “run a barbed wire fence” (Farrar, 1972, p. 20) along the El Paso side of the Rio Grande if Chinese immigration from Mexico continued. The U.S. established sixty immigration inspectors known as “Chinese Inspectors” (Staudt, p. 33) to prevent Chinese
from crossing the border to enter the United States. The only exception was the “Pershing Chinese” (Rhoads, 1977, p. 18) brought into El Paso by General John Pershing from Chihuahua in 1917. When Pershing’s army pursued Pancho Villa, the Chinese were the only ones willing to interact with the Americans due to the anti-Chinese treatment in Mexico. After Pershing’s unsuccessful mission, his more than 500 Chinese followers were brought into the United States (Farrar, 1972; Rhoads, 1977). The smuggling of Chinese into the U.S. was decreased due to the Mexican insurrection in the 1910s (Farrar, 1972). In addition, the exclusion acts, anti-Chinese sentiment, and the completion of the railroads attracted much fewer Chinese to the border of El Paso and Juárez while the population in the area was on the rise (Liu, 1981; Farrar, 1972; Rhoads, 1977). The decreased amount of Chinese in the United States, specifically in El Paso/Juárez attested to the rising tide of nativist movements that propagated restrictions on immigration, especially for those with darker complexions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Such movements perpetuated the racial and cultural superiority of the whites (Ngai, 1999). Further, they hardened boundaries between places that had shared years of histories such as El Paso, U.S. and Juárez, Mexico. The impacts of policies as rhetorical interventions on people’s daily communication were evident.

**Mexican People on the Borderlands of Mexico and the U.S.**

While the El Paso Chinese colony declined, the El Paso/Juárez area annually doubled its average population after the 1900s with the exception of 1930-40 (Staudt, 1998). As the Free Zone of trading, established in 1987 by President Porfirio Díaz, was abolished in 1905, an economic depression in Juárez ensued (Martínez, 1996; Timmons, 1990). There were more than 10,000 people of Mexican decent in El Paso, which
consisted of one third of its total population by 1910. The irrigation projects, introduction of large crop production, and exclusion of Chinese workers increased the need for a labor force and attracted a tide of Mexican immigrants into U.S. southwest (Martínez, 1996, 2001; Ngai, 1999). With the great demand for workers, the Temporary Admissions Program established in 1917 brought 80,000 Mexican guest-workers to the United States (Martínez, 2001). Ngai estimated an annual seasonal migration in the 1920s ranged from “60,000-100,000 workers” (p. 90). Tides of Mexican immigrants both with legal and invalid documents came to the United States even though they received the least pay, even below Japanese and Greek workers (Martínez, 2001).

The large number of Mexican workers arose concerns among predominately Anglo-American legislators (Ngai, 1999). The issue over “illegal” Mexican immigrants became an arena of disagreement between the nativists and the industrialists. The industrialists viewed Mexican cheap laborers as needed to develop the Southwest, while the nativists strive for keeping the “undesirable” Mexicans from entering the United States (Acuña, 1998a, 1998b; Ngai; Martínez, 2001). Nativists such as Madison Grant, William McDougall, and a Princeton economist Robert Foerster insisted that Mexicans as “a lower race” should be restricted from entering the U.S. and affecting the “racially better stock” Saxons. They warned that indiscriminate mixing would endanger the superior Nordic race and bring about “mongrelization” (Kline, 2001; Piatt, 1998, p. 463). As Ngai explicated, the fear for “retarding the natural birthrate of Americans” and Americans being replaced by the “lower races or classes” (Ngai, p. 75) was so strong that Congress formed immigration laws based on anthropological and scientific racism. For example, the Immigration Act of 1924 was “a race-based nativism, which favored the
‘Nordics’” and it established foundations of “[social] processes for European immigrants, ‘becoming American’ (or, more precisely, white Americans), while casting Mexicans as illegal aliens and foredooming Asians to permanent foreignness” (Ngai, p. 70).

Even though Mexicans were granted legal status as white in the Immigration Act of 1924, the United States Congress began to enforce stricter immigration laws—head tax, visa fee, and the literacy test in order to refuse visas to all Mexicans laborers (Acuña, 1998a, 1998b; Ngai, 1999; Martínez, 2001). According to Ngai, these discriminatory attitudes and policies were effective because the average amount of Mexican immigration dropped from “58,747 per year in the late 1920s to 12,703 in 1930 and 3,333 in 1931” (p. 90). Congress made provisions to harden the difference between legal and illegal immigration in the 1920s and formed the Border Patrol in 1925. In 1929, any unlawful entry to the United States was made a felony in the hope that this would control illegal immigration primarily from Mexico. As Ngai stated “‘Illegal’ became constitutive of ‘Mexican,’ referring… to a wholly negative racial category, which comprised both Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans in the Untied States” (p. 91). While the U.S. immigration administration worked hard to exclude Mexicans by constructing them as illegal aliens in the 1920s, the American consul in Juárez strictly enforced policies to withhold visas. The line between El Paso and Juárez became increasingly more defined and maintained.

During the Prohibition Era in the 1920s, hordes of tourists rushed to the border cities such as Juárez for various entertainment such as bars, gambling houses, and brothels. Numerous Anglo Americans from the United States visited El Paso/Juárez even

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5 According to Ngai (1999), illegal European immigrants apprehended by the Immigration Service were more likely to avoid deportation. In New York City, they had a higher percentage of having legal counsel in deportation hearings compared to their Mexican counterparts.
though the area was perceived by the inland-inhabitants of both Mexico and the United States as the playground of vices (Martínez, 1994, 1996; Ortíz-González, 2004; Timmons, 1990). An American Consul stated in 1921 that

Juárez is the most immoral, degenerate, and utterly wicked place I have ever seen…Murder and robbery are everyday occurrences and gambling, dope selling and using, drinking to excess and sexual vices are continuous. It is a Mecca for criminals and degenerates from both sides of the border.

(Martínez, 1996, p. 151)

Although infamous, these attractions brought prosperity to the two frontier cities. On their way to California, an estimated 75 percent of tourists stopped by Juárez and the rail transportation between El Paso-Juárez became popular for traveling salesmen in El Paso.

Tourism brought significant revenue to both El Paso and Juárez. In the early 1930s, the Great Depression finally affected the El Paso/Juárez area when tourism dropped sharply. El Paso experienced a 21 percent decline in manufacturing. Its residents accused the commuters from Juárez for the loss of their jobs by taking lower wages and spending all their money back in Juárez (Martínez, 1996). Border traffic was blamed for the drain of the town’s wealth. Resolutions were enacted, such as closing the international bridge between El Paso and Juárez to restrict people from going to Juárez to gamble at night. El Pasons also promoted campaigns for a boycott of shops that hired Mexican workers.

Following the nation-wide anti-Mexican policies and sentiment, nativitists were encouraged to harass and even directly attack Mexicans (Acuña, 1998a; Martínez, 1996, 2001). In El Paso, Mexicans were attacked and discriminated against by public officials
as well as private citizens. The health officials diagnosed a Mexican woman who had resided in the United States for 15 years with syphilis and deported her in spite of her legal papers. Her children, two of whom were U.S. born were forced to leave with her (Martínez, 2001). With the collapsed economy in the U.S., Mexican workers were resented and treated as a disposable labor force (Acuña, 1998a, 1998b; Ngai, 1999; Martínez, 2001). Over 400,000 Mexicans, half of whom were citizens of the United States, were deported and repatriated during the Great Depression years (Ngai, 1999). Propaganda on deportation of Mexicans reinforced the stereotypes of Mexicans and Mexican Americans as undesirable aliens who entered the U.S. without appropriate documentation (Acuña, 1998b).

After the Great Depression, Mexican laborers were once again in demand in the 1940s-1960s when there was a labor shortage. The United States was involved in World War II, the Korea Conflict, and the Vietnam war and its economy was in expansion consequently for these wars (Martínez, 1994, 1996, 2001). The Bracero Program was established in 1942 and lasted until 1964. It signed up almost 3.5 million Mexicans as bracero contracts (Martínez, 2001). Many activists in Mexico complained about its government helping the U.S. employers in exploiting and discriminating the braceros with unwanted work with low rages. Tensions arose between the two governments in negotiating minimum wages and working standards. On the border of El Paso and Juárez in 1948, Border Control officials were under pressure from the Texan employers and began to apprehend the undocumented workers and patrolled them to the employers who rushed them to the cotton fields. The flow of undocumented migration became drastically large in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the U.S. government launched an aggressive and
militant campaign known as Operation Wetback to “secure” the border where hundreds of thousands of Mexicans were “in the apprehension, expulsion, and voluntary departure” (Martínez, 2001, p. 57).

Resentment toward Mexican migrants or/and Mexican Americans was on the rise even though there was great demand for their cheap labor. People of Mexican origin experienced bigotry not only through immigration policies and at their jobs, they also were discriminated against and kept distant at every level of daily life. Discrimination against Mexicans existed “in employment, education, schooling, recreation, and labor unions” (Acuña, 1998a, p. 311). Mexicans were excluded from the Anglos’ congregations and they could only worship after the European Americans left the church. Mexican children went to Mexican schools, which usually meant less facilities and resources. Mexicans were excluded from the “regular” swimming pools, restaurants, funeral home, public toilet, and housing areas that the Anglo American “legal” citizens were at. Even Mexicans’ pets had their own cemetery (Martínez, 2001).

Mexicans were segregated from Anglo Americans’ everyday lives. As Ngai (1999) stated:

Casting Mexicans as foreign distanted them from Anglo-Americans culturally and from the Southwest as a region: it stripped Mexicans of the claim of belonging they had had as natives, even as conquered natives.

The distancing was a way by which the “other” was constructed. . .

[through] the failure (or refusal) to identify the self in the other. (p. 91)

In 1965, the U.S. passed an immigration law to invalidate the race-based immigration policies, which excluded Asians and favored white Europeans in the 1920s to 1940s.
Nativists seized the opportunity and proposed a quota system that included Latin America and Canada for the first time and put a cap of 40,000 from any of these nations (Acuña, 1998a). Many Mexicans and Asians with close kin such as parents, children, and spouses in the U.S. entered the country (Martínez, 2001).

After the 1965 law, undocumented migration remained to be a concern in the U.S. In 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) established a system to punish employers who knowingly hire undocumented workers. Consequently, a 1990 study revealed that

[ten] percent of employers admitted to some form of bias against “foreign-looking” or “foreign sounding” workers. Another 14 percent said the law prompted them to hire only those workers born in the United States to avoid hiring anyone with temporary work eligibility documents. (Martínez, 2001, p. 42)

After half a decade, the Immigration Act of 1924 continues its legacy in discriminating against people of non-Nordic origins including Mexicans, who are deemed undesirable by some for the United States.

Between 1982 and 1996, approximately 3.3 million Mexicans entered the United States legally (Martínez, 2001, p. 39). In 1998, there were almost 19 million Mexican Americans among the 29 million Latinos that made up about 11 percent of the U.S. population (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). As Delgado and Stefancic pointed out, the Latino/a population “has an annual purchasing power of $300 billion” yet at the same time has the worst statistics in areas such as “health, infant mortality, longevity, school drop-out, and ownership of medical insurance” (pp. xvii-xix). Under the national policies
such as the Bracero Program in the 1940s-1960s and the proposed guest workers program in 2003 that encourage Mexican migrants to the U.S. as cheap labor, Mexicans (im)migrants both legal and illegal and their children at the same time, experience a backlash against them.

Discriminatory treatments include state politics and strategies such as Tortilla Curtain—a border fence established in the 1970s, steel walls among the San Diego-Tijuana and the Arizona-Sonora border, an increased size of the Border Patrol, El Paso’s Operation Blockade in 1993, California’s Proposition 187 in 1994, and the U.S. Supreme Court’s refusal to overturn the English-only initiative in 1999. All of these actions were designed to draw a stricter line between Mexico and the U.S. and to reduce the economic benefits from immigrant labor (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998; Martínez, 2001; Vila, 2000, 2002). The backlash was so pervasive that one of Atlanta’s most popular radio disk jockeys in 1995 commented that “Mexicans seeking to enter the United States without documentation should be shot with machine guns placed in guard towers at the border” (Martínez, 2001, p. 44). Such aggressive rhetoric seems to be unfortunately shared by Border Patrol agents since “between 1993 and 1996 nearly 1,200 border crossers lost their lives as a result of drownings, accidents, exposure, and homicide” (Martínez, p. 45). Mexican-looking people experience a great deal of harassment at the Mexico-U.S. border zone (Martínez, 1994, 1996, 2001). The resentment of people in El Paso toward those in Juárez is shown in their overwhelming support toward the “Operation Blockade” in 1993 (Vila, 2000). More than 70 percent of El Paso’s residents

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6 The name “Operation Blockade” was soon changed to “Operation Hold the Line” (Vila, 2000, p. 251).
7 Martínez (2001) quoted an article appeared in Atlanta Journal-Constitution on December 10, 1995. The comments from this disk jockey were “Take a few out coming across the river [and] we’ll take care of this illegal immigration problem… We’ll just dump the bodies back across the other side of the border” (as cited in Martínez, p. 44).
are of Mexican origin and more than 90 percent of them supported the Operation Blockade (Martínez, 1994, 1996, 2001; Ortíz-González, 2004; Staudt, 1998; Vila, 2000). The “Operation Blockade” is a tighter border patrol strategy to deter illegal immigrants from entering the U.S. It “placed four hundred agents and dozens of government vehicles and helicopters on the twenty-mile stretch of border dividing El Paso from Ciudad Juárez” (Vila, 2000, pp. 167-8). The act is in obvious contradiction to the laissez-faire attitude and brotherhood sentiment between these two cities under the ideology of free trade.

Regardless of the longstanding tension between groups such as El Pasoans and Juarenses, their interdependency on economic, social, and cultural aspects is significant and continues to deepen (Martínez, 1994). As Staudt (1998) stated, “Juárez is home of the largest number of maquila workers in northern Mexico,” which has approximately 150,000 workers employed (p. 38). Taiwan-based multinational corporations also joined in this export-processing industry. Groups of Taiwanese managers with their own (hi)stories arrived at the borderlands and added another layer of complexity to the already intricate relations. In the following discussion, I wish to map out the political and historical contexts where these Taiwanese and Chinese’s subjectivities and cultural practices are produced.

**Taiwan—Another “Frontier”: The Past and Present over Here and There**

Located just off the southeast China coast facing its Fu-Jien Province separated by the Taiwan Strait, Taiwan is an island that stretches nearly 245 miles long and approximately 90 miles wide (Davison, 2003; Gates, 1987). It is smaller than one tenth
(8.2%) of the U.S state of Texas with a population more than 22.56 million as of August 2003 (Government Information Office, Republic of China-Taiwan, 3/07/06).

Formosa is another name that is associated with Taiwan. In 1517, a Portuguese vessel saw Taiwan and its captain wrote in his log “Ilha Formosa,” or Beautiful Island. Since the 16th century, Taiwan has been the target of colonizers for its strategic and mercantile location (Chen & Reisman, 1972; Copper, 2003). Spaniards occupied Manila in 1571; thereafter, Taiwan Strait was full of European ships. The Dutch overthrew Spanish rule in 1579 and established the Dutch Republic (Davison, 2003). Due to its limited land in the Netherlands, the Dutch launched their expedition overseas and landed on Penghu Islands west of the Taiwan Island in the Taiwan Strait in 1622. The Dutch forces commandeered 1,500 Chinese laborers to Penghu for erecting fortifications. These Chinese laborers experienced the harshness of the Dutch rule. Before the fortifications were complete, 1,300 Chinese had died from starvation. Those who survived were shipped to Indonesia as slaves (Davison, 2003). In 1623 or 1624, the Dutch moved to Taiwan and began erecting Fort Zelandia at Anping (Davison, 2003). For the next 40 years, the Dutch exercised their colonial rule on the island (Copper, 2003; Davison, 2003). In contesting the Dutch rule, the Spanish forces seized Jilong in 1626 naming it San Tiago, which is the northeast coast of Taiwan. These two nations were involved in many years of wars over their own interests on Taiwan.

In 1642, Spain conceded its control of parts of Taiwan to the Dutch. Taiwan was completely under the Dutch colonial rule until 1661. The Dutch benefited greatly for their exclusive control of commerce on the island and trade with merchants in China, Japan, and elsewhere in the region (Copper, 2003; Davison, 2003).
The population of Han Chinese on the island was several times smaller than that of the Aborigines (Copper, 2003; Davison, 2003; Gates, 1987). Aborigines in Taiwan rebelled against the Dutch by using bows and arrows against Dutch guns and artillery. The Dutch slaughtered hundreds of thousands of aborigines and occupied the plains. The remaining opposition fled to the mountains or areas not yet occupied by the Dutch. According to Davison (2003), “in this process of oppression, the population of the plains aborigines had been cut in half from 600,000 at the beginning of Dutch rule to 300,000 by the late 1630s” (p. 10). The Dutch helped the pirate trader Zheng Zhilong to emigrate Chinese to cultivate fields in Taiwan (Copper, 2003; Davison, 2003; Gates, 1987). More Han Chinese then settled in Taiwan and attempted to overthrow the Dutch authority. The Guo Huaiyi Rebellion in 1652 was one of many that were quelled and participants in the revolt faced severe punishment. As Davison wrote, “Guo’s second in command was captured and burned to death, his corpse in the streets, his head severed and carried about on a bamboo pole. Additionally, two brigade leaders suffered the indignity of being drown and quartered” (p. 9). The Dutch used some Aborigines in pursuing the Chinese forces, “and for seven bloody days and nights inflicted and sustained great harm: While Chinese dropped all around them, 10,000 aborigine fighters also went to their deaths” (Davison, p. 9). Dutch colonial rulers often manipulated the relationship between the Aborigines and the Chinese to their own advantage (Copper, 2003; Davison, 2003). The aborigines and the Han people had been competing for economic resources on the island. The colonial rulers such as the Dutch often exploited such competition by placing one group against the other.
Since Chinese outside of the mainland were often perceived as traitors in the eyes of Chinese rulers, their oppression and suffering was not a particular concern for the Chinese rulers (Davison, 2003; Gates, 1987). In 1603, the Spaniards killed 23,000 Han Chinese in Philippines. The Ming court response was that “[t]hose who reside in foreign lands have all abandoned their native places in pursuit of monetary gain. Accordingly, they are a debased form of humanity for whom our protection is unnecessary” (Davison, p. 6). Not only were they devalued, after Manchu overthrew the Ming dynasty, Chinese on Taiwan island were also perceived as rebels that would help to restore Ming’s rule.

After the Manchus overthrew the Ming dynasty, the Ming loyal Zheng Chenggong decided to retreat to Taiwan as his base. In 1662, he led 25,000 troops and took control over the island to “Resist the Qing; Restore the Ming” (Davison, 2003, p. 16). The Qing emperor ordered the evacuation of areas on the southeast coast to preclude more Chinese joining Zheng’s resistance (Copper, 2003; Gates, 1987). The evacuation created a severe deprivation and many fled to Taiwan, which increased the Chinese population in Taiwan drastically (Copper, 2003; Davison, 2003; Gates, 1987).

From 1662 to 1684, Zheng and his family ruled Taiwan and enforced a severe system that forcefully subjugated the Aborigine. Zheng inherited the Dutch lands system and claimed them for themselves instead of returning these lands to the farmers. As Davison (2003) described, “the policy under the Zheng administration was to establish a militia system to open up new lands for cultivation source to supply the army with foodstuffs” (p. 19). Hence, the lives of the common farmers were repressed under the Zheng’s ruling as under the Dutch. The Zheng family ruled Taiwan from 1661 to 1683.
when the 12-year-old ruler Zheng Keshuang surrendered to the Qing. Another gust of wind shifted the fate of peoples on Taiwan to a different direction.

The Chinese courts often viewed Taiwan as a “frontier society” (Davison, 2003, p. 12; Gates, 1987, p. 32). Prominent officials of the Qing court encouraged the view of abandoning Taiwan to the Aborigines. Unlike the Dutch or the Zheng family, Taiwan was viewed by the Qing court as a wild and uninhabited place except for “the robbers and fugitives from the law who sought safe harbor” (Davison, p. 23). Taiwan was included in Qing’s territory as a part of the Fujien Province during the Kangxi reign (Chen & Reisman, 1972; Copper, 2003; Davison, 2003). Officials assigned to Taiwan were mostly Chinese rather than Machus, who were the ruling ethnicity of Qing, and such an assignment was viewed as a demotion. These officials were “lazy, inefficient, and corrupt” and they enforced laws with “cruelty and disregarded the welfare of the population” (Chen & Reisman, 1972; Copper, 2003, p. 35). In the course of Qing’s 212-year ruling, a conflict occurred an average of every 2.7 years (Copper, 2003), and the Chinese saying “every three years a small rebellion, every five years a big rebellion” (Davison, p. 31) described the social unrest on the island. One of the greatest uprisings was led by Zhou Yigui in 1722 and was crushed by a large mainland army. Zhou was sent back to Beijing “to be crucified, and laid waste on the countryside” (Gates, 1987, p. 35).

In addition to rebellions against the mainland government, hatred among Chinese immigrants and Aborigines escalated. The Aborigines decorated their villages with Chinese skulls and the Chinese practiced cannibalism by openly selling the flesh of killed Aborigines in the markets (Gates, 1987). In 1884, the Qing court assigned a capable
official, Liu Mingchuan as Taiwan’s governor and Taiwan became a province after two
years. Liu promoted the modernization of Taiwan and proposed a land reform, which
resulted in a great success. He built railways, steam ships, and machines for coal mining,
lumber, and sugar processing (Copper, 2003; Davison, 2003). Although the rebellions
and resistance from the Aborigines and Han Chinese remained active during Liu’s stay
from 1884 to 1891, his contribution to Taiwan’s development was deemed significant by
later generations.

Competing for its influence on Korea, the ancient empire of China and the
westernized modern Japan went to war. However, it was Taiwan’s fate that was
significantly altered in the aftermath of the 1894-1895 Sino-Japanese War. China ceded
Taiwan and Penghu to Japan “in perpetuity” in the Treaty of Shimonoseki. The local
leaders of Taiwan proclaimed Republic of Taiwan, the first Asian Republic, to resist the
Japanese colonial government. For the lack of support from the Chinese government in
Peking or the European nations, the little organized Republic lasted for only ten days.
However, rebellious activities continued. Davison (2003) wrote that Japanese soldiers
killed 12,000 Taiwanese resisters during 1898-1903 and the number of Taiwanese who
died in the struggle against the Japanese colonization was around 20,000, which does not
include the casualties caused by Japanese soldiers. The Japanese drove the Aborigine
militarily into a wide-range of reservations where they were not permitted to leave while
the Japanese could come and go as they pleased (Gates, 1987).

In 1897, approximately 23 percent of Taiwan’s population chose to return to their
home villages in China and the Japanese colonial government incorporated the remaining
Taiwanese who were mostly lower- and middle-class gentry. They were selected to be the
community leaders in securing local stability and support for policies of the colonial regime. From 1898 to 1993, the colonial government practiced a series of reforms and policies on the island. Taiwan was investigated and scrutinized in detailed reports on its lands, natural resources, as well as peoples for the colonial regime’s maximum profit. For instance, virtually all rice produced in Taiwan was exported to Japan to sustain the rapid urbanizing and industrializing homeland.

Under Japanese rule, Taiwan on the one hand progressed economically and socially based on the information from numerous research projects (Yao, 2001). The Japanese colonialists modernized and extended port facilities, roads, and railroad systems. In 1903, Taiwan had the first hydroelectric generators in Asia outside of Japan, a modern public hospital in 1906, and large dams for irrigation in 1926. After World War I, the colonial regime started Taiwan’s industries such as textile and advanced its research and technology for finer rice and sugar production. The colonial policies improved the public health, sanitation, and education levels on the island. The population grew from “2,650,000 in 1900 to 5,962,000 in 1943,” and school attendance rose from “13.1% in 1917 to 71.3% in 1943” (Davison, 2003, p. 54). On the other hand, the Japanese colonial government monopolized “the sale of opium and production and trade in salt, camphor, and tobacco,” (Davison, p. 54) which made Taiwan ever more financially dependent on its colonial regime while being thoroughly exploited by it.

Taiwan’s social aspect was also greatly affected by the Japanese colonial ruling. Decrees and criminal laws were exercised retroactively. Capital punishment was employed frequently. Any resistance was defeated swiftly and surely. The Japanese school education disseminated the Japanese worldview and rewarded only Japanese-
speaking students with higher education opportunities. This intelligentsia was highly identified with its colonial government and some of them later became the main force that pushed for Taiwan’s self-rule or independence. The interaction between Japanese and peoples in Taiwan during the colonization consequently produced a hybrid culture that combined both elements in cultural forms such as art, music, culinary skills, and literature. In addition to Taiwanese culture, its people’s identity was heavily influenced by Japanese colonial regime. Over 200,000 Taiwanese people were involved in some type of services in the military and at least 30,000 died during WWII. Furthermore, even years later many eldest Taiwanese amicably remembered the Japanese colonial contribution on the island (Davison, 2003).

Japan gained the complete control of Taiwan Strait, which was its base in establishing the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” in the 1940s (Copper, 2003; Davison, 2003, p. 70). After its plan failed, Taiwan was restored to the “Republic of China” led by Genealissimo Chiang Kai-shek in December 1943 at Cairo Conference. In 1945, one-eighth of the Japanese population on the Taiwan Island left and Taiwanese people hoped for its self-rule and genuine democracy. Chiang appointed the Fujien governor Chen Yi as the chief administrator of Taiwan. The war brought sky-high inflation, economic depression, plunged food production, and diseases such as malaria, leprosy, and bubonic plague to Taiwan. Chen was not concerned about the miseries experienced by the Taiwanese people but with engaging in his own aggrandizement. He and his favored officials allowed corruption. They stripped whatever was left from the Japanese colony and survived through the heavy U.S. bombing from both private as well
as public infrastructures and shipped them back to supply the struggling battles in the mainland between the Guomintang (or Kuomintang, KMT) nationalists and communists.

Even though forcefully imposing its ideology and Chinese language (i.e., Mandarin) onto Taiwanese people, general resentment toward the mainlanders was reflected in the popular expression that “the vicious dogs (Japanese) might have been chased away, but slovenly pigs (Guomintang [KMT] officials) had replaced them” (Davison, 2003, p. 77). On February 28 1947, the KMT police killed a middle-aged woman who was selling black market cigarettes to make a living. This event led to outraged demonstrations and oppositions by both elite and non-elite Taiwanese, which is known as the “February 28th incident” (i.e., the Two-two-eight incident) where hundreds of thousands Taiwanese were killed by the KMT troops. From 1949, Taiwanese people experienced “White Terror” in which a virulent campaign was launched to silence potential critics. Although Chen and several other officials later were publicly executed in 1949 after Chiang Kai-shek, along with approximately 1.5-million exodus of mainlanders retreated to Taiwan, the ill will between the Taiwanese and the mainlanders became much steeper (Chee, 2005; Copper, 2003; Davison, 2003).

During the 1950s, with the financial support of the United States the KMT government deployed policies such as land-reform programs, light industrial and imported-oriented policies, which brought Taiwan’s economy to prosperity. The government passed “the Statute for the Encouragement of Investment for Industrial Construction” (Davison, 2003, p. 92) to attract foreign investments to Taiwan in 1960. Between 1966 and 1968, three export-processing zones were established and offered great conditions with cheap land, quality labor, low taxes and plentiful energy. In the
1960s and 70s Taiwan achieved the “Taiwan miracle” of the rapidly increasing expert value from US$ 174 million to US$ 1.56 billion and import growth from US$ 252 million to US$ 1.52 billion (Davison, 2003).

Chiang Khai-shek’s son Chiang Ching-kuo assumed the presidency in 1975 and initiated the process of Taiwanization, which included more Taiwanese, the *ben sheng ren* (i.e., people of this province) instead of *wai sheng ren* (i.e., people of outside province) officials in the government while ensuring that KMT remained its ruling power (Chee, 2005). In addition, Chiang Ching-kuo proposed various plans aimed to modernize Taiwan’s infrastructures. Economic success brought Taiwanese people material comfort even though it was under harsh military dictatorship, it also arose the middle-class Taiwanese to quest for cultural endeavors focused on literature rendered in the Taiwanese dialect, works on portraying the life of country folk and small-town residents. By the end of 1970s, many *dangwai* (outside the party) movements regardless of the political persecution, persevered in their pursuits of more Taiwanese political representatives and its independence. The 1979 *Mei Li Dao* incident in Gaoxiong, Taiwan’s second largest city in the south was an example where anti-government demonstrations occurred and many leaders who were university professors and activists were put into prisons with long-term sentences or became exiles in another country.

The Republic of China on Taiwan lost its seat in the United Nation in the early 1970s and soon after broke its formal relationship in 1979 with the United States after President Nixon’s historic visit to the former communist foe in the Mainland China. Many countries such as Japan followed the U.S. and broke off its relations with Taiwan, which had since experienced much isolation in international affairs. However, both Japan
and the U.S. later established a quasi-official agency on Taiwan to perform similar functions to the former embassy so that they could keep the official relations with the People’s Republic in the Mainland — one of the world’s largest nations as well as a channel to the Republic of China in Taiwan — one of the world’s most dynamic economy. In 1986 Chiang Ching-kuo foresaw the fast-paced changes of the society where an eager middle class would grow frustrated with the level of political freedom in Taiwan. He established an ad hoc committee to study the framework of martial laws for betterment. The oppositional party Democratic Progressive Party (Minjindang; DPP) was formed in 1986 to further Taiwan’s pursuit of independence (Chang, 2002; Copper, 2003; Davison, 2003; Ng, 1998).

In 1987, Guomintang government made the most momentous decision to lift martial laws, to lift the ban on organizing oppositional parties, to legalize the DPP, and to lift restriction on Taiwanese travel to the People’s Republic of China through Hong Kong. Chiang Ching-kuo died the next year and the then vice-president Lee Teng-hui succeeded to the presidency of Taiwan. Lee supervised the political transition and continued the economic expansion even when “the U.S. government forced an appreciation of the New Taiwan dollar and ended Taiwan’s most-favored nation status” (Davison, 2003, p. 104) in the 1980s. With a more “Taiwanized” party, a report on the 228 Incident was issued after 45 years in 1992 with factual and contrite statements. In the same year, the DPP proposed in its white paper that argues for the “One China, One Taiwan” position, labor rights, education curricula adjustment, and care for the underclass. In 1994, its active member Chen Shui-bian won the direct election for the Taipei mayoral position.
Although the support of DPP increased in the beginning of 1990s, Lee Teng-hui won the presidential election in 1996 as a candidate of KMT. In 1999, Lee angered the Beijin officials by proposing the position that the governments of Taiwan and mainland China “had to come to act on the international stage as discrete political entities” and “any discussions about future reunification had to ensue as a dialogue between equals” (Davison, 2003, p. 113). At the turn of the millennium, fear for Taiwan’s declaration of independence if Chen Shui-bian won the election as the president, the People’s Republic of China issued warnings and threats of war. However, Chen maintained high approval ratings and won the election in 2000 as the DPP became the ruling party of the island. Oppressed by colonial imperialists since the Dutch, the Zheng’s family, Qing dynasty, Japanese, and the KMT rule, the island that is home for more than 22 million is ruled by a ben sheng ren’s party for the first time in Taiwan’s history.

In 2003, Taiwan had a per capita GDP estimated at US$23,400 compared to US$37,800 of the U.S. (CIA- The World Fact Book, 2004). Taiwan’s top trading partners include the United States, Japan, Hong Kong, the ASEAN area, and the European Union. In 2001, Taiwan was the world’s 14th largest exporter and 16th largest importer. It held the world’s third largest foreign exchange reserves (Taiwan Yearbook, 2003). With economic success, the peoples with mixed cultural traditions on the island continue to form their cultural identity, to fight for their national identity, and to strive for the right for self-determination. It was out of such contexts that a group of Taiwanese as well as Chinese transnationalists arrived to El Paso/Juárez borderland in which they dwell and travel—they bring a culture premised on intricate relations created and evolving under
various historical and political forces. I joined some of their culturing experiences in August 2004.

Arriving at the Setting—Locating the “Community”

My plan was to stay with Estella, a female Taiwanese manager around my age whom I had met twice prior and spoken to over the phone once. I was to share her apartment during my six-month stay. Yet, there was a change of plans of which neither of us was aware. After my arrival, my relative Mr. Lee who is Estella’s supervisor arranged for me to live in a motel instead of with his family for a week as I had expected. On the third day, I was told that I should find my own apartment instead of living with Estella. Mr. Lee informed me that a couple weeks ago, the Juárez plant had lost an important client to one of their competing Taiwanese multinational cooperates which recently arrived to the El Paso/Juárez border. As a consequence, the future of Estella was in a somewhat uncertain situation due to the weakening performance of the plant. She could resign or her contract could be discontinued when it expired. I then was advised to live by myself, which brought much anxiety due to my tight budget and planned “follow the people” (Marcus, 1998, p. 90) research design to live with/amongst some Taiwanese and Chinese managers who constantly cross borders and move among multiple places in the transnational capital world. Further, I struggled whether and what to tell Estella about this sudden change, especially not knowing what she perceived as her future in the company.

Feeling trapped in my dark, windowless motel room where even the famous, or some would say notorious El Paso sunshine had trouble finding its way in, I felt

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8 The naming practice that I deployed for this project was asking participants to generate a pseudo name for this research. I first explained the reason for an alias, the individual then was asked to provide a name toward the end of my stay. Some participants asked me to generate one for them. In those instances, I did so after asking their preference for being referred to with a Chinese, English, or Spanish name since most people I encountered use English names specifically for work or school purposes.
devastated. I worried about being unable to afford the living expenses of my own apartment as well as the isolation from the people that I planned to interact with. I phoned my mother in Taiwan unleashing all my fears of being unable to afford the cost for an unfurnished efficiency apartment. I wept over my worries of not having any interaction with the people I intended to learn from by living among them and my struggle with what I should tell Estella about this change in living arrangement or whether she even knew about it. With Mother’s comforting words I cried even more, all the while, feeling guilty about worrying my parents and the possibility of burdening my parents’ already astringent financial condition. After the call, I sat in my lonely motel room choking on my anxiety as CNN repeated news on Hurricane Charlie in Florida and the resignation of Governor McGreevey from New Jersey inadvertently aiding my nervous system’s goal of pushing me off the edge. Eventually I fell asleep. I had many dreams where I was in the company of my parents, brothers, my long-time partner, my university peers and professors. Maybe it was because my dreams provided the only safe and familiar space to me or perhaps I was exhausted from my worries, but I slept through the night enjoying the company of my loved ones.

The next morning, I woke up feeling momentarily confused. After a quick shower and note taking, I wandered onto the busily trafficked Montana Avenue searching for my breakfast while car after car passed by like bullets daring me to step into their path. “Where is my community?” I mumbled while feeling swallowed by a tremendous sense of loneliness and loss of direction. I reached a McDonalds and opened the door, sounds of laughter and conversations in Spanish welcomed me in surrounding me with a gentle vibe that seemed to temporally rejuvenate my exhausted body and mind. I stepped into
the midst of the friendly atmosphere where it seemed most customers sat together as a family chatting and enjoying each other’s company. Boundaries between these individuals were effaced during constant interactions as people gathering napkins and ketchup and intermingled with workers and other customers. Although the atmosphere was beautiful, my fieldwork worries returned and hung heavily over my head as I ordered my sausage egg McMuffin meal to go so that I could return back to my hermit’s lair and brood. In gathering napkins and ketchup packets, I accidentally bumped into an elderly man. I immediately apologized as he asked me how my day was. “It’s good. How about yours?” I answered with a smile because it’s polite. “It’s good. Thank you,” he replied while taking out a piece of candy from his pocket. He told me “Have some candy. It’s from Baskin Robbins, an ice cream shop. They have 31 flavors.” He gave me a big smile and walked away as I was thanking him and feeling embraced by a sense of relief as if he heard my screaming inner voice. “It will be okay. I will be okay.” I said to myself as I walked out with a bag of food in my hand and warmth in my heart. His words and actions as well as those of the other customers somehow brought me a sense of security when I had felt the most lost and disconnected from the environment as a desperate ethnographer. The raspberry-flavored candy strengthened my deflated heart and my feeble legs as I trod back to the motel.

Settling into the Setting—Forming Relationships and Developing Research Questions

After a week of staying in the motel, I found my new “ethnographer’s pad” with the assistance of my relative, Mr. Lee. Located on the East Side of El Paso, the 494 square ft. efficiency apartment became my safe space to unveil my most truthful feelings
and deepest thoughts through writing and documenting what I saw, heard, and learned after daily activities. It also was a space for me to bond with close friends through casual dinners, free conversations, and in-depth interviews. With some help, I collected several pieces of furniture such as bed, a couch, a few plates, and a microwave that some previous Taiwanese managers had stored at Estella’s two-bedroom apartment. She was now preparing to move out of and into a smaller unit. The previous burden that had overwhelmed me became much more manageable as I was settling into my pad. I explained to Estella that my decision for this arrangement—not to live with her, was to avoid any controversy about being the niece of the management director living on the company property while conducting academic research. I asked whether she would be willing to befriend me and help me with my research. She agreed, although she disagreed with my excuse as she said “I don’t see the necessity to divide it so clearly, I mean, how much more electricity and water can you use if you lived in the apartment with me?” I apologized for being selfish and thanked her for her understanding. My resentment toward Mr. Lee’s plan and uncertain feeling about the friendship with Estella was reduced greatly. My frustration toward all these changes turned to a different outlook which helped me understand the bad timing and awkward situation beyond any individual’s control. “Isn’t serendipity and flexibility what being an ethnographer is all about?” I chaffed myself.

Movement occurred often in my eastside apartment complex. During my six-month stay, my downstairs neighbors changed twice, then my next-door neighbor J.D. moved out and Charlie moved in. In the parking lot, there were license plates of many states from Texas, to Hawaii, and Alaska. Many belonged to soldiers from Fort Bliss,
which is one of the primary economic resources in El Paso. According to a statistic provided in the *El Paso Times* (*EPT* hereafter), there was an 8% decline (2,100 jobs lost) in El Paso’s manufacturing sector from September 2003 to 2004 (*EPT*, Oct. 27, 2004, 4F).

Since many large multinational corporations relocated jobs in El Paso to somewhere else such as Levi Strauss & Co. in 2002 had stopped its production in El Paso, and the VF Jeanswear announcement of its 1,035 layoffs in September of 2004 (*EPT*, Sept. 3, 2004, 1A), Fort Bliss was becoming a major financial buttress for El Pasoans. It draws federal money for border community such as “a job training and employment center with a $972,619 grant, renewable for up to $2.6 million,” more border patrols, as well as “high-tech equipments to the border” (*EPT*, Oct, 17, 2004, B1; Oct. 21, 2004, B1; Nov. 4, 2004, A1). From my apartment, I often spotted young women and men in military uniforms leaving for work in the morning and returning home around 6:30 p.m.

It did not take long before I learned about the division between the Eastside and Westside of the city after being asked many times about the security or quality of my pad by some west-side dwellers. After telling my friends and acquaintances the location of my apartment, I often encountered questions like “Is living in the East Side dangerous?” “Is your apartment managed by Lao-Bai or Lao-Mo,” cause Lao-Bai are more discreet and would keep the environment clean and beautified. Yours is probably managed by

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9 “Lao-Wai,” “Lao-Mei,” “Lao-Bai,” “Lao-Mo,” “Lao-He,” and “Lao-Chung” are nicknames for various racial/ethnic groups. Their usage is somewhat similar to Fitch’s (1998) explanation of the kind “references to such characteristics as one’s personality, ability, or physical appearance” (p. 42). However, the race/ethnicity-oriented usage is juxtaposed with the national and cultural heritages which naturalizes skin color and national identity in an intriguing yet unsettling way. As one participant explained, in El Paso, a person who is neither white nor black would be a Lao-Mo (Mexican). “Lao-Wai” is a term for foreigners (Wai Guo Ren), which often is used to address Americans. “Lao-Mei” is another term in referring to Americans (Mei Guo Ren). “Lao-Mo” refers to the Mexicans (Mo Xi Ge Ren). “Lao-Han” refers to the Koreans or Korean-Americans (Han Guo Ren). “Lao-Hei” and “Lao-Bai” also were used. “Hei” means black color while “Bai” is white. Thus, “Lao-Hei” means the Blacks while “Lao-Bai” for the Whites. In referring to the Chinese race/ethnicity/cultural group, the term “Lao-Chung” (Chung Guo Ren) was used.
Lao-Mo right?” Richard, one of the maintenance people of my apartment complex told me that El Paso started from the eastside and he still remembers how empty the rest of it was while growing up in the East Side during the late 60s. In one of our conversations, he said “I’m afraid to say it, but the people in the Westside are stuck-up, excuse my language. They think of themselves as better.” I somehow understood Richard’s feeling as I was often trying to convince some acquaintance that I like my residential area and have been enjoying the management of my apartment.

Ortíz-González (2004) explained that the highway system roughly separates the city into the three sectors of northeastern, northwestern, and southern. The closer to the Rio Grande by the border with Mexico, the more concentrated the low-paying and labor-intensive jobs such as in the garment factories that draw mostly recent immigrants from Mexico. According to Ortíz-González, the northwest has a large population of “Euro-American professionals, prosperous businesspeople from Ciudad Juárez, and successful Latino professionals and entrepreneurs” (p. 37). In the newly urbanized eastern side further away from downtown reside many middle-class European and Mexican Americans due to proximity to the maquiladoras and related production in Juárez. Ortíz-González pointed out however, that these managerial-status residents are becoming more transients due to the frequent closures and relocations of plants in the El Paso/Juárez area. A couple that I knew who were on their last year of the six-year working visa purchased a two-story house in that area not along prior to my arrival to El Paso in August 2004. In the end of the year, their plant was struggling to survive in the increasing local and global competitions.
During my stay, I was often praised for being brave in taking the bus and wandering around downtown on foot. As one of my friends said “yeah, I took the bus once when I first came [to El Paso] at the Eastside terminal. There was not a single white face on the bus. It was not like being in America at all. They were all those Lao-Mos taking buses to clean houses in the Westside. Nobody spoke English, it’s all in Spanish.”

Most of my friends inhabited in the East Side primarily for its proximity to the Zaragoza Bridge through which many managers commute to the Juárez maquiladoras everyday. The differences between these two environments may be divulged in some naming practices such as “Sunland Park Mall” in the west side versus “Cielo Vista Mall” in the east. Dividing the city into only two sides based on class/ethnicity certainly runs the risk of oversimplifying this extremely heterogeneous city. However, it is imperative to note the prevalent public perceptions toward the two areas. One El Paso resident expressed that

On the evening of Christmas Day, my son, my daughter-in-law and my two grandchildren were driving to visit my wife and I. While on River Bend on their way to our house, someone shot out one of the rear window [sic] of their vehicle, completely destroying it. This was not a BB. It was something used to kill. My youngest granddaughter usually sits beside this window when they travel. This could have been a major tragedy. I am curious as to why the El Paso Times and other media completely ignored this extremely serious assault. Is it because it happened on the West Side where crime supposedly doesn’t occur [italics added], or are there other
Mr. Carl’s concern for the crime leaking into the supposedly safe West Side environment echoed the questions I encountered regarding the safety and quality of life around other neighborhoods. In addition to the checkpoints on the Border Highway and Rio Grande, this invisible internal border served to further blockade between languages, bodies, and lifestyles within the city of El Paso. This internal border might be invisible, yet it is attested to in people’s everyday living such as commenting about how friendly and easygoing it is to conduct business with Lao-Mo instead of with Lao-Bai who are so serious while returning to homes in “Coronado [the richest and ‘whitest’ part of El Paso]” (Vila, 2000, p. 62) in the West Side.

As I became closer to some of the Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists in El Paso, I began to invite some of them to my pad for dinners and at times, interviews. Most had made comments on the nice night view of my pad in appreciating the countless sparkling lights on the other side of highway I-10 and the Rio Grande, which divides these two nations with “distant proximities” (Ortíz-González, 2004, p. 34). The former is to be traveled freely by automobiles and the latter is to be heavily guarded against certain bodies from crossing. Indeed, many nights I stood by my window looking at these lights representing “progress,” “employment opportunities,” and therefore supposedly “better lives for the Mexicans” as my friends believe. That is, prosperity comes with maquila programs such as that of the East Asian export processing zones (Castillo & Acosta, 1993). From this side of the border, I often wondered what was to be seen beyond the sparkling sea of lights? Were the lights for spotting unauthorized individuals in the plants?
or lighting up the faces of those young on-line operators making about US $35 each week? As many of my transnational friends repeatedly affirmed me that their presence to El Paso/Juárez is beneficial to local economy, peoples in Mexico grow more dependent on foreign capital, commodities, and technology. The lights did not show those thousands of nameless people whose lives have not yet been progressed from such “one-way” development (Verhelst, 1987). What were my friends thrilled about when they see the “splendid view” from my pad? Which group was lit up with the help of the lights?

**Learning with Four Women: Mary, Estella, Mama Gau, and Jen**

Finding an affordable place indeed relieved a great deal of my stress. However, not knowing people around my neighborhood made me feel somewhat suffocated from the isolation. My “conversations” with the very few pieces of furniture I owned/borrowed did not satisfy my need for human contact. I decided to take a twenty-minute walk each day to visit my relative Mary Lee and I often stayed over awhile after dinner. I spent many August and September afternoons and evenings with the Lee’s. Mary and her two daughters came from Taiwan to join Mr. Lee in 2003. Prior to the move, Mary spent a few months in El Paso caring for her husband and the rest of the year in Taiwan with her children. Feeling she was as an object being delivered and received in between two locations, Mary prayed for her husband’s decision to relocate the whole family to El Paso.

After moving to El Paso, Mary’s life involved much less traveling. Every morning, she gets up around five-thirty to fix breakfast and ready her husband and children for work and school. She starts her daily bible study and prays for a couple hours. Sometimes she practices English conversations by watching DVDs brought from Taiwan. Mary enjoyed the seclusion and tranquility of her life in the United States as she repeatedly
appraised how Americans unlike Chinese, respect other’s personal space. Mr. Lee usually returned home from work around eight o’clock in the evening except on Wednesdays due to scheduled phone conferences. In that case, he did not come home until 10 p.m. Mary constantly expressed how being in the United States is a positive experience “Mei-Guo is truly heaven for children,”10 “America is heaven for consumers, I love those dollar stores!” “In America, when there is a sale, it is a true sale. It is not like how it is in Taiwan, which is always a trick,” “Living in America is really safe. There is no need to lock the door.” Daily comments such as these stimulated my curiosity to learn more about various ways in which spatial metaphors of “heaven,” and “America” were being naturally interconnected with meanings of “safe,” and “trustworthy.” I became curious about what some of the forces are behind these almost commonsense-like identities of places, and what kind of power they then carry.

Estella now spends her holidays visiting home in the southern part of Taiwan approximately every six months. Between 1996 and 1997, she traveled and studied in Spain as a college student. After college, she worked in the southern part of Mexico in 2000 prior to her current employment. As a lover of learning different cultures, she told me “I know my parents are getting old, and the time left for us to spend together is diminishing. I am still young, I can always travel to different places in the future after my parents pass away.” Her words underscored her role of being the oldest daughter and her need to care for her aging parents as much as she can. For her language capabilities and job requirements, she is one of the few people in her company who could coordinate with

10 In Chinese, Mei-Guo is America. Mei means “beautiful” and Guo is “country. Thus, Mei-Guo literally means “Beautiful Country” and is used to address “America.” There are multiple English names being used in referring to the United States of America such as “the U.S.,” “America,” and “the States.” Throughout this research, I employ “America” when it is translated from conversations with my friends in El Paso and “the U.S.” or “the States” in my own voice.
the other offices her company owns. Consequently, her working hours are quite different from other managers. There are at least three days a week she works until late into the evening having phone conferences with her co-workers in other locations across Asia, Europe, and the Americas. She relies heavily on technology to keep contact and acquire information from her “co-workers” in the world without being bound by space.

When she is off work at her apartment, she also answers phone calls from the Taipei headquarters. However, she said “it’s kind of nice [for them to call]… because having some chit-chat about what happened in the headquarters is positive and fun. Otherwise, life is too dull here {laugh}.” Being alone in her apartment, Estella perceives the “business calls” as an avenue to build and sustain personal relationships as well as an outlet for her loneliness. Worried about her well-being, her mother gave her a copy of Buddha Scripts to alleviate the pressures of her job and being away from her family.

“There were times when I felt too much frustration building in me, I’d read it to help me relax,” she said. Due to her busy schedule, I only hung out with her during weekends for some cooking, movies, grocery shopping, golfing, and conversing. To Estella, life in the U.S. resembles “less constraints” both figuratively and literally. On a late October Saturday afternoon, Estella and I were sitting outside a coffee shop by the University of Texas at El Paso where she often plays tennis with her friends on Sundays. While sitting in the outdoors, accompanied by birds chirping and the gentle sunshine, I uttered “How nice it is for us to be like college students hanging out here on such a beautiful afternoon!” She responded,

Yeah, I feel really free and it is so spacious here. I enjoy the freedom as well as the easy access to, for example, if I want to play tennis, I’ll just go
and play. Unlike in Taiwan, it’s so expensive to play tennis. Here, the courts are just there for you to play anytime you want.

Feeling less confined, life in US to Estella presents freedom to unlimited resources for personal leisure, particularly that costs much more in Taiwan. Estella appreciated having easy access to activities that might not have been an option prior to her life here. I was reminded that spaces encompass diverse daily activities, which in turn are connected to fixed locations such as “playing tennis anytime here [in the spacious U.S.]” I was led to wonder what were some of the activities engaged in by the Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists after their arrival to El Paso? Moreover, how were these activities being practiced and for what reasons?

In early September 2004, I met Mrs. Gau, whom I later addressed as Mama Gau in the Chinese church where my relatives attend. Mama Gau and her husband, James came to El Paso from Taiwan 12 years ago in 1992 when they were in their forties. They own a hardware store downtown El Paso and Mama Gau looks after it mainly due to her Spanish-speaking ability and her husband’s deteriorating health condition. When we first met, she told me “even though our store is very small, we have hundreds of items in the back warehouse. You should come to take a look when you have time.” They hire two full-time male “Lao-Mo Gon Ren [Mexican workers],” for the physically demanding work required in the hardware store, and a bookkeeper, Ms. Liang originally from

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11 I chose to call her Mama Gau for mainly two reasons: (1) to respond to her way of addressing me like a daughter by calling me “Meimei”; (2) a way of alleviating my longing for my own mother who is thousands of miles away.
12 James had insisted at several occasions that he preferred me calling him his English name without any title such as “Uncle” or “Mister.” He explained that “Uncle” made him sound too old and “Mister” was too formal. Thus, I called him by his first name unless in others’ presence.
13 Middle-aged, James has been diagnosed with a rare illness of a kind of atrophy where most of his muscles in his legs are withdrawing. He started to use a cane in 1997 and became heavily reliant on Mama Gau for daily care.
Mainland China. Their store later became one of my weekday afternoon hangouts. Mama Gau introduced me to other storeowners in the area who speak Chinese such as Mr. and Mrs. Chou whom I visited occasionally.

My travel to their stores involved a thirty-minute walk to the main bus station on the East Side, a twenty-minute bus ride, and another fifteen-minute walk. Mama Gau always insisted on ordering me lunch after my arrival “You are too skinny. You have to eat more. This is at least what Mama can do for you!” she said to me. Her care for me extended to driving me back to my apartment after closing the store at 6:30 p.m. even though I lived in the opposite direction. She always told me with a big smile, “It would be midnight after you arrive home by bus! I know how it is. We did not have a car when we first came here.” On our way to my pad, she often said, “God has given me so many blessings. In a million years I would have never dreamed of being the way I am, driving people around and interacting with strangers…. I was really timid before in Taiwan. It was impossible for me to behave the way I do now. It is only after coming to America that I started to interact with strangers and even asked for information.” She often said how God had taken care of both her and James much as God had for “the blind and the cripple” described in the Bible. She laughed and explained how she is blind in the United States because she does not know much English and James is indeed having difficulties walking. Life in America to Mama Gau represents a new self of opportunities. She once told me she had a friend, Maurine, who is now in her 80s. She did not go to college until her 40s and later became a chairperson in a university. To Mama Gau, Maurine’s story could only happen in America, which is full of possibilities for individual improvement and learning. “When I retire some day, [I] will go to school until I am too old to study.”
Behind her glasses, her smile made her eyes squinty. Her positive attitude and contentment with life inspired my curiosity to learn more about what does living in America, specifically El Paso/Juárez mean to these various transnational Taiwanese and Chinese.

On a Sunday in late-November 2004, I met Jen and her two daughters. Jen is three years younger than me and is originally from an inland province of China. The three of them arrived to El Paso a month before in October to join Jen’s husband, Wen-He who is a Taiwanese manager working in Juárez. Both of their daughters, Mandy, who was five and Miranda two, were born in Taiwan but grew up in China. Miranda was learning to talk and Mandy spoke Mandarin, at times mixed with some Taiwanese slang and increasingly adding English and Spanish, although very rarely, into her speech. Their apartment complex was right across from mine. We immediately became close and their apartment became where I spent many afternoons and evenings.

I often stayed until late evening, several hours after Wen-He came back from work around seven-thirty or 8 p.m. On a late Friday night or early Saturday morning when the three of us were slowly exhausting a bottle of Tequila, I told them about how my father always wanted us to go to a four year-college because he never did and was unable to be promoted regardless of how hard he worked or how much he sold his life to the company. Wen-He told me that he was once turned down for an H1 visa for

14 As with any other language, Mandarin is spoken in various societies with large Chinese-ethnic groups. Each has its accent as well as usage of phrases influenced by the previous local dialects or the environment within which individuals grew up. Certainly, there exists a hierarchy amongst all these variations.

15 “Taiwanese” actually refers to the Min-Nai language spoken by many societies, including Taiwan and Singapore with a large amount of the population whose ancestry emigrated from the Fu-Jien province in China. The role of “Taiwanese” in the rise of nationalism in Taiwan has drawn critiques of being an exclusive and insensitive label which is contradictory to the very spirit of independence, for there exists many other active languages practiced by minority groups in Taiwan (Chao, 2005; Zheng, 2005).
professionals because he does not hold a university degree, which is desirable according to the U.S. immigration regulations. Even though he finally received an H1, he said “I know I’m only a five-year college graduate, which is vocational-oriented, and I am unbelievably fortunate to be assigned here. I know this is it for me. I will always be getting a fixed pay from others, I will always be working for others. This is it. That’s why I want my children to be here so that they can go somewhere.” Jen then made fun of how he bragged about working in America when he went to the China plant to visit her before she came here. H1 holders need to ask their company to provide papers and signatures in order for them to apply for Permanent Residency (PR). However, Wen-He’s company decided not to provide signatures on papers necessary for the H1 people a few months earlier. Recently, the headquarters was seriously considering closing down the Juárez plant where Wen-He works.

On a typical Monday afternoon, I went to their apartment to hang out after Jen called me. We spent the afternoon running errands and started to prepare dinner around 4:30 p.m. Jen started to tell me about how she and her husband had a huge fight the day before and they hadn’t spoken to each other since then. She also told me that today was her husband’s birthday. I then realized why we were baking a cake.

Jen said “He thinks that I don’t want to be here in the U.S. and that I don’t want to be with him.”

“Is that true? You don’t want to be here?”

“Well, I didn’t want to come to America when I was in China, that was true because I don’t speak English and I had a job there. I didn’t know the reason to come here. I didn’t want to leave where I lived because I got used to the lifestyle there. But here, I don’t
I know anyone and I don’t know the language, I don’t know anything. But then since now I did come here, I have been trying to get used to it here and it is not that bad. I am planning to go school to learn English, am I not?”

“Why did you finally decide to come?

“My husband had always wanted to come to the U.S. and he has been working so hard to have this opportunity. He also really wanted the girls to be here with him. When we lived in China, in the company dorms, he would leave in the early mornings for work while we were still sleeping. He would come back to have lunch and take a short nap before going back to the office. At that time, our oldest daughter Mandy was only two or three years old and she wanted her father to be with her before falling asleep. She would cry so hard, so I had to call my husband to ask him when he could come back. He would say ‘okay, okay, ten more minutes,’ but then he always came back around 11 p.m. or 12 a.m. Our home was like his hotel. We never saw each other even though we lived together. Mandy always cried herself to sleep. It broke my heart seeing that. Later, I went to live in Taiwan while pregnant with Miranda. He would come to visit us once in awhile from China. My younger daughter didn’t get to spend much time with her father after she was born. He came to the hospital to take a look at us after I gave birth to Miranda, literally, it was a look and he had to go back to China to work. So Miranda doesn’t really know her father. It’s pretty sad because she’s not close to him even now. Even though we’ve been married for six years, we probably have lived together for less than three.”

While making a birthday cake for her husband, she also tried to page him without any success. She had tears in her eyes as she was telling me about her pain of being unable to have a perfect solution and her desire to return to the lifestyle she was used to. I
was in the process of forming my words to comfort her when Wen-He opened the door into the apartment returning home from work. We stopped our conversation. I told him “Happy Birthday” and apologized for inviting myself to his birthday celebration.

At this point, with Jen’s tears of being forced to become mobile and fixed at the same time as well as Wen-He’s working attitude to reach the almost “impossible dream,” by traveling alone with limited capital, I was struck by the other side of fluid traveling and hybridizing on the borderlands as various scholars had commented (Kraidy, 2002; 2005; Ong, 1999; Shome, 2003; Vila, 2000). On the other hand, I realized that when I was interrogating the mobility and capacity for the seemingly footloose and fancy-free transnationalists in their crossing borders and cultivating cultural hybridity as Shome (2003) had reminded researchers of border studies, I certainly was not considering those who are left behind nor the kinds of effects it has on the travelers. Jen’s pain made me reflect back on all my interactions and strived to understand what kinds of agony different Chinese and Taiwanese transnationalists with various privileges experienced in their working and/or living in the border area of El-Paso/Juárez. That is, I was curious to learn how they have experienced the processes of their culturing while living in the area and what strategies have been adopted or(and) invented in the culturing.

**Connecting Academic Knowledge with Lives of the Four Women**

As I was finding “my place” in (re)searching the imagined Taiwanese/Chinese community in El Paso, my initial interactions with these women made me rethink

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16 Anderson (1991) argued that nationality could be conceptualized as a collective imagined community where individuals’ belongingness derived from a sense of togetherness across different time and space. The vast amount of tombs in graveyards full of soldiers who died in the name of defending one’s nation can attest to this strong imagination. With this concept in mind, I believe that the sense of belongingness to a “community” is also imagined and performed through individuals believing in the concrete connections and sameness based on shared blood, ancestry, history, or language.
questions pertinent to the significance of their relocating to the United States, specifically to El Paso/ Juárez area. The often-spoken phrase “coming to America” refers to more than moving one’s physical body from the previous place to this new land. “Coming to America” encompasses a host of ideological symbolism and ramifications depending on the individual’s specific locations in various contexts. Therefore, meanings of “living in America” for these Taiwanese and Chinese are not to be comprehended the same way as other groups nor homogeneous amongst themselves. “Coming to America” cannot be taken as an ingenerate result without undercurrent forces at play in accomplishing such an act. These forces, the Mexican-U.S. border patrolling as an example, may counter to my friends’ lives in the United States; yet at other times, they may be auxiliary to the pursuits of my friends’ dreams in El Paso.

After spending more time interacting with my new friends in El Paso, my curiosity about the ways in which identities of places, peoples, and cultures (dis)connect into interlocking relations grew deeper. I wondered what are the dominant stories of places such as “America,” and “El Paso” being constructed by these Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists? How are these spatial relations being made and maintained? What kinds of cultural hierarchy are consequently demarcated during the construction of spatial relations? As geographer D. Massey (1995) explained, places are to be thought of as “an ‘envelope of space-time’…. not as areas on maps, but as constantly shifting articulations of social relations through time; and to think of particular attempts to characterise them as attempts to define, and claim coherence and a particular meaning for, specific envelopes of space-time” (p. 188). Hence, I further questioned as to how do these transnational Taiwanese and Chinese (dis)articulate and negotiate their identities with
these “envelopes of space-time”? What communicative practices are engaged in to better position themselves in various “local” or “remote” places and spaces? How are they performed in the everyday dwelling/travelling?

In order to better my understanding of questions about (a) How is the space El Paso/ Juárez being construed; and (b) What strategies then were developed by some of the Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists during their culturing process in this space, I incorporated multiple methods (e.g., observations while participating, in-depth interviews, informal conversations) to triangulate the information/knowledge learned (Lindlof, 1995).

In the beginning of my research, I participated and observed from my daily interactions in gatherings such as celebrative meals as well as cooking gatherings at individual’s homes, religious rituals at churches, and local shops owned by some of my friends. As time passed by, I became close with several “key informants” (Thomas, 1993, p. 38) and from them I met new people. I took fieldnotes which detailed accounts based on ‘experiences, thoughts, hunches, hypotheses, dreams, interactions and observations” (Goodall, 2000, p. 87). Since the act of taking fieldnotes is a rhetorical move in which my attention was drawn to what I was “attracted to and convinced by” (Conquergood, 1992a; Goodall, p. 87), they are not direct translations from my or others’ lived experiences to the texts nor do they consist of complete details of cultural meanings. By immersing myself in these notes, I identified some of the

Compelling incidents, sequences of actions, repetitive acts, and other critical details that inform [my] understanding of the scene…. [by looking for] subjects that are dramatized by the participants, or that are glossed by them; puzzling or conflicted situations; elements that are recurring;
conditions that evoke actions; key expressions in participants’ talk that indicate how they regard themselves, their situations, or their surroundings; and communal acts (rituals) that seem to embody beliefs or processes of the culture. (Lindlof, 1995, p. 220)

I roughly categorized these elements according to Goodall (2000) as the “basic forms of social exchange” such as routine verbal exchange, “turning points” in narratives, and habits in speech conversations; patterns of everyday performances such as routines, rituals, rites of passage, isolated episodes of new comers’ culturing, episodes of risks-taking or face-saving, and crises. Each day, through an analyzing cycle of writing down what was said and practiced, codifying it into a type of category, and reflecting on how the type of communication coded interacted with my personal experiences and knowledge, I attempted to de-familiarize the taken-for-granted relations and norms.

In order to make sure my (partial) interpretations are truthful, I invited friends for interviews as a way to enquire about their perspectives and interpretations toward particular events or language usage. I verified information I learned as well as to engage in more focused and deeper conversations about their personal experiences and feelings toward their lives in El Paso/Juárez, as various ethnographers suggested (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995; Lindlof, 1995; Spradley, 1979). I conducted multiple in-depth interviews with twelve of my friends both from Taiwan, China, as well as Hong Kong. During the first interview, I provided them the consent form, explained it, and started with what Lindlof referred to as “grand-tour questions” that allowed my friends to unravel their experiences from a time-line approach to “introspect effectively about her or his
Each interview generally lasted approximately one and a half to two hours. More specific questions such as their reactions and perspectives toward specific events, unique instances that impacted their life in this environment, and explanations toward particular terms were included in later interviews. I transcribed and translated these interviews conducted in Mandarin into English which became another source of my interpretation of communication occurred in the community. In the following ethnographic accounts, various types of translating strategies are incorporated (e.g., Anglocized Chinese; completely translated Chinese; English words mixed in Chinese sentences). Such usages are to demonstrate the intermixing and fluid languages switching in my friends’ daily conversations. Following historian Yuh (2002) who interviewed Korean military brides in *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, I use various conventions to quote my friends in order to demonstrate nonverbal behaviors, usages of mixed languages, and interactions in the interviews.

Chapter two intends to contextualize the space of El Paso/Juárez and its relations to the understanding of the culturing process of a group of Taiwanese and Chinese. First, I provided brief histories on El Paso/Juárez and Taiwan as two frontiers with myriads of interactions between various cultural groups. These stories were to depict the environments the Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists have been. By introducing these events, I hope to illustrate the active interconnectedness between the historical and political structures and ethno-movements in this global stage. I then narrated my own

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17 Please see Appendix for the consent form as well as the initial interview questions.
18 According to Yuh’s (2002) work, “{ } enclose notes on nonverbal behaviors such as laughter, sighs, gestures; [ ] enclose background explanations added by me as the researcher; ( ) enclose questions asked by me; italic typeface is used for words of the speaker that do not require translation, including English and occasional Korean words where the meaning is made clear; regular typeface is used for words of the speaker that have been translated into English” (p. xi). In addition, I followed Lindlof’s (1995) suggestion and underlined the words spoken with an emphasis during the interview.
interactions with the El Paso/Juárez border and the peoples to search for the salient communicative phenomena of inquiry. That is, through my growing familiarity with the members of the Taiwanese/Chinese community and their environments, I arrived at research questions, which include: How do the Taiwanese and Chinese understand their lives at the borderlands of El Paso and Juárez? What are their culturing processes? What are some of the strategies being enacted during their culturing on the border?

In the following chapter, I explicate how different places were experienced and depicted in my daily interactions. The significance of places/spaces in my transnationalist friends’ understandings of their lives will be illustrated. The discussion will focus on the relations constructing these spatial identities rather than the authenticity of the representations of various geographical locations. That is to say, it is the process of space making is at issue, instead of the accurate descriptions of a location on a map.
CHAPTER THREE: MATERIALIZATION OF SPATIAL IDENTITIES

Foucault (1986) explained that the problem of human living space is “that of knowing what relations of propinquity, what type of storage, circulation, marking, and classification of human elements should be adopted in a given situation in order to achieve a given end” (p. 23). He further pointed out that human beings do not live in a kind of void where individuals and things are placed. Instead, we live “inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not super imposable on one another” (p. 23). Critical geographer Massey (1999b) proposed, in a similar vein that spatiality/space is produced through the process of interaction and has multiple voices, both coherent and disruptive. Massey (1995) encouraged envisioning place as an “envelope of space-time’…. not as areas on maps, but as constantly shifting articulations of social relations through time” (p. 188). She challenged how these envelopes of space-time are often defined and attributed to coherent meanings and characteristics. The envelopes of space-time in Massey’s term, of El Paso and Juárez have myriads of characteristics bestowed to them throughout history. Meanings of these places are easily reduced to certain fixed and congruent characteristics. Such a reduction overlooks various relationships being articulated in the process of producing spaces.

Grossberg (1996) explained that the identities of places are to be read as processes of “space/place becoming” (p. 177) in which interests are always present and at times, competing with one another in propelling the story of a place. As Massey (1995) pointed out, the story of a place often serves the interests of the more powerful. Consequently, certain groups are desired to be included while others are excluded under the influence of the dominant groups. Everyday talks and written texts create discourses that shape the
story of space-becoming where ideologies and values are built into the process. Through our daily interactions, relations are (re)built into different spaces-times that shift and remark its boundaries and territories based on new relationships being (re)articulated as dominant power travels. For example, the relationships between El Paso and Juárez change in accordance with global economic/political structures at different historical moments. People in these places build particular relationships and engage in certain communication with one another under the influence of these structures. These activities carry a significant impact on the meanings of these two places.

Although movements of decolonialization initiated and thrived in later half of the 20th century, the question of “post-” colonialism continues to stimulate numerous debates in all fields for material and political accountabilities in defining the meanings of “post” as discussed in Chapter one (Chambers & Curti, 1996; Mishra & Hodge, 1994). With current debates in mind, theoretical claims such as JanMohamed’s (1985) examination on Manichean allegory, which is a colonial legacy to be realized in colonial novels such as Kim may continue to facilitate understanding of present transnational interactions. In viewing Manichean allegory as an influence on contemporary writings, I extend his frame to the sphere of Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists’ daily talks in suggesting such a mechanism permeates in people’s everyday communicative events as a fluid discursive force in buttressing hegemonic ideology (van Dijk, 1997a, 1997b).

Nevertheless, I am fully aware of the debates between the binary operations of Manichean allegory without various struggling interests (Stoler & Cooper, 1997) or space for resistance on the one hand; and the hybrid identities replete with romanticized subaltern resistance on the other as Loomba (1996) explained. In my analyses,
Manichean allegory is perceived as a mindset that positions people/places into an oppositional binary (i.e., the colonizers vs. the colonized) and within which, static characteristics are attached to each group (i.e., the civilized vs. the barbarian). It is practiced and enacted in daily interactions as a means to gain understanding of the worlds for sense-making during my encountered interactions in El Paso. I do not claim that anybody to be in the fixed category as the “colonizers” or the “colonized.” Rather, I intend to illustrate the heavy influence of such an exchange mechanism of Manichean allegory in daily understanding and organizing, not without contradictions however, of various places and peoples.

Perceptions projected and knowledge claimed onto any geographic location and society cannot escape the hierarchical division produced by colonialism. Without erasing the colonial experiences, the effects of globalization demand us to view the world beyond the split between the colonized Oriental and the colonizing Occidental. As Bennett, Grossberg, and Morris (2005) stated, “[any] ‘space’ now holds multiple meanings, with strong cultural, physiological, and political associations.… The pervasiveness of the term invites us… to acknowledge space as a dynamic force in the contemporary struggle for meaning, belonging, and power” (p. 334). Hence, an individual’s comments about places are not to be disassociated from the effects of colonial dominance nor “genres or orders of discourse, such as those of the media and politics” (van Dijk, 1997b, p. 33). Van Dijk (1996, 1997b) explained the interplay between discourses at the micro- and the macro-levels. That is, individuals’ communicative events such as interactions and cognitions with ethnic prejudices acquired, used, and reproduced in everyday life, reveal the institutionalized negative representation on certain minority groups being (re)made and
perpetuated in our past, present, and future. This chapter strives to delineate the interconnectedness between daily individual interactions and macro-discourses such as global geopolitical relationships within which the Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists exist. More specifically, I (re)construct narratives from everyday conversations to reveal the ways in which El Paso and Juárez are comprehended within this community. In so doing, I adopt Manichean allegory as a lens to identify the oppositional ideology in the processes of space making on the borderlands.

**Manichean Exchange Influence: (Dis)ordering Spaces**

I was surprised to learn about how widely circulated the *World Journal of Texas* (henceforth *WJT*), a Chinese newspaper based in Houston,¹ Texas, was among these Taiwanese and Chinese peoples. It did not seem to matter that the “news” always arrived about one or two weeks late because the newspapers are not delivered daily. It remains as one of the major means for those who do not read news in English or use computers to familiarize themselves with world events particularly in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the US. *WJT* also provides genres pertaining to their personal interests such as stock market updates, prose on various topics, entertaining information, and the most recent policies of US immigration regulations and practices.

As an outlet to familiarize oneself with the new environment in El Paso, it is common for new arrivals to share the newspaper with one another. Mr. and Mrs. Lee kindly shared their issues of *WJT* with me throughout my stay. Not only did it alleviate

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¹ The newspaper is printed in traditional Chinese characters which are used in Hong Kong and Taiwan while simplified Chinese characters are used in mainland China. There are other newspapers such as *Singtao News*, which focuses on news in Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan with phrases specifically for Cantonese language users. Even though the traditional Chinese characters are read in Hong Kong as well as in Taiwan, as a Taiwanese, I may not comprehend the meanings of some phrases in *Singtao News* even though I recognize the written characters.
my stringent budget, it enabled me to more fully engage in daily conversations. Some people brought their copies to share with others during informal gatherings such as Bible study groups. Mama Gau subscribed to it through her business and shared it with her bookkeeper Ms. Liang from Shanghai.

Mama Gau also offered it to me to read so that I would not get bored in her store. She often expressed her frustration while reading *WJT*. One day, she said to me “You see this? What is Taiwan going to do?” pointing to the newspapers while sighing and shaking her head. She continued, “This is why I can’t bear reading news about Taiwan now, it makes me upset.” “What happened?” I asked. She then showed me the newspaper with several headings such as: “Lee Chi, the once fervent supporter for Taiwan’s independence [now] believes independence is not suitable in Taiwan: He states that keeping it ambiguous politically may bring Taiwanese more security; moving toward independence will lose everything”; “Communist combat aircrafts were close to the middle-line of the Taiwan Strait, the Military offers different stories”; “Bien set the tune for the content of ‘The Republic of China is Taiwan’²: Accepting national heritage means to respect both two histories and different ethnic experiences” and “On Founding Father Sun Yat-sen’s Birthday the Blue camp and Green camp paid respect separately.³”

² This refers to Chen Shui-bien who has been Taiwan’s president since 2000. He is often referred to as A-Bien in showing affinity. His administration is often called the “A-Bien administration.”
³ In his “Blue and Green in South China Sea” originally entitled “Stand off in Taiwan” that first appeared in the London Review of Books, Perry Anderson (2004) comments on the dramatic outcome of Taiwan’s 2004 Presidential election which split politics into two camps. Each symbolized itself with either Green or Blue representing the factitious struggles during the Byzantine era. The Green camp includes the Democratic Progressive Party, the majority party since 2000 along with other groups supporting Taiwan’s independence. The other one is the Blue camp primarily consisting of Kuomingtang (KMT), the power holding party for almost half a century after Chiang Kai-shek’s arrival to Taiwan in 1949 and the New Party split from KMT in early 90s. The Blue propagates Taiwan instead of the Beijing government, as the legitimate rule of Mainland China.
I sensed her disgruntlement about the fervent debates within as well as outside of Taiwan island about its national identity and relation to “the Republic of China” (ROC) established in 1911 (*WJT*, Nov. 12, 2004, Taiwan News A5). Lamenting on the deepening division between peoples in Taiwan, Mama Gau said,

All day long they fight over whether ROC is Taiwan. This government only cares about fighting over *empty ideologies* while letting the economy rot. They keep arguing about *abstract issues like name-change* and denying the Republic of China? What is the point in fighting over such *useless issues*? People need to feel *safe and secure economically* in their daily lives [italics added].

After a long sigh, she continued

> When I was young, there was no such a division between ‘ben shen ren’ [indigenous people] and ‘wai shen ren’ [outside people]. Everybody got along. You go and ask your mother to see if I am right. It is so sad for those Taiwanese who are still trapped in Taiwan. Those capable of leaving were *out* a long time ago [italic added].

As a businesswoman, Mama Gau perceived economic strength as the substance of security. The pragmatic values were underlined in her hierarchical arrangement of issues. The self-naming and identity topics are classified as the “useless” and “abstract” political ones as opposed to the monetary ones. Struggling for an identity was blamed for Taiwan’s declining economy and solidarity among its peoples. Since the abstract/political discussions on self-labeling are prevalent in Taiwan for her, it would be necessary to withdraw from the suffocating environment. Since political issues are seen as separated
from the economic one, Taiwan was deemed as a less desirable place to live and identify with because the government is consumed with useless issues (i.e., non-economic ones) such as national identity. Citizens in Taiwan like Gau were “forced” to leave and those who remain are “trapped.”

While I was listening with a deep sense of “powerlessness” as someone who is “out,” I thought about how scholars also have recently paid greater attention to different kinds of nationalism rising in societies such as Taiwan and China (B. Anderson, 2001; P. Anderson, 2004; Chen, 2004; Wang, 2004, 2005). Both Perry Anderson (2004) and Benedict Anderson (2001) wrote articles elaborating on their analyses on Taiwan’s nationalism from different political, cultural, economical, linguistic histories and concluded on the somewhat pessimistic future for Taiwan’s independence. Several Taiwanese scholars such as Wang (2005) have pointed out that with the more widely known debate about Taiwanese nationalism within the island and abroad, “perceptions have tended to be shaped mainly by commentaries centered on the positions of the U.S. and China, not the island itself” (p. 1). With admonishment on developing an overzealously exclusive nationalism, Wang indicated a sense of hope for Taiwan to become an entity treated with dignity. However, such an optimistic outlook seems to be rather rare, particularly in Mama Gau’s words.

At this time, a gust of laughter approached the store as an old man in a white cowboy hat walked in with a couple of people. “Como está, Listo?” greeted Mama Gau. “Bien.” Listo started to shake hands with everyone present in the store as always. Awakening from the previous conversation, I started to hear Mexican radio music as part of the air floating at the end of Stanton Street connecting to Mexico with the
unidirectional Stanton Street Bridge. The phone rang while people walked around looking at different items. Mama Gau said “Un momento” and gave the phone to one customer near her as she often did. Sometimes it would be a call for directions to the store, which are too complicated for Mama Gau to explain over the phone. At times it was the employer calling to talk with the person being sent for that purchase. This time, it was a call in which her clients said that for some reason, the traffic through the border moved very slowly that day. They were stuck at the border for a long time. They told Mama Gau that they would eventually get there. Mama Gau promised that she would wait for them. She laughed and said to me, “I am this nutty here. I always grab someone next to me to answer phone calls that I can’t understand. Let them handle it. They are great in helping.”

After almost an hour, a group of customers came in. “Oh, look, here they are.” Mama Gau and others busied themselves with helping customers find items and I chipped in as a temporary cashier. However, Mama Gau’s words about Taiwan and its peoples continued circulating in my head while being in the conjuncture/disjuncture of multiple spaces-times. Viewing residents in Taiwan as piteous is to project them only as victims. Such a perspective overlooks the possibilities for resistance that many have engaged in such as discussions on name changes in self-identification. Further, this view neglects the complicity that many Taiwanese who instead of being marginalized victims, contribute to the current racialized, nationalized, and gendered labor oppression and configuration (Cheng, 2002).

There have been increasing critiques and examinations on foreign labors/migrant workers’ conditions in Taiwan. However, critiques of the Taiwanese people’s
accountability in the development of transnational capitalism does not erase the repressive atmosphere Taiwan has experienced as all my friends in El Paso had expressed at various occasions. Mama Gau’s statements revealed that it was Taiwan’s past being missed. It was the Taiwanese people presently “trapped” in Taiwan that are piteous. It was Taiwan’s future being confined and unseeable. It was this shop located literally across from the U.S.-Mexican border checkpoints where Mama Gau’s life has been experienced for the past decade and would continue. Mama Gau was not alone in expressing frustration about the current situations in Taiwan. During my interactions with many Taiwanese in El Paso, I gathered the overall sense of viewing Taiwan’s living condition as unstable and even unbearable.

One evening after dinner, I learned about Wen-He’s disappointment and loss of hope in Taiwan’s future. Jen had made a joke about Wen-He’s shifting positions by saying “now, he loves America and hates Taiwan.” Wen-He defended himself I am really disappointed in Taiwan for two reasons. One is how the government promotes the cultural sense of melancholy. My other disappointment is also educational. Taiwanese’s math ability used to be one of the best in the world until they changed the teaching methods that adopted American progressive step-by-step inductive style. For example, if you buy $15 worth of goods, and pay it with a $20 bill, instead of giving you 5 dollars back, Americans will give you singles back starting from 16, 17, 18, 19, and then 20. So the Taiwanese government is making the strongest element in our education to become weaker. I figured I might as well bring my daughters here since their math strength will not be strong
[competitive] enough anymore, at least their language ability will be of vantage.

Working in a multinational corporation, Wen-He perceives an increasingly competitive world. It is therefore imperative to perform with maximum efficiency, which means expending the least time/energy to reach the correct result/profit (Rofel, 1992).

Viewing children in Taiwan as losing their mathematical ability, Wen-He searched to advance his children with better language skills in English compared to the children in Taiwan. At the moment, I recalled a conversation Jen and I had about a week earlier when the girls were jumping around in my apartment. Jen shared with me that she was upset with Wen-He for always favoring Taiwan and thinking that Taiwan was better than China in all regards. “Back then, even the toilet paper in Taiwan is better in his mind.” She proclaimed with a laugh and continued “I admit that there are many not-so-positive activities the Chinese government did, but don’t count me in! Now that he’s in America, everything about Taiwan is worse than that of America.” With the memory of Jen’s previous comments, I was then able to connect Wen-He’s (dis)articulation of his (family’s) positions. He strove to flexibly reposition his family in accordance with the logic of various places being classified based on the perceived utmost vantages in an economical sense. That is, China was placed as the lowest and U.S. in the highest at that particular historical juncture.

Both Jen and Wen-He perceived themselves to hold no personal power in influencing their large environment. As Mama Gau lamented, their feeling of being powerless seems to be reflected in the political participation in Taiwan. Wang (2005) suggested an increasing apolitical attitude in Taiwan with “a sharp drop in voter turnout
from slightly above 80 percent in March to under 60 percent in December [of 2004]” (p. 2). However, Wang pointed out that this does not indicate an ebbing for the tide of nationalism, rather the disillusioned peoples toward the quality of democratic politics in Taiwan. For many of my friends, the decline of Taiwan’s economic performance plays a crucial factor in their (lack of) involvement in matters relating to Taiwan. Such a belief propelled Wen-He’s acquisition of as much mobility as possible in “self-directing” the course for him and his family. After weighing and arranging different places in hierarchical relations based on the current and projected future global configuration, Wen-He expressed several times that his children’s future is very likely to remain in Asia. Thus, the boundaries of his present order of places and spaces are shifting just as human populations shift in this competitive world.

In the following discussion, I map the fluid and power-laden relationships between various places/spaces constructed through my friends’ and my daily communication with each other in El Paso as well as with written texts. I intend to illustrate how different geographical locations such as Taiwan, El Paso, Juárez, and the U.S. are construed hierarchically. Through these space-making and ordering processes, our quotidian interactions are interconnected with the global arena and questions such as what kinds of symbolic spaces they each occupies and what the impact is on my friends and myself and those in our surroundings became imperative to address.

“Taiwanese are piteous”: Taiwan’s Narrow Future in the Global Arena

As the transnational “imagined” community of the Greater China continues its rapid actualization with aids of various political, economical and cultural interventions propagated, practiced, and embraced by elites in primarily Chinese-ethnic groups within
and outside the Asian Pacific region (Chang, 2000; Ong, 1993, 1997, 1999b; Ong & Nonini, 1997), its “ungrounded empires” bounded not by physical territories but cultural practices continue to precipitate its production and accumulation of transnational capital holders (Ong & Nonini, 1997). Although the construct of the Greater China remains debatable as to its “real existence” and what it encompasses, as the “fastest growing and largest potential market in the world” (Chan & Cheng, 2002, p. 389), its material effects have been experienced by both individuals inside and outside of the man-made geographical referent called the Asian-Pacific region, through the flows of people, capital, and commodity (Dirlik, 1993; Nonini, 1993). Such an imagination and materialization was mostly perceived as the soaring “China expansion” to my friends in El Paso and was experienced with ambivalence to various degrees. At any rate, they recognized China’s trajectory as an emerging superpower with aggressively expanding influence in all spheres such as economic, political, military, cultural, and even sports. For example, the 2004 Olympics were held in Greece during my sojourn in El Paso and the Chinese athletes’ performance was often discussed. Moreover, Beijing will host the Olympics in 2008, which was mentioned by several Chinese and Taiwanese in discussing how much Beijing has changed. They concluded that China would be much more modernized for this event.

Similar to Mama Gau and James, Mr. Lee and Mary also were born in Taiwan during the 1950s not long before Taiwan’s economy turned its way to prosperity. There were cottage factories everywhere, and the prevalent slogan of her childhood was “Living room as Factory” as Mary told me. Unlike Mama Gau and James, both Mary and Mr. Lee’s parents came from China to Taiwan after 1949 without receiving a Japanese
education or living under the Japanese colonial rule. Mama Gau frequently told me that unlike both her father and father-in-law, who received a high educational background during Japanese colonization, neither she nor James attended university. Both Mary and Mr. Lee are college graduates who had to take national examinations to enter junior high, senior high, and university by achieving competitive scores. Mary’s husband is in senior management; therefore, many of their acquaintances hold a similar socioeconomic status in the Information Technology (IT) industry or its relating fields. More than once, Mary told me that many of their friends in Taiwan now face the thorny problem of the husbands being assigned to work in Mainland with their wives and children left behind in Taiwan. She explained the situation

It is extremely difficult for a family to stay together physically now because almost all the industries had moved out to Mainland China with few job opportunities left in Taiwan.\(^5\) It has become a dilemma to families

\(^4\) Yao (2001) examined Japan’s thorough colonization of Taiwan and its production of a group of Taiwanese gentry elites under the Japanese educational system. Many became local leaders who experienced different fates under the KMT’s rule after WWII. Zheng (2004) unpacked the identity crisis experienced by the Taiwanese who received the Japanese colonial education, which proposed the “logic for the strong.” For example, countries are divided into strong and weak ones—weaker countries ought to be ruled; humans are ranked from better to lesser races—the weak races are naturally dominated; and cultures are perceived as the advanced vis-à-vis the backwards—the backward cultures are to assimilate into the advanced culture. According to Zheng (2004), such ideology was packaged under the name of Japan’s modernization in Taiwan. A generation had received such education during colonization (e.g., both Mama Gau and James’ parents). The interactions between those whose parents received Japanese higher education prior to 1945 and those who came from China with the KMT army after 1949 are complex and at times paradoxical. Besides different educational and historical experiences, there exist class differences within both groups, which further complicates the already entangled contexts. Please see Chapter Two for more discussion on tensions between various ethnic groups in Taiwan.

\(^5\) Individuals’ political attitude toward the relationship between Taiwan and China differs and it might have affected the terms they choose to address each of the nation-states. Therefore, I translated “Dai Lu (Big Continent)” as “Mainland”; “Chung Guo Dai Lu (Central Country Big Continent)” as “Mainland China”; and “Chung Guo (Middle/Central Country)” as “China.” I have no intention to classify or essentialize people’s political affiliations but rather to illustrate the pervasiveness of the everyday negotiation with the highly sensitive yet nearly never publicly discussed topic—the Taiwan and China relation. Even when terms such as “I am Taiwanese” or “I am from Taiwan” deployed as self-introductions in different situations for different ends because it somewhat suggests a person’s political attitude. This is discussed more in chapter four and five.
in Taiwan. If the whole family moves to Mainland, they face immediate problems about education since the private schools are too expensive and are for those foreign [italics added] business people. The other option is public schools where children would need to adjust to a really different ideology taught there, like governmental organizations. Even if the family decides to separate, then there exists the prevalent “Ur Nae Wen Ti.”

Her statement revealed multiple layers in constructing spaces of Taiwan and China. First and foremost, Taiwan was perceived as a place where under the current global geo/economical configuration, it would be nearly impossible to stay and work. With such a perception and feeling for a place of limited opportunities, the concerns had to be practical such as children’s education. In Mary’s understanding, private schools were not for her Taiwanese friends but the “real foreigners” who are non-Asian and wealthy. Further, under the present One nation, two system policy and practices, Mary perceived lessons specifically on governmental organization taught at schools in these two places would be oppositional and contradictory. If due to these two obstacles, the

6 “Ur” means “second” and “Nae” can be understood as women’s breasts, milk, or a respectful term for married women. “Ur Nae” then is understood as mistress of the businessman outside of his homeland. Such a term reduces the woman to a body part since many Taiwanese businessmen do not marry their female partners in China. The term is often used accompanied with another term “Wen Ti” which means problem. Such a usage underscores the direction of the blame the females bear within the patriarchy apparatus. Further, many of the so-called “Ur Nae Tsuen,” the “concubine village” in Ong’s (1999) phrase, are located around the Special Economic Zones (SEZ) or cosmopolitan areas where capitalism most prevalent (p. 154). It has been argued that capitalism has implicated with patriarchal hegemony and practices in accumulating profits while women are often exploited (Kung, 2004; Nonini, 1993; Ong, 1991). All my married female friends had mentioned the “Ur Nae problem” whenever the conversation was on working in China. A male friend originally from Taiwan said to me, “now the Mainland is becoming prosperous. The mainlanders are following Taiwan’s path and they are starting to have their own ‘Ur Nan village’ too! I read the newspapers.”

7 According to the Basic Law in the Joint Declaration between the PRC and Hong Kong in 1990, an agreement of the “one nation, two system” paradigm was established. Under such a paradigm, Hong Kong was promised to preserve its capitalist system and way of life after returning to China’s sovereignty. The overall essence of such a paradigm promotes the idea for “Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong” (Friedman, 2001, p. 8). Since then, the “one nation two system” paradigm that asserts the “One China” policy serves as a reunification model for the Beijing government in viewing its relationship with Taiwan.
wife and children decide to remain in Taiwan, then they were to face another difficulty, which is the husband’s infidelity ensued by his living and working in China. Mama Gau mentioned multiple times how

Taiwanese wives are piteous. The husbands have to work in Mainland. So they are left at home turning into a “yellow-faced wife,” [as an unattractive housewife] because of their constant worries on children being academically competitive and husband working in the environment full of the “Ur Nae Wen-Ti.”

Being influenced by heavily patriarchic traditions, Mary and Mama Gau strongly believe in wedded women’s responsibility as a caring mother and wife. With the prevalent practice and trend of having one parent working in China, the role of the other, usually the wife becomes paradoxical. It is required of her to remain in Taiwan to care for her children and to be away from her husband working in China where it is believed that “women’s charm is ubiquitous and invincible.”

Understanding the collective sentiment these wives shared, I insisted on issuing challenging statements such as, “It’s not the mainland women that are problematic or to be blamed for,” only to learn that many of my friends’ response was “you don’t understand. It’s men’s nature.” Such an assertion instigates the unchallenged patriarchy apparatus functioning in both social spaces in Taiwan and China masked under the “Law of Nature.”

Jen had told me how it started: “In Mainland, there are so many Karaoke bars where there are women working there for men to sing with, to hug, and to grab. Business partners often take you there and buy you the ladies to keep you company. The mama-san
would bring a line of young girls for the client to choose from. I heard that it costs $200 renminbi [approximately US $35] and another $200 renminbi for spending the night with the girl. It is a very common practice.” Jen was the only married female who challenged the Taiwanese men’s prevalent view on girls in Mainland as all being very open sexually. She further discussed the perception toward Taiwanese men as libidinous in China. Her critique was one of the few that placed accountabilities on multiple parties, except that the governmental responsibility was not attributed. At any rate, to many of my married female friends, the “Ur Nae problem” coexists with Taiwanese businessmen in China.8 They were thankful for their husbands’ assignment to El Paso, since I was told that there are not worries for Chinese men working and living in El Paso/Juárez area since “Mexican women are after Americans only” as I was told.9 Otherwise China would have been their only space for survival in the economical sense while an “unsafe” one in the family sense.

Another stress related to the inevitable future of working in China, as my friends believed is the fear of violence. There are approximately 500,000 upper-middle-class Taiwanese industrial and business people how reside long-term in China and this number continues increasing (Wang, 2005). During a conversation one afternoon, Mary showed me the newspaper reporting Taiwanese business people being murdered in Dong-Guan, Guan Tong Province. In the section, there is an overall report on Taiwanese business

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8 Although the “Ur Nae problem” was framed as a Mainland China phenomenon in my daily interactions, it is not the only place the male patriarchy is combined with capital dominance in business practices. For example, Kung’s (2004) article illustrated how Taiwanese businessmen in Vietnam practice sexual politics in the environment that is not open to foreign capital. Taiwanese entrepreneurs married or mistressed Vietnamese women as fake business owners for their capital accumulation. These “individual cases” only press for more forceful interrogations on the material impact and forces implicated within the emergence of the “Greater China” transnational communities.

9 However, the condition is reversed for Chinese women as Wen-He told me he was warned by his co-workers not to bring his wife to El Paso for her attractive appearance.
people being murdered in the year of 2004. There have been six individuals and a whole family along with their Mainlander babysitter victimized in different locations such as Dong-Guan, Tai-Tson, Shanghai, Hai-Nan, and Ken-Shen. The motivations and scope ranged from revenge from an ex-worker or unemployed individuals, lover’s affairs, and robberies (WJT, Nov. 27, A3). While reading it, I recalled that Jen told me that when she was working in Guan-Dong at a Taiwanese multinational company, she dared not to work overtime after it turned dark in the evening for the worry of being robbed on her way home. During a late night chat with her and Wen-He, Jen disclosed that, “I once had a nightmare about being robbed but nobody came to help.” Wen-He jokingly asked “How come I, as your husband did not appear in your dream as your savior?” only to hear Jen say “You were never around, remember? You were working in America at that time.”

This short exchange about their previous experiences impelled me to read these words in the newspaper: “Chang’s whole family killed” and “A female manager’s body parts found in several locations” with a deeper understanding of the kind of fear being absorbed and embodied in quotidian deeds such as going home after work. It demands incorporating multiple perspectives in differentiating and understanding the Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists who are able to avoid being assigned to a certain place such as China and those who chose to work in China hoping to one day be assigned to the U.S.

10 After Jen and Wen-He came to El Paso, they both would still receive electronic messages about their previous work-environment. From their conversations, I learned that there were several stories on Taiwanese managers that they knew being stabbed or blackmailed by gangs while the local police force was unable or unwilling to resolve such matters. However, this is not to say that Chinese workers are not victims of violence. They narrated that several workers for Han-Jian were murdered. As a powerful/large multinational Taiwanese corporate in Guang-Dong with more than 30,000 operators in one plant, the Chinese operators started a large petition to request the owner to press the local officials for pursuing these murders. However, its owner made an announcement claiming that those murders were random events which posed no real threat to the workers. At any rate, I do not intend to claim that all areas in China are dangerous. Rather it is to point out that, as Jen told me, the crime around the areas such as Tong-Guan in Guang-Dong where, many multinational company’s plants locate, is rampant. Hence, Dong-Guan is not to be equated to other cosmopolitan tourist cities such as Shanghai and Beijing or other cities in the inland provinces. Each region has its problems as it is in any other nation-state in the world.
Estella explained feeling fortunate to be assigned here in El Paso because Taiwanese managers are easy to substitute... our [Taiwan members’] main task is to train the local people and once they’re capable of performing their job, we are sent back to Taiwan because it cost less for the company to hire a local manager. So I am grateful for not being assigned to China because Chinese managers work really hard [thus it would be too competitive]. Plus, they speak the language, they know the culture, and it costs the company less to hire them. So they are easier to use compared to Taiwanese managers from the company’s perspective.

Therefore, even without considering all the potential social problems in Taiwan and China as Mary, Jen, Wen-He and Mama Gau expressed, being familiar with transnational corporations’ calculative practices for profit-maximization, Estella revealed another layer of fear, which is the acute awareness of being highly replaceable as a Taiwanese manager working in China. She recognized that the Taiwanese managers’ advantage of speaking the same language as the Mainlanders is merely a temporary one. Their place at the company is peripheral and amounts to a small significance. They would easily be dis/replaced regardless of how hard one works. When humans are expressed as exchangeable and calculable commodities, dominate and submissive relations are established. Such a phenomena resonates with Césaire’s (1994) equation: “colonization=‘thingification’” (p. 177). Submitting under the logic of transnationalism, Estella views

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11 On November 17 2004, it was reported that “Working for extremely long hours, Taiwanese the hardest workers in the world: Average working for 2282 hr/year: Major entertainment off work is television and computer.” Two days later, another headline appeared “Taiwanese office workers on average work for more than 10 hours every day: More than half do not receive overtime pay over 60% worry about “Karoshi—death by exhaustion syndrome” and 40% suffer from some health problems” (WJT, Nov. 17, 2004).
individuals including herself as existing as “pure use-value” to the corporation (Mitchell, 2000, p.21) and such value fluctuates as any other merchandise in the precarious market. The desire for “coming to America” the Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists envisaged and managed to achieve is cultivated and constrained to various degrees. It requires examination by critically unpacking interrelations of spaces and places. That is to say, my friends with different capitals experienced different kinds of fears and anxieties such as the perceived inevitability of being assigned to work in China and the associated risks. Moreover, many expressed dire concerns for the kinds of challenges they believe their homeland of Taiwan is facing and will continue to struggle with which will have immense impacts on them and their loved ones.

“Reality simply works this way”: China as the Inevitable Future

In a conversation with Mary, I was asked to read the Chinese newspaper discussing the controversies about Taiwanese school textbook reforms. There had been numerous debates among Taiwanese officials and scholars as to which history to focus on in high school education. In the current senior high school history curriculum, out of nineteen chapters of “National History” section, only four are on Taiwan’s history of development, experiences, and socio/cultural changes. In the proposed edition, Taiwanese history will be separated from Chinese history where the establishment of the ROC is arranged under the section of “Chinese History” instead of that of “Taiwanese History.” Early history including Japanese colonization and the authoritarian KMT rule will be written into the new edition. Such changes had drawn criticism to the government in attempting to “de-ROC-nize,”\(^\text{12}\) for it suggests the separation of Taiwan and the ROC.

\(^{12}\) I translated this term literally to distinguish it from another concept of “de-Sinicization” for in this context, Mary was defending the legitimacy of the Republic of China (ROC) as the sovereignty of both
This reform invoked emotion and reaction beyond the Taiwan Island. It was deeply felt on the other side of the Pacific Ocean where my friends in El Paso revealed their malaise on this issue in daily conversations. Mary reacted with much emotion in her tone:

I don’t understand why they try to ‘de-Chineseness.’ Just when the world is onto a wider boulevard to be inclusive, they want to walk on the narrow path to exclude. I should call my friends and tell them not worry about their children being unable to adjust to the school environment in the Mainland. Sooner or later, unification will occur. The earlier assimilation [to the Mainland ways] occurs, the better for the children.

Witnessing the growing importance of China as a nation-state and self-identifying as the 2nd generation of the Mainlanders, Mary’s comments underlined the interests and legitimacy for Taiwan to construct an inclusive identity. That is to claim “Chineseness” in order to enjoy a prosperous and justified path with more possibilities as she finally noted the inevitable fate for Taiwan to be unified and the necessity for her friends in Taiwan to better position their children in a timely fashion. To her, the coming geopolitical configuration for the next generation is obvious. To many of my friends in El Paso, this increasing economic and social discord was mostly attributed to the “political talks” with the more pronounced inclination for Taiwan’s independence, which is facing the Chinese government’s ever-firmer strategy to deeper Taiwan’s isolation in the world. Wang (2005) in *New Left Review* asserted that, “[e]xploiting the rapid growth in its power and status, Beijing loses no opportunity to penalize even the most peaceful, non-
governmental activities by young people from Taiwan in international forums” (p. 7).

One of the most telling examples of these actions is the painting by a 13-year-old Taiwanese youth, Chih-Yuan Yang, initially being chosen in a UN-sponsored competition for world peace. His candidacy was annulled after the People’s Republic of China (PRC) lodged a serious protest against his painting because the ROC flag is included among dozens of other national flags (Wang, 2005; WJT, Aug. 14, 2004, A3).

Another example provided in Wang’s (2005) article reported a similar attack upon a Taiwanese post-graduate who joined a Japanese-organized ship of peace and was excluded from speaking inside the UN headquarters as other members were able to do.

Events as such demonstrate the power and influence that China currently possesses in the global interactions. Daily statements by community members in El Paso made were closely pertaining to and experienced within these interlocking spatial relations between various geopolitical spaces between Taiwan, China, the United States, and many beyond on daily basis.13

13 Some of the Taiwan-related headlines are included in this footnote to illustrate the kinds of major news reported by WJT during my stay. “If Taiwan stirs up conflicts between both sides of Taiwan Strait, Singapore will not support Taiwan” 8.23; “Signing FTA with five Central American nations with international ties, Taiwan being the rich fool? Original plan of signing five together was changed swiftly into separate negotiation, officials worry about five nations competing for financial aids” 8.26; “Kofi Annan: Not permit Taiwanese ‘President’ being interviewed by the United Nation Communication Association” 9.16; “Beijing: It is a farce for Taiwan to march toward joining the UN” 9.17; “Taiwan’s GDP ranked the same in recent 10 years” 9.22; “The United States is losing its competitiveness” 10.15; “Pakistan promised to strengthen its protection to Chinese in its territory” 10.17; “The U.S. and China may take care of Taiwan problem together” 10.20; “Powell personally encouraged cross-strait conversation. Hu and Wen did not appreciate the proposal” 10.26; “Powell encourages unification. Beijing showed surprised and welcoming” 10.27; “American beef, Taiwan agrees to re-import on principle: It was banned from importing for 7 years due to Mad Cow disease last year. American official pressed? Taiwan official admitted that Bao Dao-Ge from American Institute in Taipei went to the Health Bureau to negotiate” 10.28; “Rumors about the Republic of El Salvador will establish relations with the Mainland” 10.28; “Powell-Hu meeting is over. Taipei finally released its long-held breathe” 11.21; “Bush did not mention a word on Taiwan problem: Hu Jin-Tao highly appreciated the U.S. on insisting the ‘One China’ policy and against Taiwan’s independence” 11.21; “Taiwan New Dollar exchange into renminbi has grown significantly: Taiwanese money pours into the mainland as much as NT$50 billion (US$1.6 billion)” 11.24; “Beijing presses, foreign banks dare not to invest in Taiwan without constraints” 11.29; “China and ASEAN countries work together to compete with U.S. and EU: Signed the largest FTA world-wide. Beijing
During my stay, I would ride with Estella to grocery shop from time to time. On a warm January Saturday afternoon on our way to Costco, she expressed her concern that the Taiwanese current government, instead of working on the weakening economy has been overly zealous about political affairs. Such a practice would exacerbate Taiwan’s condition of being isolated from international affairs such as the recent 10 plus 1 Treaty.

Being ignorant, I made an inquiry about the treaty. She explained, “Mainland China had recently signed the Free Trade Treaty with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)\textsuperscript{14} and that treaty provides free tariffs. It is kind of like the EU and NAFTA.” Thinking why it was a big deal, I asked “Was Taiwan included?” “No, that’s the point. Taiwan was not included” Estella exploded, raising her voice and continued

It is a quite frigid position for Taiwan now. Don’t think that any Taiwanese companies could just move to Mainland China. Actually, it is not as easy as it appears for Taiwanese investors to conduct business in Mainland unless you own some huge multinational company like Han-Jian.\textsuperscript{15} There is very little protection for small or medium-sized Taiwanese firms investing in Mainland China.

\textsuperscript{14} Established in August 1967 with five nations originally, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations completed “the ASEAN 10” in 1999 with ten members/nations: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. ASEAN Dialogue partners include Australia, Canada, People’s Republic of China, North Korea, South Korea, United States, India, Japan, Mongolia, New Zealand, Russia, and the European Union.

\textsuperscript{15} Han-Jian (a pseudo name) is one of the largest Taiwanese owned multinational companies (MNC) in the IT industry. It recently established a large plant in Juárez, Mexico and has drawn a lot of attention since its arrival to the El Paso/Juárez border. I heard about their Juárez plant being robbed in late 2004. The local official immediately was sent to “express concern and such an act is vary rare,” according to one of my friends.
“How so?” I asked curiously thinking about articles I read on the convenience and advantages for Taiwanese to manage businesses in Mainland China due to the language and cultural affinities, kinship, historical ties, and cultural understanding of interpersonal relationships and business handling (Chang, 2000; Hsing, 1997). She then explained that some of her relatives own companies in China and have felt they were treated unfairly as Taiwanese investors. Consequently, her relatives have been contemplating moving their investment to other countries in Southeast Asia.

Although Estella believed that the current global situation is adverse for Taiwan, she was pleased that the Bien government in Taiwan started to improve its economy. She said, “They finally learned that it is imperative to have a strong economy, otherwise, nobody would ever hear you. Had Taiwan not had a strong economy, who would have heard of its name? This is a fact [italic added]. Reality simply works this way.” As a young multinational-corporate manager mastering four languages, Estella’s rationale alluded to the deeply felt ordeal for Taiwan in the brute realpolitik, which led to a determination to accumulate more capital for a voice.

Estella’s feeling of being cornered in the global arena resonated with Taipei Major Ma’s advocacy for Taiwan to tread a future for Taiwan by possibly being included in the heavily promoted 10 plus 3 Treaty (i.e., ASEAN, China, Japan, and South Korea) as a Treaty of 10 plus 4 in order to survive. As PRC stretches its muscles in building economic and political alliances that centralize the Greater China along with the Asian-Pacific region targeting a global reconfiguration, most of my Taiwanese friends in El Paso divulged few positive outlets for Taiwan’s future. Some even expressed at times
being ashamed of being a Taiwanese.\textsuperscript{16} One comment was made that “It is Taiwanese’ nature to be enslaved. They [as Taiwanese] cannot be self-ruled.” Such a belief speaks to the unchallenged and unraveled colonial past. The highly felt insecurity and lack of dignity seems to be solely attributed to the Taiwanese government failing to tone down its desire to be recognized as an independent nation-state.

Being transnationalists from Taiwan living in the U.S., all my friends from Taiwan affirmed that the Taiwanese government is in urgent need of building a prosperous economy, for they had learned that the only and ultimate channel to speak and to be heard in this world is to equip oneself with a strong economy. The perceived geopolitical and socioeconomical instability of Taiwan reassured their impervious belief in Taiwan’s accumulating maximum capital. Such a credo is depicted in Mama Gau’s pithy words:

Taiwan cannot continue this ideological fight for its independence and name-change. Look around my store, 99% is made in China. Who would give a darn about you when you do not have money? If Taiwan stays on its current course, it will end up as a broken egg.

The simile indicates more than fear and anxiety for Taiwan as a fragile egg encountering the boulder-like growing Chinese economical, and therefore, political power. In addition, it reveals the imperative support from the world that Taiwan needs. For an egg cannot be

\textsuperscript{16} I would like to stress that many people would not refer to themselves as “Taiwanese.” Instead, they may introduce themselves as “I am from Taiwan” or “I came out of Taiwan.” Such a self-reference could reveal one’s political inclination to some extent. During my study, I was questioned by one participant for using the term “Taiwanese/Chinese” in my consent form once he spotted it. Before continuing to read the description of my study, he proclaimed “Why do you say Taiwanese/Chinese? Why separate them? Why didn’t you simply put ‘Overseas Chinese’?” Such an immediate reaction underscored the tension and deeply felt emotion embedded in the commotions amongst peoples relating to Taiwan as well as Taiwan’s increasingly fermenting struggle in becoming a world recognized nation of complete self-rule sovereignty rather than being defined by the Beijing government.
self-sufficient for long, as I heard frequently, “Taiwan has so little land, numerous natural
disasters, scarce natural resources, and a large population which leads to unbearable
competition.”

Lacking sufficient raw materials, the current Taiwanese government was chided
for instigating tension rather than “maintaining the current condition,” which means not
owing the right of public self-naming. As the struggle for self-identifying ferments,
numerous heated discussions among various interests groups have ensued. To some,
these struggles are too “political.” Mr. Lee expressed that Taiwanese society is “overly
political,” and hoped that his children “would never involve in political matters in the
future.” Being assimilated into what Giroux (2000) referred as “corporate culture” which
produced “compliant workers, depoliticized consumers, and passive citizens” (p. 41),
many of the Chinese and Taiwanese transnationalists in El Paso advocated reducing
ideological debates and substituting them with “concrete” actions that would generate
more capital for security and possibilities. To many of my friends, governmental
conversations on economy instead of politics are the only rationale focus for survival.
The value of pragmatism was spoken loudly through their frustrations about rhetorical
battles on identities (e.g., naming, ethnic divisions) within Taiwan. Instead of viewing
politics as a “performative register of moral action… [that prevents] justice and
compassion from becoming extinguished in each of us” (Giroux, p. 43), politics were
viewed as an unnecessary enterprise manipulated by the pugnacious to destabilize a
society. One of the modern products through social practices and organizing is the
dualism of image and reality in representations, which facilitates grouping and
sequencing nation-states and its people according to referents such as “national
economy” (Mitchell, 2000, p.19). As “corporate culture beings,” the sense of security and dignity only accompanies economic capital, which was perceived as the only stake Taiwan has to defend. To make one’s nation loaded with money means being indispensable by the superpowers.

A Greater China for Whom?

The Greater China is perceived as a concept closely related to the notion of “one China” that assumes its mission to “live up to the responsibility of ‘the Chinese people,’” by PRC, while “Taiwanese may see such a concept as a product of political compromise, used only for the purpose of deferring China’s aggressive attempts to expand its sphere of influence” (Chang, 2000, p. 65). Although the expansion of the Greater China to some of my friends posed a tremendous threat, at the same time, it was ambivalently embraced for the possibility of bringing the Chinese people to a glorified status once again.

Due to the weak economy in South America during the late 1990s, Mr. and Ms. Chou relocated again after moving from Taiwan to Paraguay almost two decades ago. Only this time, they traveled from Asuncion to El Paso. They opened a shop downtown selling decorative items to vendors or shoppers primarily from Mexico. As with many of the community members, economic conditions play a central role in Mr. Chou’s judgment of actions. With a keen sense for market trends, he explained his take on the U.S. economy in relation to his own business:

[Our] business was in its peak during 2002 and then it got bad in 2003, and the worst in 2004. Many factories over there [in Juárez] moved to Mainland China so people became jobless. They stopped coming here to shop since they do not have money in their pockets. Now… I am not some
highly educated person. I do not understand those Wall Street technical
indices what so ever, but I do know that there used to be so many people
waiting in line at the currency exchange booths before. They used to have
four counters open with long waiting lines. People wanted to exchange
money, or send money home to Mexico. Now they have only two counters
open and you usually are served right away. In other words, not much
money has been mobile. Now we only hope companies in North will move
down here to establish plants to provide jobs.

From observing changes in his nearby environment, Mr. Chou explained his view that the
hidden danger in the U.S. economy was “the growing amount of people relying on social
welfare” and “everyone is using their credit cards buying goods and driving good cars.
Then later when they lose their job, they declare bankruptcy and their house would be
auctioned immediately. This country’s economy is built on debt. How scary!” With the
view of the U.S.’s declining position as the economic leader and its increasingly
unfavorable balance of trade with China, he continued, “Now China has become a player.
Hu Jintao promised $100 billion investment in Latin America, I mean, U.S.$100 billion,
not just a million or NT dollars! All nations in the world were astonished. Nowadays,
who can offer such a large amount of investment?”

Mr. Chou’s sentiment of the implacable economic power that China possesses
celebrated the imagined transnational community of the Greater China. Self-labeled as an

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17 The El Paso Times also included a commentary that alerts the U.S. to vie for Latin America with China
in order to not “simply be a way [sic] station between Shanghai and San Paulo” (EPT, Dec. 2, 2004, 5B).
On November 23, 2004, a report on China pledged to promote “investments in Mexico’s steel and
automotive industries and ease access to its markets for Mexican products,” and to help with Mexico’s
$8.5-billion trade deficit with the China at Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (EPT, Nov. 23, 2004,
F1).
overseas Chinese, Mr. Chou perceived the Greater China, which is based on the Chinese racial and cultural essence (Chang, 2000; Cheng, 2002; Ong, 1999a) as the only hope and the unavoidable corollary for the Chinese people. Chang (2000) explained, “having long honored themselves as living in the culturally superior Middle/Central Country, citizens of ‘China’—whether the PRC or ROC—have, since the Qing dynasty, seen their countries fall prey to Western and Japanese imperialism” (p. 52). To some of my friends in El Paso, such a transnational community unbounded by territories was much welcomed. As a medical doctor Dr. Kwan who until recently, resided in California for more than two decades after leaving Taiwan, expressed, “finally, I am able to feel proud of being Chinese. Before, being from Taiwan was disparaged regardless of where in the world you went, for it plays such a minor role.”

Identity of a place is specific. In that, it is always (per)formed “by the juxtaposition and co-presence there of particular sets of social interrelations and by the effects which that juxtaposition and copresence produce” (Massey, 1992, p. 12). Spaces are made and remade through (non)interlocking social relations embedded with unbalanced power. During my stay, the characteristics demarcated and attached to geographic places and spaces such as China, Taiwan, or the Greater China were hierarchically constructed within several coexisting and interactive relations such as the (non)memberships to economic-political organizations, within which, new spatial and social relations were simultaneously generated. Stories and comments my friends shared cast Taiwan into a space as an undesirable past deemed with a topsy-turvy and precarious present and a volatile future. China is spatially identified as desirable and full of possibilities and aspirations for its inchoate rise to an unlimited and effulgent future. Such
coherent stories for places produce new social relations and neglect to challenge the hierarchical and unbalanced relations embedded in the matrix of the power nexus within places as well as their constant external connections.

Much of our daily talk where ideologies were displayed and absorbed as natural and neutral perspectives, without being examined and traced for the discursive interconnectedness between spoken words, written texts, and institutional policies, as van Dijk (1997b) proposed. In the previous discussion, I strove to trace and connect the fluid interaction between everyday conversations and larger global events in which the interlocking places of “China” and “Taiwan” as geographic and ideological spaces were positioned hierarchically in the geopolitical power structure and communicated in my friends’ desires and actions. In the similar vein, geographic locations such as “America,” “Mexico,” “El Paso,” and “Juárez” were understood and represented in relation to one another in which an order based on Manichean exchange logic was constructed. Massey (1999b) proposed that “places may be thought of as open articulations of connections so too may constructions of difference and identity” so that the essentialized past authenticities will be challenged and the possibility for change will be created (p. 288).

[T]he boundaries of nation states are temporary, shifting phenomena which enclose, not simply ‘spaces,’ but relatively ephemeral envelopes of space-time. The boundaries, and the naming of the space-time within them, are the reflections of power, and their existence has effects. Within them there is an active attempt to ‘make places,’ Massey (1995) explained (p. 189). Hence, any “grand narrative” (Massey, 1999b, p. 287) is constructed from the point of view of (relative) elites who “today worry about a sense
of disorientation and a loss of control must once have felt they knew exactly where they were, and that they had control” (Massey, 1992, p. 9). Such narrative erases the multiplicity and contradictions of a space. In other words, different voices co-exist in a space of disparate power relations. Stories told by those in Taiwan would likely differ from that of my friends in El Paso, TX. Rather than being “victims” trapped within the global arrangement, those residing in Taiwan understand identities of the island from different positions. As a very dear friend shared “I refuse to be pessimistic and not to see the vitality of Taiwan because every morning when I go to work, I see people everywhere busily ready to greet their new day. Hope and life is pronounced so loudly in their walking and perhaps running to work in Taipei streets.”

Identities formed about Taiwan and China by my transnational friends in El Paso/Juárez ought not to be judged for “authenticity” or reduced to an essence. They are to be attentively listened to as my friends wrestle with mixed feelings of being ashamed, fatigued, resentful, despairing, or suffocated by being Taiwanese/Chinese buttressed by macro- and micro-level of forces. Such forces motivated them as “local elites” to “escape” from the seemingly futureless space replete with instability and constraints to a desirable one believed to be suffused with freedom and possibility at the present. For “space and time are simultaneously physical phenomena, social practices, and symbolic ideas” (Bennett, Grossberg & Morris, 2005, p. 331), it is the process of (dis)articulating certain social relations embedded in space and across space under which the meanings and impacts of “coming to America” at a particular historical (dis)juncture ought to be examined.
Coming to A Land of the Free

“America” is more than a geographical referent to a place on a map. America was given characteristics through collective imagination. During my stay in El Paso, the meanings of America shifted as the contexts altered. The overall sense was that being carefree is the foundation of America, American people and American culture. Statements in conversations reveal underlying values in which individuals’ expressions tell the kinds of lifestyle and cultural logic they desired or approved. Mr. Lee appreciated the convenience of American life in everyday functions as he explained “it is very easy and fast to get to the supermarket, to the mall, to the west side or to the eastside of the city.” The sense of high mobility in the U.S. was recognized by all my friends in El Paso. Such an easy life was to be achieved only through owning a driver’s license and a car.

Many wives from China and Taiwan encountered their first task after arriving to the U.S.—study for the driver’s license. Several wives joked about the tense atmosphere and fights during driving practice with their husbands. Many commented on hating to practice driving because their husbands would yell at them. Dawn, who along with their children joined her husband in El Paso three years ago from Taiwan, laughed and said “I felt so frustrated at the time. Several times, I said I was never to drive again. But then the children had to go to school.”

I was told that it was not long before my arrival to El Paso, that the state had discontinued offering exams in Chinese. Many wives who had not yet obtained their driver’s licenses became desperate for their lack of sufficient ability in reading English. In early November, a translated Chinese version of the exam questions was produced and immediately borrowed for copies with much celebration and relief. In counting the
official regulations, these Taiwanese and Chinese enacted the technology and human labor they have in generating “duice” as the Chinese idiom says “policies from the top, counter-strategies at the bottom (shang you zhengce xia you duice)” in making things work toward their ends (Hsing, 1997, p. 150).

Some decided to overcome this obstacle by memorizing all questions and answers in English as Jen did. She started to prepare for her driving exam even before she left China for the U.S. Her husband, who had taken the test in El Paso, emailed her sample exam questions with some translations so that she could start her preparation early. Jen told me how stressed she was once she arrived to El Paso under the pressure from her husband who pressed her very hard to pass the driving tests. Her husband Wen-He explained to me how he did not wish her be confined at home without a means to be mobile so that she could enlarge her social circle. Jen obtained her driver’s license in three weeks after her arrival. She showed her appreciation by saying to me “I know he did all that for my sake. Sometimes a person needs to be pushed hard enough to reach the goal.” Jen’s “quick success” became almost a legend amongst many wives, although not without consideration of her young age.

Now in her late forties, Ms. Liang passed the exam rather soon after arriving from Shanghai approximately ten years ago. After the first couple of days with her new license, she drove a stick-shift car with which she was not familiar. “It stopped in the middle of the road on my way to work. I did not know what to do so I left it in the middle of the road and went back to scream for my husband to for help. He drove me to work…. Well, just had to force myself to deal with situations,” she laughed while Gau added “See, how nice your life is now.” Both Jen and Ms. Liang believed that surprising performances
could emerge from times of adversity by grinning and bearing it. That is, the compelling force may not always be negative for it propels people to achieve seemingly unattainable goals. Once the task of driving being mastered, the convenient and easy America alludes to other layers of meanings—“the free America.” In the following section, I illustrate how various characteristics such as modernity, equality, humanity, and democracy were assigned to the space the U.S. imbued with the savor of freedom.

**Modern America: “One is safe and free to go anywhere.”**

In arguing that modernity is a concept of both geographic and temporal locations, Morley (1996) wrote “modernity has itself long been equated with Americanization” (p.328). The physical mobility— the ease of getting around in America, was attributed to its thorough development as an advanced nation that is ahead of the times. Dreaming of taking a long vacation in the U.S. after his retirement, Mr. Lee told me and his family during lunch:

> America is truly enormous. It is very soothing regardless where your vision lies because it is so spacious. It is quite amazing how truly developed it is. With such a highly developed infrastructure, one is safe and free to go anywhere with no trouble.

The sense of freedom was connected to the comprehensive highway system and high-technology management that the U.S. possesses. The boundary-free life one is able to enjoy in America is due to its development and modernization, which provides abundant security and comfort. The life that is free from physical constraints in America

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18 By no means do I suggest that obtaining a driver’s license is the only task these new (im)migrants face. Nor do I suggest that such a task is the most difficult for there are much more painful tasks faced by other immigrants. That is to say, that as new comers to El Paso, most my friends belong to the (upper) middle-class who need not to endure physically demanding work such as relying on the public transportation in conducting daily business without other options.
demonstrates itself in statement like, “The management in America is unbelievable. The restrooms are clean everywhere you go,” an accomplishment that most of my Taiwanese female friends praised at least once to me. It can only be achieved in a modern and civilized place as Mary said, “You can judge how progressed a country is by its restrooms.” The very logic of ranking nation-states and different peoples into the developed world/culture and its antitheses according to the level of their hygiene has been practiced for decades in the United States such as the quarantine of the Chinese immigrants on Angel Island as Shah (2001) explicated. Shah further demonstrated how sanitary regulations deployed in Chinatown under an extremely discriminatory public facility distribution were aimed to segregate and contain the undesirable race/cultures from the dominant space. Such regulatory practices consequently turned a geographic place into a representation that is less than that of the developed Western civilization and modernity. Efficient spatial management and control cultivates an assuring impression of freedom for some groups in the society.

Feeling free goes hand-in-hand with being secure in the mind of a large number of the Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists in El Paso. “Living in America is good because there is no need to lock your door,” said Mary when she was unable to get home before her daughter was off from school. Dwellers in the civilized and progressed American society are required to do little in preventing oneself from harm. During a regular dinner, Ms. Chou expressed her feelings about how safe America is compared to Paraguay where she and her husband had resided for more than twenty years after leaving Taiwan.
Nostalgic of their life there and referring to Paraguay as her second home, Ms. Chou felt it is much safer owning a store in the U.S. “There is no need for a gun in the store,” as she told stories of how all the Chinese-ethnics they knew in South America had been robbed. James responded “Taiwan is also lawless like that.” Ms. Chou refuted by saying “No, Taiwan is so much better than Paraguay.” James immediately affirmed the superiority of the U.S. above all “You are in America now. It is different, there is civil authority under which you’d feel being protected.” He later expressed lacking any interest in going to those “third-rate countries.” Being ignorant about the political-social-economical structural conditions in South American nations and shocked by the conversation, I remained silent besides frowning slightly hoping this topic would end shortly. More importantly, I did not feel it was my place nor did I know how to discuss these oppressing comments being the youngest female who was invited to a friendly dinner. I felt compelled to the custom that dictates me as a youngest, female, and guest to behave politely by not challenging or asserting opinions in the conversation between adults who are established with business and family.

To my friends who are more or less capital owners or bourgeoisie, the individual’s freedom and mobility is coupled with the civility of a society at both spiritual and material levels. Mr. Lee’s plan of traveling by a van in the U.S. cannot be practiced in Mainland China as he said “in China, you still need the local people to accompany your traveling to be safe.” To the community members who have expressed a great level of insecurity and uncertainty in the past, U.S. as a “first-rate nation” provides them an environment with convenient facility and lawful stability.
**Egalitarian America: “So now we are all nobles.”**

The sense of freedom is assumed to be manifested in all cultural levels of American life. Most of my friends praised the boundary-free class divisions in the U.S. The kind of class distinction to which they referred is more in line with the class system being “institutionalized in political systems (the House of Lords and the monarchy persisting in a parliamentary democracy), in education systems (the persistence of private education and its privileged routes in universities and employment), and in a variety of cultural and social forms” and consequently create “[e]litism, privilege, hereditary advantage, and snobbery” as Bennett, Grossberg and Morris (2005, p. 39) explained. As Bennett et al. concluded such a definition often leads to the claim of the USA as a classless society. This conclusion is reflected on my El Paso friends’ attribution to America.

During many gatherings at the Lees, the American culture and people were often exalted. Mr. Lee rationalized that “Lao Mai seem to love their jobs regardless of its nature. Even the janitors were very polite and said hello to me happily when I was at the airports… They had their chin up while walking. They must enjoy their job.” In another occasion, Mary stated

In Taiwan, the distance between people is really small because of the limited land, but the distance between people’s hearts is really large. But in America, it is the opposite. Like the neighbor who’s living across from you, even though [their house] is far away from yours, they would say “hi!” to you when they see you.
Viewing El Paso as the representative of the U.S., Mary contrasted her experiences in El Paso to that of Taipei, Taiwan. The U.S. society was praised for its equality for people would keep close relationships instead of keeping hierarchical distance. This element was demonstrated through daily activities such as greeting your neighbors even out of earshot. U.S. practices were ranked more positively than those in Taiwan.

Thinking of how Lee, Chung, Hertel and Wang (1995) illustrated the risk of assigning universalized cultural difference and traits without contextualizing specific sociohistorical conditions in the intercultural interactions, I raised a question that maybe this difference in distances is due to the difference between the urban and rural environment instead of between Taiwan and the United States. My “challenge” was followed by Mr. Lee’s example explicating the higher and more friendly spirit in the U.S. Just a couple of days before, their mailperson saw his car pulling into the driveway so he walked up to him with their mail instead of putting it in the mailbox. “People here are well-educated. That is why everyone is very polite regardless of one’s job. They are educated at a very young age to behave that way.” With successful education, Americans appear to be sanguine under all circumstances as I was told in another conversation, “Lao-Wai bosses would not yell at employees.” They enjoy whom they are as well as whatever occupation they have. Consequently, Lao-Wais are, Mary concluded, “all very nice people,” and their son added that “they would not self pity.”

The positive spirit of American people and culture was often attributed to its religion as oft-heard statements “Christianity is what America was founded on,” “It is so much easier to be a reborn Christian in America or Canada,” or “Korea has the biggest Christian population. It is the America in Asia.” As during one Sunday Bible study on
“Jesus at a Pharisee’s House” in the Book of Luke, there was a discussion on how Christianity stresses equality in that everyone is brothers and sisters. This is unlike India that has the caste system or the Chinese who have hierarchy in occupations. But with the Lord, everyone is equal without hierarchy. Christianity is perceived as the essence of the U.S. and it buttresses the “natural” performance of its citizens as equal.

The apparent classlessness and pride, to my participants projected unlimited personal freedom and was due to all opportunities being fair and open for all. The Lees were not alone in such exaltation. When Ms. Liang first arrived to the U.S. from Shanghai, she worked at odd jobs as a waitress, tailor, and a launderer when her husband was studying for higher degrees. Being a college-educated accountant in China, she admitted to “being too embarrassed to even tell my family about my life in America,” for she worked on those “low jobs” that she used to look down upon. However, as time went by, she adjusted to her roles and believed that

It is different in the U.S. It seems that for those who work as a waiter, they don’t feel bad about themselves. It is just a job, which is the same as other ones. There is no difference between working on a professional job and working at odd jobs. People wouldn’t treat you differently. Once I started to think that way, I was able to solely focus on making and saving money.

The egalitarian image was palatably attached to America. In the egalitarian America, one can be freed from hierarchical ideology that fixes individuals to the occupations such as how Ms. Liang’s sense of self-pride altered when different social roles (i.e., college-graduate accountant, waitress, tailor, launderer) were taken on. Once she interpreted and
believed that jobs and people are treated separately with no different judgment in the States, she was then able to free herself from being ashamed.

However, the material discrepancy among various race-ethnic and gendered groups remains large in the United States especially giving the violent history in terms of subjugated “non-white” groups. Amott and Matthaei (1996) illustrated the unequal distribution between race and gender groups in terms of the types of occupations (e.g., “Chicanas still remained over concentrated in low-paid, seasonal jobs and suffering high poverty rates”) and unequal pay in the United States (p. 86). After the sudden “discovery of Chinese abilities” during World War II, since then the amount of hiring Asian American women for managerial and professional jobs have significantly increased from 24 to 32% between 1960 and 1990 with “over one-third of Chinese American women over the age of 25 held college degrees” (p. 214). Yet, within the group, the division between the affluent immigrants from Taiwan and Hong Kong with English and professional skills and those who remained in Chinatown, which demands little English skills, has become polarized as “14 % of Chinese were living in poverty in 1990” (p. 215). In addition, the predicament for the African American community is severe as “one third of all Blacks were poor in 1992. A full 18 percent of Black women were living on less than half of poverty-line income, compared to 15 percent of Black men, five percent of white women, and four percent of white men” and “about one-fifth of all Blacks are caught in the long-term cycle of poverty, segregated into inferior housing, schools, and jobs” (pp. 190-91). These conditions suggested the obvious disparities in classed U.S. society.
The sense of “American equality” was palpable beyond the perceived non-discrimination toward “lower” occupations. It extends to the availability of activities usually enjoyed by those with a higher socio-economical status. On one Saturday afternoon, Estella and I joined Frank’s family to play golf. Frank had been in the U.S. for almost ten years and was joined by his family approximately three years ago. Frank’s wife, Dawn commented on how easy and wonderful it is to be able to access such a luxurious activity in America by saying “in Taiwan, the membership to a golf club is astonishingly expensive!” Estella agreed, “yeah, so now we are all nobles!” making her swing with a laugh. On the surface level, this exchanged conversation praised the easy access to golfing. However, it revealed their frustration with the scarce resources, specifically the limited amount of land in Taiwan, which created deeper boundaries between the “haves” and “have nots.” Positioning themselves as being excluded from activities attainable only for the rich in Taiwan, Estella and Dawn celebrated the “equal” access in the U.S. instead of viewing themselves as having reached “have” status. The physical mobility to activities which was believed to be exclusive to those with more capital in Taiwan was interpreted as another American cultural trait. These comments revealed the sense of freedom to the desirable lifestyle found constrained in Taiwan. Opportunities are abundant for anyone in this egalitarian society.

Humane America: “Adults in Taiwan just don’t want children to be happy.”

The Mid-Autumn festival landed somewhere in late September, 2004. It is also known as the “Moon Festival.” It falls on the 15th of August according to the Chinese Lunar calendar. It is one of the holidays heavily celebrated with the extended family. On the Saturday prior, I was invited to their celebrations hosted by different Chinese-ethnic
groups. The Chinese language school organized primarily by several Chinese-ethnics originally from Taiwan hosted a cookout. The Taiwanese Chamber of Commerce invited Taiwanese business people and their family members for a dinner gathering to socialize and celebrate. The third event was the one I attended which was a much smaller scale, mainly for friends/co-workers to gather together as more of a family-style celebration.

I celebrated the holiday with Mr. Lee’s co-workers and their family members at the home of one of the managers, Jack, who was about to move into a newly purchased house. Through the whole day, I could not sit still out of excitement. My excitement was a mixture for the desire to be an ethnographer as well as an active social being since I had not been interacting with many people until that time. Finally, it was five o’clock. I grabbed the containers with guacamole, dips, and chips and hopped to meet some others for a car ride to Jack’s rented home in the west side. After getting out of the van, I immediately heard children’s laughter and smelled charcoal floating from the back of the house. I was offered a beer and joined the conversations around the grill. On the other side of the yard, boys and girls were chasing after each other and throwing balls. In the midst of ideas about readying Jack’s new house and the big move next month, I overheard two fathers attempting to feed their children. One said “婷婷, 你去那邊坐好不好? (Ting-Ting, go there to sit ok?)” while chasing after the fast-running child. The other was selecting food and asked “Bryan, 你要不要一個香腸? (Bryan, would you like a sausage?)” While I was enjoying the all so familiar Taiwanese style of grilling with thin-sliced marinated, grilled pork sandwiched in between two pieces of bread along with some “American style” barbequed lamb ribs put on my plate, Tracy, a Taiwanese
manager on a business trip from China to El Paso asked about the cost of education in the U.S.

“American public schools are free which is very nice. You only need to show some mail with your address to prove that you live here,” answered Mary. Several parents started to discuss the U.S. education and Li-Ning said “Education here in America emphasizes art very much. They often make some crafts that are kind of useless,” she laughed while Mary added, “Education in America values children’s creativity.” Jack then said that he was not sure what was being taught at school; however, his son’s ability to comprehend and enjoy what was being said in school mattered the most as he said “I thought to myself, it’s all good as long as he has fun in school.” These comments revealed the need for children to enjoy growing up and learning in an encouraging environment as Mary told me at a later occasion that

I feel there is one obvious difference [which] is that, here in America, teachers use many methods to encourage [students] and [they] also pay a lot of attention to the individual differences between each child…. For example, I often see my daughter bring a small card saying “You did a good job” or something similar after returning from school.

She also commented that she knew that her daughter’s performance probably did not match her teacher’s evaluations. Regardless, the teacher gave students encouragement for small achievements and awarded high grades. These made students very happy with themselves. Mary then concluded her opinion of favoring the American educational logic as she explained
in comparison, when we were in Taiwan, low grades usually were given and then... I don’t know if it is the thinking logic in Taiwan or a kind of cultural difference, or the attitudes and ideas of most teachers, it seems that they feel, you’d only be more nervous and show more initiative with them giving you lower grades. So it is totally different compared to the normal [italic added], I mean the encouraging type. So we can see the outcome [that children enjoy going to school here], which is just different.

From her analysis in comparing and contrasting these two logics toward educating children, the two educational attitudes practiced in two geographic locations labeled by nation-state referents were fixed as hierarchically oppositional. With the heavy emphasis on education in Chinese culture, it is the “healthier” means through which American education is deployed that attracts the Chinese and Taiwanese transnationalists (Zhang & Harwood, 2004).

In a later conversation, Mary explained that even though there are Chinese sayings about “個人頭上一片天 There is vast sky above each individual’s head” and “兒孫自有兒孫福 The children can take care of themselves when they grow up so parents don’t have to push too hard for their children’s future,” Chinese parents can only cognitively know these ancient sayings from memorizing them but cannot practice them. The wise sayings are no more than unpracticed words. Education to Chinese then becomes a utilization of moving to a higher position than others, which is not the foreigners’ practice driven by the logic/spirit of Christianity. Lao-Wei/Foreign parents would not act the way the Chinese parents do in urging their children to study solely for the idea of rising to a higher position. Similar to school education, parental education is
deposited into two positions which were spatialized as the foreigners in the “Western Christian” culture and Chinese in the “East Confucian” heritage. Moreover, one was positioned as a healthier pedagogy that practices the normal and humane, and is therefore superior in treating children while the other was pathological as evident in one of her comments made jokingly “that is why my son said to me ‘Adults in Taiwan just don’t like children to be happy!’” As a loving mother, her ideal education paradigm is practiced only in the U.S. for her deep religious belief in the superior Western (American) practices over the Other (Chinese) unpracticed rhetoric.

In many gatherings, the fulfillment of children’s future was enacted and realized through casual statements about the superior American education such as “over here [in America] all types of children will definitely have opportunities in studying for however and whatever his/her talent is. This is a more fair place,” and “Education in America is to teach in accordance of individual aptitude instead of educating without discrimination.” Often, these Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists’ evaluation of this “better” system was juxtaposed with words like “Chinese kids here [in America] are always one or two grades ahead in almost all subjects,” “Their math here is so easy,” and “I don’t know, my son did not study hard but got all ‘A’s.” From these descriptions, Chinese and Taiwanese parents were fond of the “American” ideology of ensuring “fair chance” in rewarding different individuals. Further, a sense of superiority with being Chinese was subtle in the casual comments on the effortless excellence. As Chang (2004) explained, there seemed to be a “paradoxical complex associated with ‘being Chinese’—one views oneself simultaneously as both superior and inferior to people of other cultures/nations” (p. 59). The unquestioned flawless status of American education system reflects on Taiwanese
cultural analyst Chen’s (2004) critique of deeply ingrained Americanization in Taiwan, which has been absorbed into its cultural consciousness, bodies, thoughts, and desires. To my friends in El Paso, their life in the U.S. is satisfied largely with their children receiving healthier and more humane education in a fair and free system

**Democratic America: “America is the true founder of democracy.”**

Another immediate feeling of freedom is the simple and pristine American life that is free from complication with few burdens and obligations. Both Mr. Lee and Mary were enraptured with their placid life in the U.S. To him, life in Taipei was full of social occasions and events such as weddings and funerals. Life in the U.S. is quiet for each family household is physically independent from one another, which permits privacy and calmness. To her, life in Taipei was frequently disrupted by her friends’ phone calls or unexpected visits. Consequently, it was less likely for her to accomplish her plan for the day because she was oftentimes interrupted in the middle of something. After coming to the U.S., she had only a few close friends and she said that they “already had that concept of privacy after being here for some time.” Therefore, Mary ended up with more private time to engage in more “meaningful” activities such as book reading as she joked “I rarely watch television here because I do not understand it. So all of the sudden, I have more time to utilize for myself.”

Concerned not about the quantity but the quality of social interactions, Mama Gau felt the social obligations and human relations in Taiwan are too delicate for her. Fear of being unable to practice the rules, Mama Gau had asked her best friend in Taiwan to be the mediator for her family affairs. She explained that since she had been out for more than a decade, she worried about offending others because she felt lacking the adequate
cultural competency that has changed as time has passed. “My generation needs to follow the traditional rules while interacting with the older generation as well as to adapt to the less traditional norms for the younger generation” she protested. To Mama Gau, life is too complicated in Taiwan where, for example “wedding and funeral ceremonies are so troublesome. Unlike in the U.S., it is very simple and fast with some snacks and coffee, then it’s done.”

The simplicity of the American way of freely living in all the cultural activities such as voting, weddings, funerals, even personal address was envied. When I was discussing an appropriate personal addresses for Frank and his wife according to our age differences, Mary told me to just call him Frank.

**Mary:** How nice it is for Lao-Wai to just simply call each other’s name. You should be like that.

**Me:** I cannot be comfortable with calling someone older by her/his first name.

**Mary:** Well, you are still quite Chinese.

As I left their house, I was perplexed about my feelings toward the comment of being “quite Chinese.” Sandel (2002) wrote on how kinship addressing is an everyday practice in Taiwan that demonstrates not only an individual’s cultural performance but also her/his caregiver’s attentive education. Although Frank is not my kin by blood, such performance remains applicable for he is associated with an older generation of mine. Through refusing to disengage in the daily practices such as “kinship” addressing, my identity was labeled as the “Chinese” that are troublesome and complicated instead of as a “well-educated” daughter fulfilling her caregivers’ teaching. Hence, such an identity of
being quite Chinese was denoted as an oblique complication, hence lesser, practice compared with that of the West.

On the other hand, I came to understand the free cultural and social space that English as a language meant to Mary. Heinz (2001) argued that American English serves as a cultural space for gays and lesbians within another linguistic and cultural system such as German to assert as well as affirm their identities. By assimilating herself into the usage of personal address practiced in American English, it brought a sense of relief and openness to Mary in this new non-Chinese environment, a new and free way of living.

Nevertheless, the clear-cut and easy nature of the “American way of living” is by default in opposition with that of the “Taiwanese or Chinese way of living” whose nature is complicated and inclement. This mechanism of contrasting straightforward convenience and fulsome inconvenience is again discerned from the way in which the U.S. Presidential 2004 election was discussed among my friends in El Paso. During a dinner in early November with the Lees and a family friend at Olive Garden, one of the favorites for both families, a Taiwanese CEO in a different multinational corporation, I was introduced as a doctoral student from Ohio. After learning that I attend a school in Ohio, Mr. Wu made a comment about Ohio being the most famous state after the past election. He analyzed that “America is precisely a democratic country. See there is no commotion after the election. Nobody reports or makes more fuss about it after a couple of days. Unlike Taiwan, the news would keep reporting it and there would be new materials to stir up.” A few days later, Mary read about candidate John Kerry’s concession and praised “America is truly great. See how Kerry immediately conceded so
that the election could be over. It is the true Jun-Tze attitude.\textsuperscript{19} Unlike Taiwan, even until now, people are still fighting [about the previous election].\textsuperscript{20}

In the following week, I heard comments of “America is the true founder of democracy!” in conversations at various occasions. Mama Gau issued the resentment of Taiwan’s presidential election as a humiliation in front of the world by saying “America is an authentic democratic country. See, it is so quiet after the election. But look at Taiwan, it is still chaotic even until now in November. People are still fighting about the election in March! It is such a huge joke for the International community.”

Comments extolling the U.S. election from their observations underlie the criteria for the authentic democracy—American democracy. The true performance of democracy was interpreted as being quiet, simple, and efficient as opposed to passionate noise, entangled, and prolonged. My friends’ admiration toward the political atmosphere in the U.S. was in consonant with their outlook for the overall life in the U.S. That is, individuals are perceived to be free from shackles and fetters of intricate social relationships and obligations. Being in an advanced nation, Americans lead their life that is easy, convenient, private, and uncomplicated.

DeSantis (1998) critically analyzed the ways in which “The American Dream Myth” was incorporated in an early 1900s Black, nationally distributed newspaper as

\textsuperscript{19} Jun Tze can be translated as “a man of virtue; a perfect or true gentleman, or a superior” according to the definition of Far East Chinese-English Dictionary. It is the ultimate goal for a human being according to the teaching of Confucianism.

\textsuperscript{20} Perry Anderson (2004) commented that there has been no election more unique and full of drama than Taiwan’s presidential election in March 2004. The day before the election, Chen who was seeking re-election campaigned on the jeep in his hometown accompanied with much exciting noise of music, firecrackers, and crowds. It was not until later that he announced he had been shot. Soon, various rumors and speculations permeated the Island. Coming from behind, Chen was re-elected with a 0.2% margin. Many believed it was the sympathetic effects of that bullet. Soon after the election, protests in many locations and forms consisting of members from all strata in the society were organized. Students performed a long-lasting peaceful hunger strike while hundreds of thousands of supporters for the opposition candidate engaged in marches and sit-in demonstrations. These demonstrations pressed the government to establish a “319 committee for Truth.” It has yet to come to a final result.
rhetorical strategies to encourage African Americans in the South to migrate to the North where their dreams could be fulfilled. In his analysis, themes suggested that “with effort, hard work, optimism, and egalitarian cooperation, *anyone* in America can morally achieve material success and enjoy the freedom, leisure, and religious and social independence that attend wealthy economic status” (p. 480). From conversations I had with my friends and acquaintances, characteristics as described in DeSantis’ study were attached to the land, the people, and the culture of the United States under an overarching essence—advancement. Such a story of viewing U.S. modernity as an exemplar for the “developing” ones across the globe to reach, leaves no alternative to be outside this generalizing and natural Eurocentric discourse on modernity (Massey, 1999b).

In light of Hall’s (1992, 1996a, 1996b) view on positionalities in forming cultural identity, space ought to be conceptualized as always being constructed through the articulation and disarticulation of differences and identities as Massey (1999b) explained. The discourse circulated from my interactions, within which the United States was assigned with all desirable traits by these Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists, and it provides scarce space for other ways of being deemed respectable or advanced. The Taiwanese and Chinese in El Paso live their lives in America through making and remaking a coherent identity of the U.S. constructed with little consideration of the tensions existing in various relations of oppression and resistance. Being on/in the line of the intersection of nation-states, El Paso not being exempt from other border places, encompasses multiple, fluid, intermixed, and at times subversive cultural identities and consciousness through myriad movement. At the same time, El Paso exists within an interlinking cultural zone guarded militarily where the U.S. as the stronger state in the
asymmetrical, international relations remains the arbiter who controls and monitors the types and directions of bodies and merchandise flow (Wilson & Donnan, 1998).

**El Paso in America**

Located on the U.S. side of the border, El Paso enjoys the appraisal bestowed on it by these Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists for its carefree American lifestyle and advanced infrastructure. The difference between the two sides of the international bridges was posited into the “rich America” and the “poor Mexico” dichotomy (Ortíz-González, 2004; Vila 2000).

Estella shared her experiences

While crossing the border, you can see many situations. … because we usually get stuck in the traffic coming into America from Mexico, the traffic is fine going to Mexico from America. So let me first start with the situation at the side of going into Mexico from the U.S. when you enter Mexico. You can sense that these two are totally different countries because you can see the lacking of infrastructure for roads. In America, they take care of them all the time but Mexico does not. So there are potholes here and there on the roads. You would be unable to comprehend why [this is the situation.] The industry is so prosperous here with all the maquiladoras and with all the foreign investment. The government supposedly already levies a lot of taxes, so they should have money to fix these things such as traffic lights, road maintenance, or to beautify the city, but it seems none of these is done. However, from our understanding, I mean because when I was in school, Mexico was taught to us as a
developing nation with a lot of corruptions. Government officials did not put the collected tax money into development or maintenance. So this is the situation from America side entering into Mexico, which is that “How can these two be so different! After all Mexico is Mexico, and America is America.” Although El Paso still falls short in comparing to other cities in America [italics added], you can still feel the differences between Mexico and America once you passed the border.

Based on different criteria, El Paso was simultaneously included and excluded of being American. When it came to the kind of infrastructure that determines the identity of El Paso, it was categorized as American. Although I was not sure under what conditions El Paso would be excluded from being an American city, one thing was certain. That is, El Paso was not as American as it could be. While listening to her description, I recalled Mama Gau telling me that her clients mostly are poor street vendors from Mexico. They distrust their government so they do not file taxes as the Americans would. She said “That is understandable with such a venal government… I feel sad whenever I go there [to Juárez]… I mean to see that their roads are not like roads and traffic lights are not like traffic lights.”

Lives in Juárez and El Paso are two contrasting entities where differences were ostensibly discerned as vast disparity in infrastructures in which governmental (mis)managements are held accountable. The development of a place refers to not only economical and structural improvement, but also the performance of the government through providing a secure and trusty environment. El Paso was reported to retain “its spot as second-safest large city in the United States” (EPT, Nov. 23, 2004). After the
report, many shared it with me on how “El Paso’s safety is the 2\textsuperscript{nd} best in the U.S.,
though it is a \textit{totally different story} [italics added] in Juárez.” Such a casual comment
underlined the tremendous and long-term influence in which imperial legacy carries as
Juárez has always been portrayed as a town of vice. Further, El Paso is in a space
superior than Juárez in Mexico yet inferior to other cities in America according to the
oppositional spectrum.

In a conversation about life in the U.S., Mr. Chou asserted that American society
is lawfully ordered and competitive in all-aspects. “Even the police would feel more
pressured to enforce laws diligently. If you cross the border, cars drive haphazardly and
you might not feel anything wrong if you litter. But then after you come over to this side,
the traffic is ordered, which is really different from there,” he explained. Civil authority
in the U.S. is stronger to keep the societal order. The U.S., specifically El Paso, is the
model for comparison and prevailed in the competition of governmental tending and
leadership, law enforcement, civilian cooperation and trust. Many of these transnational
Chinese/Taiwanese believe that as an American city, El Paso was lawfully ordered. On
the contrary, Juárez was perceived as chaotic with little construction and lack of faith in
the government, which developed into a vicious cycle.

Researchers have problematized such an unchallenged formula with documents
showing the uneven and compartmental wealth distribution in both sides of the border
(Bath, Tanski & Villarreal, 1994; Ortiz-González, 2004; Vila, 2000). On September 23,
2004, the \textit{El Paso Times} reported a story on families living in a subdivision on El Paso’s
far-east side that had to live without proper water connections for almost 20 years.
Further, it provides brief statistics on some regions having no water service or sewage
(EPT, 3B). Bath et al. traced policies which have had an impact on the inadequate facilities in “El Paso County’s colonias” where one or more conditions such as “lack of potable water supply or no water system, lack of adequate wastewater system or no wastewater facilities, lack of decent, safe and sanitary housing, inadequate roads and/or inadequate drainage control structures” exist (pp. 15-6). Moreover, many of residents in these areas often suffered from police raids and harassment for undocumented individuals and a high level of apathy from local communities including Mexican-Americans who have made it into the more comfortable living class (Ortíz-González, 2004; Vila, 2000). The poor side of governing and lifestyle in El Paso was seldom mentioned by friends of mine who are recent arrivals residing in the somewhat affluent areas to fulfill their desire for stability.

**An Unauthentic America: “Americans have a whiter face.”**

The sheer difference between El Paso and Juárez lies in its infrastructure. The culture and people in El Paso/Juárez is understood by these transnationalists as inseparable and as undiscriminatory as the El Paso sun that shines on all peoples and creatures on both sides of the international bridges. To my friends, the exceptional natural environment of El Paso, TX manifests its people and cultures. This belief is similar to isolationist thought during the 19th century, which viewed the advancement of a culture being closely attached to a place’s soil and environment as historian Robert Young (1995) explicated.

Throughout my stay, I often heard about how “Texas is such an exceptional state with no need to worry about any kind of natural disasters. No tornadoes, no earthquakes, nothing like that.” Mr. Lee explained:
Although Taiwan is referred to as Formosa, the beautiful and treasured island, there are natural disasters frequently. Every year, there is either earthquakes or floods causing great damages. I think the Taiwanese’s index of agony and uncertainty index is much higher than that of the Texans. Like the 9/17 flood was very serious and not long after that, there was the 9/21 earthquake. All these natural disasters are truly hinged to Taiwan…. I guess the only thing that the Texans need to worry about is the gasoline price.

Texas was perceived as a blessed land that is different from the past experiences of these transnationalists. Gas prices as the Texans’ only concern speaks to the vast land of the state rather than as an important indication for the national economy. Such an analysis revealed the deep desire for such an inhabitant.

During a family gathering for Bible fellowship, Dr. Chen, a Californian dweller who relocated his family to El Paso a year ago, said

Texas is truly like the land of the Canaanites … a land imbued with milk and honey flowing…. You can find fruits like grapes and fig as it is described in the Bible over here. The other day I saw some grass while driving and realized that it was the kind of grass mentioned in the Bible that God prepared for the Israelis.

Referring to El Paso and Texas as the fecund land of the Canaanites, the view projecting El Paso into a space of stability, safety, abundance, and hope is once again, underscored.

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21 The 7.6-magnitude earthquake happened on September 21 1999, which did great damage to the island. A September 23rd report stated a 2,008 death-toll, more than 2,600 were trapped in rubble, and more than 5,000 were missing and injured. Three strong aftershocks followed the next day and left 100,000 homeless. Many of my friends in El Paso told me they could still feel the horror during those days. In this disaster, the apartment flat that Wen-He’s parents had just finished their mortgage payment on collapsed.
The natural climate was suggested as the inspiration for the worry-free nature of the people in El Paso. Nine out of ten times I was given an introduction to El Paso with information like: “The weather here is great. People here are Mexicans and their ethnicity is naturally warm and friendly because of the weather” and “Mexicans are very friendly and warm by nature [italics added].” El Paso as a physical place denotes a part of life in America that is full of vigorous spirit and kindred humanity cultivated by the perennial sunny weather. Life in El Paso was experienced with much joy as Ms. Liang told me:

The weather here is really nice, everyday I get up there’s plenty of sunshine. Unlike Shanghai, it’s always so gloomy, similar to Taiwan. It’s a lot of time grayish so one would get so upset with even small matters. But here, the weather is so beautiful so nothing could feel so serious.

The El Pasoan sun is also the origin for incessant energy. When I first met Dawn, she repeatedly commented how the weather in El Paso is gorgeous everyday and people are extremely ardent. She later told me “I feel vigorous after coming to America. When I was in Taiwan, I felt spiritless everyday. Now I get up very early each day and even feel lacking of time. I am very busy every single day!” She shared that unlike her husband’s, her relatives are still in Taiwan though she does not miss them. “I am lacking of conscience saying this,” Dawn laughed and said, “but I call to see if everything is fine.” Feeling unsettled about enjoying her stay in El Paso perhaps too much, she attributed her being invigorated and feeling more vivacious to this salubrious environment, which was unattainable in Taiwan.

Mama Gau too, has a busy schedule for having to look after the shop six days a week from 9 am to 6 pm. Regardless of the long working hour, she believed her life was
very meaningful and said “here, time is like being compressed. ZOOM! A day has gone by. Unlike in Taiwan, everyday I was blindly busy without direction.” She told me this as we were closing the store for the day while two men in the truck stopped and waved toward us “Rosa, Buenas noches.” “Eh, mañana” said Mama Gau waving back and said to me “You see, Mama has no gender here. I’m their pal. I spend all day wallowing with them. People here are very friendly and easy to get along with.” She further said “actually, we Chinese need to learn from them for being optimistic. Whenever you ask them ‘How are you?’ They always say ‘Good! Good!’ even without money in their pocket. If it were us Chinese, we would had been desperate a long time ago without being able to smile at all.” She laughed and continued, “So it is like what the Pastor said, they Mexicans are like the younger son and us Chinese are the elder son.”

In explaining the different outlooks enacted by Mexicans and Chinese, Mama Gau showed her appreciation toward the carefree lifestyle while indicating the inescapable fate for Chinese, as the naturally born older son in the biblical parable in the Book of Luke. Instead of being like his prodigal younger brother (Mexicans), the older son (Chinese) was lawful and hardworking for his Father. The culture and ethnicity of these two groups of peoples was naturalized and stabilized throughout various discussions on the climate, ethnicity, and culture in El Paso.

Although El Paso was deemed, by and large as an advanced place, it simultaneously was treated as a place that is not quite American. The frequently made comments “El Paso is not like America, there is no racism here,” “People here are not real Americans,” and “There are all Lao Mo here, it is not like America at all” eluded that El Paso is different from the rest of the U.S. for its warm climate and undiscriminating
peoples. Many of my friends had learned about El Paso not being “authentic American” even prior to their arrival. Mary told me her friends who moved to America from Taiwan years ago had warned her never to agree to come to El Paso if her husband was assigned there.

They told me that “Don’t you think it would be okay with the idea that you would be living in America anyway, because it is not America.” They said, first of all, it is in the desert over there, so it is really hot. Second of all, there are all Lao Mo over there. So they said “You could never agree to it!” {laugh} So it is human beings’ nature to take people in comparison with each other. Because you see, you might think that one is American, and then Mexico is adjacent to it with a border, so then the other one is Mexican. You’d naturally think of America as if it is in a higher status. Well, at least it is more sufficient and wealthier. Then the Mexicans are poorer and it is kind of sad to be poor, I feel. If a person is poor, others would think of her/him as having the proclivity to some wrong deeds, and especially would doubt her/his dignity. You would say… even say that they are lazy, and they would steal. How piteous it is [to be in that position.] {laugh} I believe there are lazy Americans too, only they have a whiter face [italics added]. Big deal!

Further, she told me of her friends’ complaints about the poor job performance of their Mexican gardeners. Mary speculated that

[m]aybe it was because Mexicans have a lower living plane for working on lower-strata jobs so their standard probably is not as high. My friend
probably thought that they should do a better job, make the flowers have larger blossoms with fertilizer or something like that. So the standard is different. I don’t know. It is just a thought.

The value of always bettering oneself as the Chinese saying states “jing yee qiu jing” (Second best is not good enough—to try for the best; to do still better)” was underlined. Understanding such a value practiced by her friend, Mary searched for an explanation for the Mexican work attitude by attributing it to their ignorance of betterment and lower living standards. Mary’s assumption reflects on the prevalent representation of Mexicans/Mexican Americans being in poverty or the lower social strata (Martin & Nakayama, 2004; Vila, 2000). While as a new comer to the United States, Mary often challenged statements criticizing or demonizing Lao-Mo. Her assumption of “white and wealthy America,” however, remains worthy of unpacking. The naturalized ideology of the spatial-temporal modern U.S. versus the otherwise Mexico was once again enacted in homogenizing and ranking each of the two groups of peoples into a fixated racially, nationally, economically and culturally classed space.

Lee (1999) explicated that the meanings of “whiteness” and “blackness” in Taiwanese and Chinese culture differ from how these colors are enacted in the United States. In Taiwanese/Chinese societies, whiteness is more of a gendered and classed indication. It indicates the kinds of occupation (i.e., outdoor labor intensive vs. indoor mental intensive) and therefore, the class of a person of white or dark skin. Settling into the new environment of El Paso, Mary carried with her her understanding about whiteness from Taiwan to the Untied States, which has a history particularly in immigration regulations of normalizing and naturalizing white bodies while marking the
non-white ones as undesirable foreign. Whiteness as the unmarked norm carries daily power (Shome, 1999b). Mary’s engaging in the hegemonic discourse of whiteness that conflates nationality and race/ethnicity subjected her along with other non-white peoples immigrants or not, to the marginal and less legitimate role in the United States (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). Thus, whiteness is no longer innocent as an aesthetic matter but a marker used to explain and justify particular material and social interests (Lee, 1999). The assumption in which Americans have white face is therefore a big deal.

As Bennett, Grossberg and Morris (2005) stated, “the ‘place’ of collective identity was simultaneously exaggerated and fragmented.” A geographic place such as the United States of America assumes all citizens within such territory share same equal rights, religion, language, and ethnicity; however, in reality “inhabitants often differed in their religion, came from elsewhere, or found themselves disenfranchised by the national imaginary” (p. 256). Without complicating the representative whitefaces of the United States, the multiplicity co-existing in this place is compromised. On the other hand, by saying that being an American is not particularly special or better, Mary challenged the predominant assumption she heard about Mexican workers not performing well by enacting a comparison with the Americans. However, such an enactment secured the central position for the Taiwanese and Chinese, who are the power holders in this case, as the employers or somewhat affluent Asian immigrants.

The view that El Paso is not authentically American lies not in its proximity to Mexico, per se. Rather, it is for the result of that physical proximity to a non-white culture and people—the contaminated place/space. Shome (1996) argued for examinations on the direction of movements instead of merely on mobility. As she
pointed out, different treatments are deployed to flows from Canada to the U.S. and from Mexico to the U.S. Mary’s friends residing in other parts of the U.S., outside the U.S.-Mexico border area, were not alone in excluding El Paso from being an authentically American city. On a Sunday after church, I had a quick conversation with Dawn and Kim while waiting for my ride. Both come from Taiwan. Kim and her husband, Joe had lived in the east, west, and south parts of the United States during their decade-long stay. Several years ago, El Paso became their most recent settlement due to Joe’s employment. The three of us started to chat about which part of Taiwan and places in the United States each of us have lived before as a casual conversation starter…

**Kim:** We lived in California for three years before. Being in California is not like being in America, either. You would not know that you are in America since there are so many Lao Chung, all from Taiwan. People’s conversations are all about comparing one’s cars and houses to one another. Too materialistic! It was not like in America either. There is San Diego, which was close to Mexico. So there were all Lao Mo there too.

**Dawn:** Exactly! So that is why we did not even consider going to California at all.

**Kim:** It is not like America here, either, because of all the Mexicans. Being bilingual [in English and Spanish] is necessary over here if you went to work in government agencies. One could not know English but not Spanish. English is now even the second language, which is not like being in America.

One of the deciding factors for a place to be unAmerican seemed to rest on the race of the numerically dominant group. Once again, the real America is of a white face speaking in one language—English. Such a view points to how “place designates some mediating
ground between the human body and the arrangement of social life” (Bennett, Grossberg & Morris, 2005, p. 256). Both California, specifically San Diego and El Paso are, in a sense, contaminated by the non-white Lao-Chung from Taiwan and Lao-Mo from Mexico. What they brought with them, such as lifestyles and language usages, diminished the contained American culture existing in these places. Delgado (1999) pointed out that during economically difficult times the United States has a record as a “society [that] enacts restrictive immigration laws and policies to keep foreigners—usually ones of darker coloration—out” (p. 247). The rhetoric of contamination functions insidiously where the non-white bodies, including their own, were marked as an abnormal presence with negative influence on the United States. Such rhetoric suggests that parts of the United States are becoming like either Taiwan or Mexico, and it bears some similarity to comments enacted by French colonialists during the mid-1900s by warning that France would become more like its colonies as more of their former colonized people moved there (Stoler & Cooper, 1997). Further, as permanent residents of the United States, their own convenient mobility of which direction to move, within as well as outside, the United States (i.e., physically dissociating themselves from places with too many Chinese, Taiwanese and Mexicans) was never questioned.

The view of El Paso not being an American city does hold some validity as it is often an exception to the norm. Toward the end of my sojourn, Blockbuster, Inc. initiated a policy eliminating late fees and El Paso was excluded. Alan Payne, the president and CEO of Border Entertainment explained “We feel it would be bad for customers…. It will put pressure on us to raise prices. … We also think it will greatly reduce the availability of movies” (EPT, Dec. 15, 2004, 1-2A). Blockbuster was not the only
business that I noticed making exceptions for the El Paso-Juárez border. I was told that
the McDonald’s near the border do not provide refills on soft drinks as is the norm in
most of their U.S. facilities. As a physical space on the U.S.-Mexico border, El Paso was
thought of and treated as a different place from other American cities in the eyes of the
corporation and some of the Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists.

However, it would be mistaken to think that such a strong belief in regulating and
policing certain bodies and languages exists only in a particular cultural/ethnic group. A
self-identified 26-year-old, bilingual Mexican-American El Pasoan who is “not
prejudiced against any person who speaks a language other than English,” revealed her
frustration on a everyday basis where she was always approached with Spanish and such
a treatment to her implied that she does not speak English due to her appearance. Her
other complaint was being helped by someone who does not speak English during her
daily activities such as shopping at Big 8 and Wal-Mart or dining out at Taco Cabana
(EPT, Nov. 4, 2004, 5B). Ms. Thacker, an East El Pasoan resident objected the dual-
language classes for Mexican immigrants for it would have been unfair as she wrote “Do
the taxpayers of this school district want to pay for Chinese, Japanese, French and any
other nation’s teachers if an immigrant from one of these countries wants their child’s
native language not to be neglected?” She further argued that “Just because El Paso is
mostly Hispanic does not mean that there are not Germans, Greeks, Dutch or others here
who have rights, too” (EPT, Jan. 13, 2005, 5B). These comments and complaints stressed
a universal American identity under the English-only policy. However, as Delgado (1999)
stated, the practice in which English literacy was made mandatory to naturalized
citizenship is rather recent. It was not until after WWII “during the height of hysteria over
postwar communism” (Delgado, p. 247), was English made into a requirement for
naturalization as a citizen in the United States.

Resentful comments do not stop at containing the Spanish language. At the
beginning of year 2005, the Mexican government issued the 32-page pocket-size comic
book with information on the risks and rights while crossing the U.S.-Mexican border. It
attracted vicious attacks from all levels in the United States, and El Paso was no
exception. A northeastern El Pasoan referred to this book as a “pamphlet published by the
Mexican government that advises Mexicans how to best invade the U.S. and how to best
avoid detection.” He further vented, “Will El President Fox perhaps publish one in
Arabic for those from the Arabic-speaking counties that desire to invade the U.S., with
detailed direction for smuggling weapons into the U.S.?” (EPT, Jan. 11, 2005, 5B).

There were only a few articles published in the EPT that critically examined what
functions and whose purposes this comic book was for and explicitly stated that “this
guide does not encourage Mexicans to cross into the United States without proper legal
documents. Its purpose is to identify the migrants’ risks and rights” (Portillo, EPT, Jan.
16, 2005, 7B). El Paso as a border city adjacent to Mexico is a space with myriads of
cultural interactions including rhetorically and militantly performed regulations. Within
such a space, much resentment and superiority against those bodies that do not perform
the English-speech of “normal”—white Americans has been bred and disseminated in
day-to-day interactions such as the 10-minute conversation I had while waiting for a ride
home.
Every month, Dawn and Frank would try to arrange a gathering on a Saturday to have dinner, sing hymns, and share stories. Through telling each other personal matters regardless of whether they were sorrowful, joyful, or nerve-wracking, these informal gatherings were multifunctional in building closer relationships, demonstrating support through sharing stressful lived experiences, exchanging useful information, and cultivating stronger faith as overseas Chinese Christians.

On an October Saturday afternoon, approximately five families originally from Taiwan and one from China were on Highway I-10 coming from both the west and east side driving to Dawn and Frank’s suburban house in the rich and whitest area of Coronado. After we entered their newly purchased house, children were excited to see each other and immediately ran upstairs for videogame combat. Adults were onto different tasks—making dumplings for dinner. Some took out rolling pins, pots, steamers, etc. Some went on for a tour of their home while Dawn explained the huge traditional Mexican pot collection with symbols of serpents they had purchased from the Juárez market at cheap prices. Several husbands went out to the backyard to try out their newly installed putting-green and discussed the possibility of organizing a golf-team in order to join a country club. I partook in the task of making dumplings and enjoyed the family ambience since making-dumpling was always more or less a family-event in my growing up.

In the midst of various conversations, someone asked about Dr. Chen’s wife and children. Dr. Chen and his family have spent more than a decade in California since
arriving from Taiwan. They had recently moved to El Paso for both he and his wife were offered jobs. Dr. Chen replied,

She is really tired from working a lot. She is an O.B. but here, she also needs to do gynaecology. [It is] all for those Lao-Mo coming over to give birth so their babies can be American citizens after being born. Then they would return to Juárez and meanwhile be able to enjoy American benefits. They don’t want to live here since they are more comfortable in Juárez. So then it is for the American government to support these children. No wonder your tax rates are so high here. It is all used to support these Mexican children. I cannot figure out what these Lao Mo are thinking. [They] keep reproducing…starting from the age of fifteen or sixteen year-old until 45 years old. [They all have] more than ten children.

“They become grandmother at the age of 35. {laugh}” George, a Taiwanese and U.S. permanent resident added.

Dr. Chen then continued:

I have calculated for them. They give birth to a child every time a Southwest airplane takes off. How horrifying is that. {laugh} yeah, I did the math already. So it is so easy for them to come over here and use up the welfare here. It is really not fair. It is the money of the tax-payers and then they don’t even live here. They don’t identify [to this country] since they do not speak English but Spanish.

Mary asked “what happened to their children’s education?” “They do not care about education at all,” answered Dawn. This conversation stopped here only to be picked up
after dinner during a more formal section when individuals shared her or his experiences to attest to God’s love and protection for them. Mama Gau shared their recent interview for the U.S. citizenship application followed by Dr. Chen who said:

It is just really unfair, especially after the 9/11. It was so much more difficult for foreigners to apply for the U.S. citizenship. We [as Chinese] have worked so hard and experienced so many difficulties for our citizenship. It took [my family] so very long to be approved with so many difficulties. They can just come over here and give birth and become a citizen and then return to Juárez. How easy it is for them! So it is like we don’t even know why we are so busy working in the hospital each day.

The border is not policed and is crossed whenever one pleases.

There were some discussions about how the Mexicans came over to enjoy the benefits of the American social system at the expense of the El Paso taxpayers. Wang, a manager from Mainland China responded, “So that is why I have to pay money to Thompson Hospital? I saw it on my tax form and was perplexed as to why I owned the hospital money since my insurance is not with them.”

Later, Mama Gau said “the two grade schools by my store are all Mexican students. Every morning, there are school buses one after another loaded with students driving them to schools over here. {Frowned and shrugged her shoulders} What can you do?” This discussion was concluded by George’s wife, Pat a mother who also holds U.S. permanent residency “So, it is the American government that really values humanitarian spirit to raise their children.”
The following Monday afternoon, Mary inquired about my thoughts on the conversations made at the gathering. I shared what I had learned about the militantly patrolled border with much documented and undocumented assaults and harassment. It is not that everyone could cross as if passing through our front door at home. I further questioned the accountabilities of comments like “It is unfair!” being made by those, including myself who are in privileged positions such as doctors or graduate students. Mary agreed and said

I think people have the right to pursue happiness. It is really strange for us to come here to go after a better life but then we think it is wrong for others to come… This is originally their land, why can’t they come here? We, ourselves are foreigners here trying to climb up as well, how can we dislike other foreigners and disallow them to climb up? Of course, [Dr. Chen and his wife] as doctors, work with these people on daily basis so maybe that is why there is a lot feeling of resentment and unfairness coming from their contact. I think as a Christian, God does not want us to be mad because, first of all, it is not good for one’s health. Second, when we complain vehemently in front of others, our image in others’ mind is damaged as well. So we are hurt in making such comments physically as well as our reputations…. Well, however, it is true that the American government is trying their best to help since they can go to school for free here. However, there are so many children to take care of.

Coming into a new environment in her late 40s and speaking limited English, I admired Mary’s courage to pursue multiple perspectives of her life on the border of El
Paso/Jurárez. Further, she made efforts in acquiring additional opinions and information in the process of culturing for new meanings. I was so encouraged and excited about the opportunity in which we both shared our thoughts from different perspectives.

Anthropologist Mary Douglas (1990) explained how dirt found out of place is perceived as a contravention and danger to a system of order and classification. Hence, a set of restrictions is ensued in restricting the “pollution powers” (p. 158). She wrote that “a polluting person is always in the wrong. He [sic] has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone” (p. 159). Individuals who cross over the borderline from Juárez to El Paso were perceived as those who cross the line entering into a place s/he does not belong to, just as misplaced dirt pollutes an ordered hygienic system. Their existence (e.g., speaking Spanish, giving birth) on the wrong side of the border is then viewed as pollution according to the dominant classification in U.S. society. That is, there are some newcomers who are desired more than others (e.g., the “model minority” myth). The resolution is to engage in practices to control the existence of such unwanted individuals.

From the conversations, El Paso, more than other cities in the U.S. is at greater danger for its physical proximity to Mexico. As Conquergood (1992b) discussed how naming is a strategy in which unfit elements (i.e., peoples, cultures, places) are identified and contained. When hegemonic discourse labels brown-skinned Mexican (im)migrants as invaders posing danger to the purity of the U.S. society (Martínez, 1996, 2001; Vila, 2002). 22 Paek and Shah (2003) analyzed how Asian Americans are stereotyped in U.S. magazine advertisements and point out the racial ideology implicated in these practices as “Asian Americans are frequently depicted as highly educated, proficient with technology, and affluent” (p. 225). Such stereotyping practices overlook great differences in a heterogeneous group and pose potential conflicts between Asian Americans and other minority groups.
2000), the polluting element bestowed to any brown-skinned body is focused as the concern and indignation for regulation, if not elimination.

The El Paso-Juárez border has been seen particularly in the eyes of the El Pasoans as the last line to be defended for keeping unfit individuals from entering as well as for keeping the U.S. citizens from going and being hurt in Juárez, a place of vice. Due to the end of a US$185,000 grant for the Underage Drinking Initiative and a younger drinking age in Juárez, El Paso City Council proposed a law seeking to ban minors from going to Juárez without specific permission. Coincidentally it was proposed during the time when bars in Juárez extended hours for the holiday season (Nov.19-Jan.7). The law received zealous community support and was described as a “trailblazer” (EPT, Dec. 29, 2004, 5B) because children would never stop going “until they see the gang fight on the bridge, get raped or end up in a Juárez jail” (EPT, Dec. 11, 2004, 9B).

Such dominant attitudes toward regulating the border and controlling the body flow was reflected in the conversations at Frank’s house. These practices and conversations demonstrate a clear structure. First, certain bodies belong to certain physical spaces (Bennett, Grossberg & Morris, 2005). If a body is misplaced as dirt being found in an unfit location, threat is posed and resolution is ensued. Secondly, bodies and places are ordered accordingly in a hierarchical order, and within which, movements are to be determined by those with more economic, political, and militant power.

The images of undocumented Mexicans taking advantage of the American taxpayers were vividly painted even by residents of Juárez with descriptions like “the lazy first- and second-generation Mexican American living on welfare” (Vila, 2000, p. 117). Vila drew from a University of Texas-El Paso based multidisciplinary research

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23 Please see Chapter two for a brief discussion on fending for the borderline between El Paso and Juárez.
which showed that El Paso is a poor city and unfortunately, 43 percent of the population living in the poorest neighborhoods of El Paso was born in Mexico. According to this research, “the level of poverty of these neighborhoods is such that their inhabitants depend heavily on government support, and 47 percent of them receive some kind of income transfer. Particularly important here are food stamps, which are received by 20 percent of the sample” (Vila, p. 18). However, as Vila cogently points out, “without the possibility of relying on a structured, social, and collectively developed discourse that blames poverty on discrimination” individuals are left with no space in challenging the hegemonic discourse on blaming the Mexican (im)migrants (p. 129).

An article that appeared in *EPT* mentions that El Paso is a city “with such a dismal industrial tax base, where homeowners are forced to shoulder more than their fair share of the tax burden, the situation of declining services is inevitable” (*EPT*, Dec. 11, 2004, 9B). Statements as such point to the situation caused by the power structure. Unfortunately, such comments rarely appear in people’s daily communications. For example, although many Mexicans cross the border daily to work in El Paso, it does not mean the salary is good. The low wage was made by regulation-makers in order to attract more businesses to invest in El Paso (Ortíz-González, 2004). Women who cross the border or take several buses each day to clean houses in El Paso for $35-45/day working to sweep, scrub, mop, dust, wash and iron laundry, and occasionally tidy up the

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24 However, such a number should not be projected as the nationally experienced condition. According to Amott and Matthaei (1996), research has demonstrated that “immigration helps, rather than harms, the U.S. economy, and that undocumented workers are not a burden to society” (p. 93). They cited the result found by the Rand Corporation that only 5% of Mexican immigrants received “any public assistance, even though many employers withhold taxes from their pay” (p. 93). Further, a net gain of $27 billion to the U.S. economy came from immigration as a 1994 Urban Institute study showed. Lastly, it is worthy to note that the caseload of the number of households receiving food stamps fell 31 percent in Texas but only 19 percent in the U.S. during fiscal years 1997-99. A recent study shows that in 1997, Texas welfare cases fell 41 percent from 13,566 to 8,060 compared to the 43 percent nationwide (Capps, Pindus, Snyder & Loes-Urbel, 2001).
refrigerator are then in the double-bind where the poor continue to be exploited for capital holders’ maximum profit. Consequently, Mexican nationals or poor Mexican-Americans became the scapegoats as ungrateful beneficiaries while the U.S. government and policy-makers were perceived as the unconditional caregiver whose accountability in creating systematic discriminatory practices onto Latino/a populations is remitted.25

A Less Cultured America: “There is no culture here.”

On a chilly February afternoon I went to visit Mama Gau. I soon learned from Mama Gau that Ms. Liang went back to Shanghai to visit for the first time due to her recently granted U.S. permanent residency after a decade of residing in Texas. Before she left, she asked a young graduate student Hong, from Hangzhou China, to cover for her. In our short conversation, Hong asked if I perceived being in El Paso as being in the United States. “I guess so, why?” She explained that both her and her husband truly dislike El Paso, “Don’t you think that El Paso is a very dirty place? You can see trash thrown everywhere, even on the highway. It is not like America at all. American cities are supposed to be clean.”

After the conversation, I came across an article and learned about a budget cut which shed some light on the claim of El Paso being dirty and un-American due to its residents. At the end of 2004, El Paso City Council agreed to the budget cuts on the “Border TM Industries” that employs “mentally retarded and disabled people” to perform street and park cleaning (EPT, Dec. 11, 2004, 9B). I certainly do not wish to suggest that all the trash on the streets was attributed to this budget cut. However, such information

25 Please see Chapter two for how the U.S. policies have determined and created migrant flows in serving self-interests historically.
points out the multiple layers and contributors to a phenomena rather than for a particular group in taking the blame as it occurred during our conversation.

I recalled what Ms. Liang had told me, in comparing it to College Station, TX where she stayed while her husband was in graduate school, people in El Paso are poorer because of the proximity to the border. She said “people there seemed to be more cultured because it is a college town and people are richer due to the higher minimum wage.” Both Hong and Ms. Liang indicated that cultured people are civilized, in that they are wealthier, they are educated, and their environment is trash-free. Their definition of culture and civilization seems to resonate with “the logic of culture [which] has been bound and limited to the West” during the Japanese Meiji period (Bennett, Grossberg & Morris, 2005, p. 69). In China’s multiple attempts to modernize, the Western civilization was embraced and mimicked to various degrees (Rofel, 1992). Within such causal relation between education and Western civilization, culture is more than “a way of life” but an imperative path to a modernized being/society.

The “natural” link between culture and education was made in many other conversations I partook in during my sojourn. I heard a college professor originally from Taiwan expressed his frustration with the scarce number of bookstores in El Paso and suggested that “Lao-Mo do not read.” I heard from a mother who holds a Master’s degree in English Literature repine at the lack of culture in El Paso when she said, “It is all desert here. There is no culture here. I would like to go to the Northeast area for it is more cultural there” and how she dreamed about living on the East coast—“the cradle for the great American literature writers.” These statements revealed yet another natural linkage, which is the place and culture in relation to the people residing in it (i.e., El Paso–Lao-
Mo-cultureless dessert; East coast-great (white) American writers-cultural cradle). Estella described what she saw on her daily long-waits back to the United States from Mexico.

There are usually vendors on the border. You would notice that the items these vendors sell are snacks, newspapers, and magazines. You can see that those magazines they sell are tabloid. They do not sell those that are politics related, or business news. So from this point, you can tell the educational level over here and also some of their cultural thinking.…. They probably enjoy more of this kind, I mean because people here are mostly labor-workers, so it is impossible for them to share some… I mean to read more cultural or business-related, or maybe even political readings after they go home. I found that the people of the place are not interested in political matters. (The people of the place? Do you mean people in Mexico?) People of the ‘borderland.’ It seems that they do not care about it [politics]. They only care about whether they can keep their jobs or whether the service-provided is good. [Not] for other matters such as arts or politics, or… like outside their environment, I mean those more worldwide issues. They are all concerned more about just this borderland area. As for those more worldwide ones, it seems that they are careless and indifferent… It seems that people here are [like that]. It is true that they do not have a focus here. For example, like what I told you, those vendors on the border only sell tabloids. You can tell what kind of readings people here like to read. They only like to read those kinds of anecdotes and gossips. {laugh}
From Estella’s observation, education is the sole path to cultivate interests in cultural or business-related issues. Reading tabloid-like publications is excluded from being culturally related, which points to the logic of culture encouraging individuals to self-improve (Bennett, Grossberg & Morris, 2005). Culture in this respect serves as a means for individuals “to differentiate themselves according to how far they did (the respectable middle classes) and did not (the feckless poor) respond to the cultural imperative of self-improvement” and through which “individuals seem to naturally [italic added] sort themselves through the cultural activities they pursue” (p. 69). That is, cultivating and educating oneself through engaging in certain activities and certain place(s) facilitates individuals into **distinction**, in Bourdieu’s sense.\(^{26}\) The border areas, specifically El Paso and Juárez share a similar culture which is less American, therefore, less cultural under the logic that culture requires Western-style civilization. It is the people/culture of Mexican tradition that disqualifies El Paso’s legitimacy as a real American space.

*A Discrimination Free America: “Mexicans do not discriminate.”*

Regardless of being in an “unauthentic” American city, life in El Paso is surprisingly pleasant as it is experienced as a space of stability and security that my friends had long yearned for. Further, El Paso, unlike other real American cities, is safe from the “American vice”— racial discrimination.

After arriving in El Paso, I spent my first afternoon with Mary when she told me that their life in El Paso had been peaceful. Unlike her friends in Boston whose children

\(^{26}\) This point will be illustrated more in Chapter five.
were seriously bullied at school, fortunately such acts did not occur in El Paso. It was also during our first conversation when Mama Gau told me

I feel living here is, how to say… easier. I mean there is no discrimination. The town is not big so it is very convenient to run around to all parts. In addition, the nature of Mexican ethnicity is quite similar to our Taiwanese ethnic nature. I mean interpersonal relationships come first on many matters. So it seems that in terms of handling business/matters, relations are valued and relied on like how Taiwan was when I was growing up. California is way too competitive [without valuing human relations]. I could not have survived there.

She laughed while I told her that she was being modest. As a seasoned businessperson, Mama Gau pointed out the uniqueness of conducting business in El Paso, which is a different space from California for the people and their culture. The interconnectedness of a geographic location and its culture of people is experienced through Mama Gau’s daily interactions with her customers who remind her of the people and culture of her youth.

Young manager Estella mentioned several times how El Paso is not like America for the absence of racial discrimination. She then added “There are mostly Asians in California, so there is no discrimination in California, either.” In a conversation she elaborated on her perspective according to her experiences.

Lao-Mei see us, the H1 holders as their competitors for professional jobs since their economy is declining. So the quota for H1 has been shrinking and the U.S. companies are hiring their own people, which is
understandable. ... People here are very nice. They do not discriminate. This is something I feel is very positive about this place. That is why myself as an Asian would stay here all by myself for such a long time. It is mainly because people here basically would not discriminate against others. (What do you mean by discrimination?) I have experienced discrimination before when I was in Europe. Over there, it was especially common for the whites to discriminate against Asians [italics added]. That occurred the most. That was not a good feeling. For example, I went into a restaurant wanting to have a meal, there were obviously tables available but they just wouldn’t give it to me and said they were for their local people. If it wasn’t discrimination, what was it? (Did that happen a lot?) Yes. So at that time, I felt that I’d only stay until I finished school and would never return to that place.... I left after finishing school. After I came here, I was thinking about what I would do if there was discrimination or something like that. But then to my surprise, it is not like that here because at least Mexicans do not discriminate against people.

Based on her past painful experiences, Estella had somewhat expected to encounter discrimination in El Paso. Surprisingly, she felt that she has been treated as an equal during her many years of residing in El Paso. Her conclusion was that Mexicans as a people do not discriminate with the assumption that Mexicans are also victims, just as equally as Asians are, to discrimination from white perpetrators. Thus, Mexicans and Asians are both in the same hierarchical level of non-white/victim category.
At a later occasion, Estella shared how her relative who was an exchange student in Indiana a year ago suffered greatly from racial discrimination after her African-American roommate transferred. She said “Black people do not discriminate either because they understand how that feels.” Again, the presence of white bodies was perceived as necessary to the act of racism.

Omi and Winant (1994) argued that the link between “essentialist representations of race and social structures of domination” is in need to identify a social project as racist. They wrote “there is nothing inherently white about racism” (p. 72). Racism is defined as “a fundamental characteristic of social projects which create or reproduce structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race” (Omi & Winant, p. 162). They further explain how racial inequality and injustice were not simply the product of prejudice, nor was discrimination only a matter of intentionally informed action. Rather, prejudice was an almost unavoidable outcome of patterns of socialization which were “bred in the bone,” affecting not only whites but even minorities themselves. (p. 69)

By claiming that only the whites perform racist acts onto non-whites, the work of essentializing a group based on its race is enacted and the black/white binary is perpetuated. It diminishes the process of interrogating unequal power relations and privileges (Flores & Moon, 2002) as well as the accountability for those who have the power to make claims (Omi & Winant). Framing racism as the problem of whites masks the omnipresent process of “prejudice breeding” and bypasses contestations on actors reproducing the project of essentializing racial majority as well as minority groups. My
friends who recently arrived in El Paso, many of whom are business people, framed their understanding of racism as a practice owned and committed only by whites. Such a view erases the flexible and insidious power of dominance practiced in our mundane social activities as Chen (1996) reminded us that racism is not confined by any boundaries including geographic ones.

Further, such a belief may fall into the trap of the “white/bad versus black/good” racial duality (Flores & Moon, 2002, p. 190). Victim-hood is claimed as a nonwhite person free from practicing racist deeds while oppressive structures and practices remain strong and intact. However, this is not to suggest that there is no materiality accompanying one’s skin tone in historically racist and colonial systems. Scholars have focused on the complicated ways in which racism is practiced and centered in discursive spaces and performances of whiteness (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Nakayama & Martin, 1999; Warren, 2003). Their efforts have brought the universal white space into the spotlight for interrogation as “it continues to influence the identity of those both within and without its domain” (Nakayama & Krizek, p. 291). As Warren argued, it is the functions of those patterned images, constructs, and descriptions which keep the mechanism of whiteness running; and that this machine should be challenged and disrupted.

The first time I met Lucy, who came to El Paso as a young teen from Taiwan, I was curious to learn her perspectives on El Paso. “There are so many Mexicans in El Paso,” she said and explained how she had always wanted to leave El Paso and finally did so nine years earlier to pursue college and work in other Texas cities. Her father followed, “99% of the population in El Paso is Lao-Mo,” and her mother Pat responded
“yeah, *they* [italic added] are also foreigners, so [we are] on equal footing. … There are more white people in [her city], and some of them still would discriminate against us. Some white people are nice, but not all of them.”

Although Pat did not specifically state the sense of solidarity she felt with people in El Paso, such a tendency was alluded to. However, it was more from the point of self-recognizing as less legitimate to this land as a new comer while Othering the numerical majority of the population as not belonging to El Paso either. As Ortíz-González (2004) wrote,

> In a dislocated city [such as El Paso], some strangers are stranger than others, depending on the individual’s real or assumed proximity to the U.S. mainstream in terms of race and wealth. Wealthy or Euro-American newcomers or visitors will probably be more accepted in the city than many Mexican Americans who were born there or Mexicans who have commuted daily to work with the proper permit for many years. Even German soldiers temporally stationed in El Paso’s army base are not singled out to be made to feel as foreign as the long-term residents or employees. (p. 36)

Through the act of measuring, Mexican Americans and Mexicans’ legitimacy to El Paso was reduced while Chinese groups were in a sense, empowered as foreigners who are similar to the numerically predominant group in terms of skin tones. El Paso was simultaneously relegated to the space as the “no-man’s-land,” a shelter for both groups. It was from such a mentality in which El Paso was seen as a steppingstone free from (white) racism for some of the Taiwanese and Chinese, often the 2nd generation to move their
journey onto the mainstream of the United States. It therefore is a space which in both a material and symbolic sense, allows these new comers to cultivate or position themselves in this land of numerous possibilities, and at times, hostility.

**Spatializing El Paso in the Frame of Manichean Allegory**

I have discussed how various geographic locations are demarcated into a hierarchically spatial order wherein the Manichean allegory was permeated in private and public practices. I further delineated how such spatializing acts hold material impacts on people’s mundane experiences.

Living on the border of El Paso-Juárez, my transnationalist friends understood the space through a process of comparing and contrasting with their past experiences. Focusing on being realistic and practical, a hierarchical ranking of places was generated. El Paso was often placed in the middle space as somewhere that is “bi shang bu zu, bi xia you yu” (to fall short of the best but be better than the worst) according to a Chinese idiom. Living in El Paso is positive when it is compared to that in Taiwan or China at this particular historical moment. El Paso is after all a U.S. city where freedom, liberty, democracy, and modernity was experienced. However, it is not as American as other U.S. cities for the amount of non-white bodies and prevalence of the Spanish language. With the absence of a white majority, my friends interpreted El Paso as a temporary safe heaven for “foreigners/nonwhites” like themselves. Living on this borderland is therefore manageable for the Taiwanese and Chinese newcomers.

Critical communication and culture scholar Raymie McKerrow (1998) argued for the import of reconceptualizing space and time in the making of contemporary cultural research. Stating that space is more than a physical materiality defined by boundaries, it
is “a productive agency defined through the interactions between people” (p. 277), McKerrow encouraged researchers to unpack how power is complicit and implicated in the production and reproduction of spatiality through means of controlling and bordering places, representing spaces and experiencing spaces. Further, McKerrow reminded researchers to also be critical of the way in which time is comprehended as a linear movement according to the Western par. Such a naturalized understanding has been repressive in many aspects of how we engage in our everyday business (Verhelst, 1987).

During my sojourn, El Paso was made as a homogeneous place connected to a particular people and culture. In addition, it was fixed into a space as other ones were designated to their own rankings based on the perspective of (future) global arrangement such as the Greater China ideology. Such a construct inevitably essentialized a highly interactive, fluid, and polyvocal space. Further, the construction was accomplished through its relations to other places and each was placed under the linear story of modernization of the West. It was through the interactive and constant comparing and contrasting, essentializing and contradicting, identifying and differentiating, articulating and disarticulating within the Western civilization that El Paso, or any other geographical space was able to become.

Foucault (1986) reminded us to carefully examine spatial arrangements for they reveal the cultural logic at work. Thus, it is the spatializing practices and the logic guidance in the process of making and ranking spaces that the previous discussion centered on. As Ong (1999b) argued that it is imperative to view culture and human agency beyond as merely consequences of globalization but as forces that propel transnational movements. Agreeing completely with Ong’s insight and cogent arguments,
I however intend to illustrate the drastic impact of the more-than-ever rapid amount of
global communication and interactions that affect my friends’ understandings and
experiences of the lived places. As Ong demonstrated, Chinese-ethnics as actors have
been accumulating capital in crafting their spaces in the global capitalized world. The
following discussion will illustrate the kinds of strategies being practiced by these
Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists to better position them and their families in the
border of El Paso/Juárez, a place with intertwined hierarchical relations in the global
future.
CHAPTER FOUR: CRAFTING SPACE THROUGH TRAVELING

The conceptualization of “culturing while traveling/dwelling” discussed in Chapter one facilitates our understanding of the process of cultural hybridization, which the Taiwanese and Chinese community members had experienced during traversing and inhabiting. Anthropologist Tsing (1993) discussed the divided arguments on whether culture, being an existence, belongs to the “natives” in a confined community for the traveling ethnographer to discover, or it is created through collaborative construction from both the “natives” as well as the ethnographer. Both are becoming increasingly mobile (Clifford, 1992).

Scholars have discussed the fruitful possibility in viewing travel as way of knowing and creating cultures (Clifford, 1992). Travelers with various degrees of privileges, freedom, and motivations gain different intercultural knowledge and form various identities through agents’ “traveling-in-dwelling, dwelling-in-traveling” (Clifford, p. 108). Traveling/dwelling and its accompanied knowledge and experiences become a complex phenomenon that remains to be explored for its possibilities to understand the process in which cultural practices and identities being shifted and (dis)articulated in Hall’s (1996a, 1996b) sense, for various ends. Drzewiecka and Wong’s (1999) view of culture as a constant and mobile act in which identities are constituted during daily interaction from face-to-face to mediated communication. Thus, when culture is deemed as mobile and fluid, it is “freed from assumptions of stable community” (Tsing, 1993, p. 124). Culture is not a pure thing. Rather, it is a constant and fluid intergrading process that is always subject to and constitutive of both conscious and unconscious everyday practices. In the era of transnationalism, human agents became much more mobile as well

1 Please see Chapter one pages 21-30.
as their cultures. By traveling physically as well as through technologies, transnationalists cultivate cultural identities where “articulations” of positionalities (Hall, 1996a) are always at work.

In the previous chapter, I argued that the space of El Paso/Juárez borderlands was constructed/conceptualized within the global-spatial relationships as a stepping stone-like place that is not truly American but American enough for my friends. They construct the U.S. as a space of white people, English-speaking, democracy, classless, and modernity as discussed. In this discussion, I incorporate various narratives on how some Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists travel/dwell in El Paso/Juárez—a transitional space or a “less authentically American” space. This chapter aims to explore the ways in which the Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists travel in/out of the space of this border area. As Tsing (1993) and Clifford (1992) stated, individuals who travel across borders generate their experiences and knowledge toward different places in their traveling. Viewing El Paso/Juárez as less American is inevitably implicated in the various ways my friends perform traveling in between spaces. Moreover, I strive to show the kinds of strategies and cultural knowledge being invented and (per)formed in order to expand one’s social space during mundane dwelling and traveling. I first illustrate different tactics being employed and difficulties experienced by Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists as non-U.S. citizens while encountering border checking. I narrate stories from perspectives of those with different legal and socioeconomic status in an attempt to underline the complexity of border crossing experiences by the non-U.S. transnationalists to understand how “diasporic ethnicities unevenly assimilated to dominant nation states” (Clifford, 1992, p. 110). In addition, I provide major events such as FBI raids on two Chinese
restaurants and immigration policing that occurred in El Paso to illuminate the contexts in which various traveling, in both a figurative and literal sense took place.

“**They are tougher with the Chinese passports**”— Crossing El Paso/Juárez Border After the 9/11 Event

Many of my friends told me that crossing the border everyday is the most difficult part of their working and living here. Before deciding when to leave the office, they would check on the internet to see which international bridge has the shortest wait. Regardless, they often ended up leaving the office after eight o’clock as Estella said “I’d rather stay in the office to take care of business than sitting in the car wasting time in the traffic.” Estella shared one of her crossing experiences with me during an interview when I asked her how long she usually waits at the border.

“In the beginning, it was probably more than an hour, but right after 9/11, oh man, it was horrible. During that time, even we were invited to the immigration office.”

“Really”? I asked wondering why their working visa did not protect them.

“Yeah, it was only to those who are non-Americans, even including those PRs because they hold a green card, not an American passport.”

“What happened then”? 

“We all had to go in to give them the passports, and everyone sat together and the officer put the passports on top of their desk and then he didn’t touch them. You couldn’t see what he was doing, he asked you to wait on those seats. We once waited from 8 p.m. to 12 at midnight. It was when I felt the least of my dignity. Because first of all, I was thinking that I came here to work, to stimulate your economic progress, I mean we are the investors, right? Plus, we’re very legal. But anyway, those officers were like that. They
waited until the last moment, probably thinking it was 12 o’clock [midnight] and there shouldn’t be any more people coming in, so he handled all the cases at once. He didn’t do anything much besides just looking at every single passport. I don’t know what he was looking for. After that, he read the names and then you went ahead to take your passport back.”

“So were there other people besides you and your co-workers”?

“I saw Malaysian, Japanese, and also Koreans, mostly Asians. Basically, I felt that they might have a little bit of discrimination toward Asians. It seemed that they were quite respectful toward Japanese because Japanese have money, plus there are many Japanese companies in Juárez so many people here [in the borderland] are depending on Japanese to make their living. So they feel that Japanese are very… respectable. Because when he was examining passports, he saw Japan, he took a look at that passport first. Those people came one or two hours later than us, but they left earlier.” Listening to Estella, I felt the frustration for being treated unfairly as transnationalists of different national origins.

In the beginning of October 2004, there was news about implementing the US-VISIT program on the U.S.-Mexico border. The program would start at the end of December as the first phase to check “non-immigrant visa holders, visitors from visa-waiver countries and laser visa holders seeking an I-94 form to travel beyond the border zone” while entering the United States at land borders between El Paso and Juárez (EPT, Oct. 1, 2004, B1). The next phase will be checking visitors leaving the U.S. at the border where drivers would be given mini-fingerprint readers to press upon. The new regulation was estimated to affect approximately 33,000 visitors a day according to the Homeland
Security Department *(EPT, Oct. 1, 2004, A8)*. I was concerned about the how this 
practice would affect my friends’ daily crossing. After my mentioning reading about this 
regulation, Estella responded “Yes, we just discussed this in the office today and found it 
to be unbelievable [for them to enforce this regulation] since it will probably affect the 
already crowded traffic at the border! … I might as well move to Juárez if that happens. 
(laugh)” While most of my friends did not believe that the government would let 
business in the border area be affected, many expressed anxiety with such a practice 
prolonging their wait returning to El Paso from work.

When this new border-checking system started on December 20th instead of the 
31st as announced, I inquired to my friends how the process affected them. Mr. Lee told 
me that he had not seen or heard anyone being stopped to give their fingerprints as how 
“some co-workers were saying [it would start] on the 20th.” He continued, “However 
when I passed the border yesterday, it was as usual. It was maybe practiced on other 
bridges, but not this [Zaragoza Bridge].” Even though the U.S. Customs and Border 
Protection officials claimed the system aided in their interception of a suspect at the 
of the Taiwanese managers was asked to give their fingerprints.

Estella said that her co-workers had learned from the border patrol officers that 
Taiwan is not on the list. I asked what “not on the list” meant. Estella explained, “If your 
country is not on the list, then you do not need to have your fingerprints taken. Thank 
God that Taiwan’s [citizens] do not need to do so, the Mainland Chinese [citizens] must 
need to do that.” Out of curiosity, I asked if she knew what countries are on the list. “I
don’t know. As long as Taiwan is not on the list, it does not matter with others” she responded lightly.

Then Estella commented laughing “This would be the time to realize the advantage of not being unified with China.”

Remembering the frustration that Estella felt for being kept in the immigration office for a long time after 9/11/2001, I was not sure how to respond to this comment about her being the privileged treated group. It seemed that the travelers from China were under more scrutiny, especially many whose visa does not allow for multiple-entrances to the U.S. Her statement also reminded me that Ms. Liang had told me her husband with a Chinese passport was once kept in Mexico. When Ms. Liang’s mother-in-law came to visit them in El Paso from Shanghai, Mama Gau took the three of them with several other overseas Taiwanese/Chinese to Juárez for some sightseeing.

Mama Gau said “on the way back, her mother-in-law and her passed through the border but not her husband.”

Ms. Liang then added, “I was scared to death”!

They both laughed and kept talking one after another.

Mama Gau continued “the immigration officer who was a woman told me that we would have to reapply for a visa because his paper did not allow him to leave the United States. It was a Sunday so the Custom office was closed. We were about to find him a hotel to stay overnight and apply for a visa the next morning. I told Liang to bring her mother-in-law to go to Ms. Chou’s store so they could sit and relax a bit. Who would have known that they closed early that day to join a BBQ party”? 
At this point, they both laughed and could not talk for a while. It seemed that they were laughing their terrifying experience away.

Ms. Liang then said, “So my mother-in-law and I were sitting on the street in front of Ms. Chou’s store like two beggars since we were so frightened and tired.”

“So what happened to your husband?” I asked Ms. Liang.

Mama Gau answered, “Liang then thought about trying another checkpoint since there are several of them around here. We did and he came back into the U.S. fine. So it really depended on individual officers. For example, I had asked a border patrol officer who is my customer about her husband’s documents before we went. He told me it would be fine. So I thought it would have no problem. There were so many of us, Ms. Liang, her husband, mother-in-law, Dawn, and myself, we took two cars and everybody else got in fine. Maybe it is because they are stricter with Mainlanders [italics added]… I have never heard of Taiwanese having this happen to them before.” I was thinking about how that could be since many had told me that the border patrollers do not know the difference between Taiwan and China.

Ms. Liang continued the story. “Maybe it was because our group was too confusing to them with people holding different statuses?” Mama Gau responded, “That’s true. Some had green cards, one was on the Taiwanese passport, several had the passports of Mainland China, one on an H4 [visa as a dependent] and one had H1 working visa…”

Ms. Liang then said “They probably thought something was fishy about us since we should all be on the same status. {laugh}”

“Ha! They probably thought we were trying to smuggle people into the U.S.,” said Mama Gau while laughing.
It was not the first time that I heard stories about how Mainland Chinese passport holders would experience tougher inspections while entering the United States. On a cold Monday evening, I was at Jen’s apartment preparing for Wen-He’s birthday dinner. Jen and I, with Mandy’s assistance, made sour and spicy soup, and dumplings. After Wen-He came home and baked some short ribs, we had what he referred to as a meal of “well-combined Chinese and Western dishes,” following a yellow birthday cake and shots of *tequila*.

During the dinner, I asked Wen-He about his experiences on traveling through the border everyday. Wen-He said he never had difficulty crossing the El Paso-Juárez border. However, his wife Jen was “invited in” on the way back to the U.S. when he took his family to Juárez after their arrival in El Paso. “What happened?” I asked. “They are tougher with the Mainland China passports. Because my wife’s visa does not allow multiple entrances like ours, she was asked to go to the immigration office. But actually, it does not matter since they do not need to check visa while crossing this border area. So there was no problem. It’s just that they are more difficult with the Mainland Chinese passports.” Jen added, “I was so nervous. What if I was not allowed to enter back into El Paso? Then I would have to stay there by myself. Yikes! That would have been really scary.” “Nah, you don’t need to worry about that,” Wen-He reassured her. While listening, I was reflecting back to my own privileges of seldom having to worry about my border crossing even though the patrol officer was confused of my status as an international student in Ohio appearing at the border of Juárez and El Paso during the school term in late September. Meanwhile, I was wondering why the increasing power of
China as my friends in El Paso had shared was not felt during these Chinese passport holders’ traveling.

The conversation then moved to Wen-He’s experiences with the recent US-VISIT regulation. Wen-He said, “I have not seen anyone who went in to have their fingerprints taken. Taiwanese are fine, but I bet the Mainlanders like her will need to do so {pointing at Jen}. They are not friendly to the Mainlanders.” Jen objected “Why don’t they [ Americans] like Mainlanders? How annoying!” Wen-He then continued “Like the FBI person said that ‘we have a lot of interactions with Mainland China, though it does not mean that we are good friends.’” Wen-He laughed.

“What FBI person?” I asked. At this time, I recalled that I had learned bits about this from a close friend about Wen-He and several other men being questioned by FBI agents. Since I had promised my friend not to let anyone know that I heard about it, I never made any inquiry on this instance.

“It was not long after they got here. {pointing at Jen and the girls} There was one afternoon the FBI came to knock at the door looking for John. [John is Wen-He’s boss. They shared the apartment until John was assigned to China and Jen and the girls came to El Paso].” Jen continued, “I did not know. I heard him say something about agent. So I thought it was some client looking for his boss [John]. So I told him that he was not here.”

Wen-He followed, “Yeah, I was wondering who was looking for my boss since he wasn’t here [in El Paso] anymore. Then, later I heard Jen say the word ‘Federal.’ I was surprised as well as nervous because I knew anything federal would be serious. {laughed} So we made an appointment at [my co-workers] Mike and Sara’s home so that they could
help out since our English is not very good. It turned out that we had records at the immigration service. Several of us were asked to step inside [the office at the border] before to leave our information. John, Jason, Bob, and myself all did that before. He showed us the names, and I saw John and Jason, so I told him that we are co-workers. {laugh} The information they asked for included your company’s name and some other basic information such as your name and nationality. Then [one of the FBI agents] asked about our company and said ‘What kind of product does your company make? Is it possible to turn it into weapons for terrorists?’ We said no, we make computer stuff which is not possible to be turned into weapons for terrorists. We also thought they probably suspected us having something to do with the Grand China instance [which will be discussed in the next section]. Maybe they were trying to find out if we were involved in certain ways with this human trafficking gang. We then also wondered that maybe it was because my boss John was trying to purchase a gun back then.”

Wen-He continued, “It was surely nerve wracking. {laugh} Later, we all started to chat, the FBI person said that he is of Mexican descent and was born and raised here in El Paso. He was asking us how we like El Paso. Everything turned out to be fine. I have always been lucky in my life. I mean for example, I only have a two-year vocational college education, it is almost impossible [for someone with my educational background] to be assigned here doing what I am doing now. That is why I pushed Jen really hard to get her driver’s license and to learn English. There are so many people, like the wife of the CEO in [another Taiwanese MNC] who has been here for seven years and still cannot drive nor speak English. I really worried about Jen not having a large enough circle of
friends. Thanks to you now, you are another one of our precious friends.” I smiled and acted as if there was a halo above my head. We all then laughed.

I kept imagining the kinds of feelings they had after being asked to talk with FBI agents. Neither Jen nor Wen-He had received a four-year university education, nor lived in an English-speaking environment. Their anxiety and uncertainty was more than worrying about why the FBI wanted to talk with them. They had to make sure their “imperfect” English would not bring them unnecessary trouble. Fortunately, they had friends who had received education in English-speaking environments: Mike completed his Master’s degree in the U.S. and Sara graduated from an Australian university. Although it turned out that the appointment was not about anything severe, their anxiety resurfaced as they narrated that experience. They remained curious about what the true reason was behind their private conversations with FBI agents in Mike and Sara’s home. They thoroughly examined their everyday interactions in details and relationships for any possible reason that could link them to being suspected by the federal government agents. They then generated all of the possibilities, even including the then recent raid on two local Grand China Buffets as well as the growth of Chinese power, which might have created hostility or suspicion toward any Chinese-nationals.

“They were targeting at the Chinese”—The Grand China Commotion

On November 15, 2004, about fifty Chinese workers at the Grand China Buffets, one on the eastside and the other on the west of El Paso, were rounded up in federal raids (EPT, Dec. 9, 2004, A1). As it was reported in the EPT I read weeks later:

Officials of Immigrations and Customs Enforcement and the FBI, the agencies whose agents executed the search warrants at the restaurants and
about 12 homes Monday, referred all questions to the U.S. attorney’s office. …. One of the Grand China Buffet owners, Liu Zhi Wen, said his business partner might have been charged with harboring an illegal alien, a family member, but he was not sure because authorities wouldn’t answer his questions. Liu said Immigration and Customs Enforcement and FBI agents burst into his West Side home Monday morning and took away business documents and cash. Meanwhile, armed agents were storming the East Side restaurant, seizing paperwork and taking away about 30 Chinese workers and two Mexican workers, restaurant workers said. “I still don’t know what happened,” said restaurant manager Eddie Li, who speaks fluent English and was not taken away. . . . “The federal authorities asked to use our training rooms for briefing and interviews,” Mark Matthys, executive director of the El Paso Chapter of the American Red Cross, confirmed. “This is the first time I can think of where they requested our facilities. After about four hours of questioning, Matthys said, the Chinese nationals were taken away in unmarked vans. The immigrants, who asked not to be identified by name for fear of retaliation, said they were then taken to the hotel AmeriSuites. Their wallets were taken from them, and they were not allowed to make phone calls or talk to one another, they said.

(EPT, Nov. 19, 2004, B)

I did not hear about this event for my return to Ohio on November 10th to attend the National Communication Association annual convention in Chicago. After returning to El Paso on the 17th of November, I proceeded to catch up on recent events by having
phone conversations or meals with a few of my friends. It was not until the 20th that I
heard about the closedown of the Grand China Buffets in a car ride with Estella when she
told me “It seemed to be some employees went to snitch on their boss’s employment of
illegal workers. They all were taken away [both employer and employees.] We were
thinking maybe it was done by other Chinese buffets. {laugh}” I asked “When did this
happen?” “Sometime last week. The employees ganged up against the owner and
complained about how they were abused for working long hours. They all lived in the
Manor apartments [which are sort of next to Estella’s apartment complex] and the police
went into their apartment to search and took cash away. . . . They closed down both
buffets. The owners were put into jail for two days and are out now I think. But they are
still investigating.”

“That is really strange if the workers are illegal here, why would they expose
themselves?” I said. Estella answered, “I don’t know. Maybe just a few of them could not
take it anymore so decided ‘the heck with it’ and brought everyone down.”

This event was not discussed among people that I interacted with unless I inquired.
As Thanksgiving was approaching, I was busy inviting friends for dinner or paying short
visits to extend my gratitude for their friendship and assistance with my life and research
at El Paso. The weather report had warned for another cold front for the Thanksgiving
break.

On the 23rd, it was in the thirties and I was trembling with a blanket wrapped
around me. The heat had stopped working once again the day before, and I made repair
request for the fourth time in two months. I called Mama Gau to cancel my visit that
afternoon planning to stay for Herman, the maintenance to come to fix it since the holiday break was approaching.

Nobody showed.

The next afternoon, I spent more than two hours for a usually one and half hour journey to Mama Gau’s store due to the much more crowded holiday traffic on the buses as well as on the highway. I rushed into Sylvia, a supermarket right on the border of the U.S. side with a large amount of shoppers getting turkeys for the holiday. I picked up some pumpkin pies for Mama Gau as well as Mr. and Mrs. Chou.

After I arrived at Mama Gau’s store, I asked if she heard about the raids at the Chinese Buffets. “Yeah, it is really serious, Meimei” she answered. “What exactly happened? I heard that they were caught for hiring illegal workers?” I pursued.

“Nah, it is more serious than that. {punching keys on a calculator for the customer while talking to me} I just heard about it a couple of days ago. {sigh} These Mainlanders came here to cause so much trouble. It was a planned attack [for the Fu-Jou Gang]² all over in America. The Fu-Jou Gang is quite powerful in America. They have connections with coyotes. They say the police have been following them and staking them out for a long time. Not long ago, police in New York arrested a whole bunch of these gangsters and it was reported heavily in WJT. [My son’s] friends even asked ‘Does your mother know them?’ {laugh} There were more than three hundred policemen and they moved in more than ten locations in El Paso all at once. They went in with real guns and aimed at them. {imitating the posture of holding a rifle shooting} Everyone was scared. Some

² Fu-Jou is a city in Fu-Jien Province on the southeast coast of China. Mama Gau is referring to an article about the FBI and Organized Crime Investigation Division in New York conducting large-scale raids at three Chinese communities in New York on the 11th of November which was the largest raid on Fu-Jou Gang and arrested more than twenty members (WJT, Nov. 12, 2004).
people threw up, some fainted, you know us women, how can women handle that kind of terror? So more than ten places they went and started to search. Found a lot of cash and some papers. They had police undercover in the gang for a long time to find out about their contact with the coyotes. The undercover police asked their waiters/waitresses how much money they make. They told them two hundreds and fifty dollars a month. Of course they did not tell them that does not include tips as well as accommodation and meals.”

At this time, Ms. Liang came out from the office in the back next to the warehouse and joined our conversation. Liang said “Those are all with Gangs. They do not deserve our sympathy. {speaking toward me}” I mumbled, “Well, I was just thinking that maybe some people are just working there part time as the first step to other places but then now they are affected severely because of this . . . ”

Mama Gau continued “They really damaged our reputations as Chinese here.” By now, James came out to chat with us as well when Liang said “They all belong to the Fu-Jou Gang. They must have been involved in the money laundering business. The police got a lot of cash from where they live, and of course, they would wonder where the money is from.” James concurred “Like the four [shoe store owners] from Fu-Jou. Lan said that they only make a quarter for each pair of shoes sold. Yet, they all drive a BMW and live in a huge house. I always wondered how they could afford that kind of lifestyle with the thin profit they are making.” Mama Gau added “They would go to Vegas to gamble and each time with a large amount of loss. It is not the kind of lifestyle that regular people would have.” While listening, I wanted to reiterate my sympathy toward the workers making a meager living. Much later, I reflected to my response and wish that
I had related this instance to the Chinese inspectors on the El Paso/Juárez border during
the Chinese Exclusion period as discussed in Chapter two to challenge border patrol
practices.

A few weeks later I walked past the Grand China on the Eastside after it was
reopened. I saw the “Now Hiring” sign on its window. It was around lunch hour and a
couple walked out of the door. I noticed their look toward me and immediately made a
direct connection.

“I am not related to them!” shouted in my head as I caught my own hypocrisy and
felt ashamed. “Didn’t you want to show support and solidarity? What happened,
preacher?” I said to myself thinking back to the conversation at Mama Gau’s store where
I was disappointed at how little support was shown. I decided to continue my curiosity as
to how this event has affected the minority population of Chinese-looking people in the
neighborhood since Wen-He and his friends suspected that it might be the reason of the
FBI’s desire to question them. Further, I was curious about the community members’
reactions, specifically in relation to their frequent border-crossing activities.

During an interview with Mary at the end of November, I made an inquiry about
her thoughts on the instance.

**Me:** What are some of your thoughts or feelings toward this Grand China event?

**Mary:** This instance is about the employer using their employees’ headcounts to
open bank accounts and then they can spread the money into smaller accounts, right? I do
not know the details very much. {long pause}

**Me:** I have not read much about it because it was not detailed in the *El Paso
Times*. 
Mary: Yeah, I feel that… Oh… you mean what effects does this event have on the employees?

Me: I mean, for example, how do you think this event impacts the Chinese community or us?

Mary: {long pause} I am thinking… human nature is very… I mean on the one hand, people are very piteous and on the other hand, human nature is very bad. Why are people very piteous? Because those people, they came from Mainland China right? They do not have [legal] status here. I mean they did not have jobs in Mainland and were very poor, so out of disparity, they had to find any means possible to get work. Hence, these ill intentioned people who have means to get them here. After they were brought over here, hmmm… I heard it from Dr. Chen that these [Chinese workers] live in an apartment over there. {pointing toward the direction of Manor Apartments}

Me: Yeah, at Manor.

Mary: Right. It seems that there were more than twenty people living in that building. I mean one unit.

Me: Twenty some people living in one unit?

Mary: Right. More than twenty people. Our pastor goes to spread Gospels every Friday evening because it is impossible for them to go to church on Sundays. They are very busy and need to work. So he and Lan, and maybe some others, they all went there to spread the good news. Hmmm… so at the, for instance, a table like this, {Pointing at a rectangular western style dinner table and chairs} They would sit there and then those who interested in listening would then join them there. While they were talking, it was actually really noisy because there were people walking around or passing by, talking,
eating, cooking, or some were maybe curious and would stare at them. So you can picture that situation in your head. Anyway, what Dr. Chen was saying is that he never had any experience like that before. So that day, he was shocked. He said that it is unbelievable to have so many people inhabiting in that small apartment. Hmmm… so then… I am thinking that it is such a pity for those people. They came to a place like this in order to make a living, and then their life is in reality very harsh. Like when we go there to eat, you might not be able to imagine that they actually live in an environment like that just by looking at them. But, they do. Also, because they spent all their money, right? Like those who were smuggled in, they spent a lot of money to purchase an opportunity like this. With very little money they are making here, they even need to pay the money back. So then, it is pretty sad. They could only let their boss arrange them at will. Plus, they are in another country without any place to go for help. Moreover, it is impossible for them to go to someone to complain right? They already do not have the [legal] status here to begin with right? {laugh} So it is really sad. It is such a pity. Then speaking of human nature being evil, then we have to speak of their employers, right? You oppress these workers, so you already made money out of them. And then after you oppressed this group of people, you further made money illegally. Because it seems that they engaged in money, I don’t know the details, but it seems that [the raids] were because of the money laundering activities being revealed. So then, if they only took advantage of these workers, they perhaps could have explained or defended [with the excuse of] the high costs of hiring workers or something like that, and since they are helping these people to have opportunities to work, right? So it would be reciprocity. But they engaged in illegal activities transferring money to difference places. Then they got involved in more sins.
**Me:** Since it occurred in El Paso. What sort of impact do you think this event will have on the Chinese groups?

**Mary:** [The residents here] probably hold a negative thinking toward Chinese. Moreover, they probably feel that there are many illegal [workers]. Oh, actually many Mexicans here are illegal. They probably think that “What? There are also many Chinese illegal ones too”? Probably they would think that Chinese are very mean since they would oppress their own people and that [Chinese] also would engage in unlawful business. Or they probably do not feel anything about it since it seems that there are many drug dealers or people like that in El Paso. El Paso seems to be the headquarter of the drug cartels. Or they are probably thinking “Wow, we have got some company.” Chinese people are also quite bad, so it is not just all them. {laugh}

**Me:** Huh? {laugh}

**Mary:** Well, actually it is not too good because we are all basically Chinese here right? It would be best for us to give others positive impressions.

With this event, El Paso as a space of illegal drug activities is added with another image as a place full of various illegal aliens—first the Mexican and now the Chinese. Mary and Mama Gau’s concerns with the image of Chinese being damaged by the wrong doers speak to two meanings of the ethnic relations in the context of Grand China raids. First is the fear for the public associating the “model minority” Chinese immigrants with the Mexicans as the “normally” illegal actors in El Paso. Thus, it is important to disassociate oneself from “them”—the wrong doers from Mainland. Further, the possibility of white bodies being illegal (aliens) never was present in these conversations.
We kept discussing the development of the Grand China event when Mary said “Oh, I remember [that] because later the Chinese government came out to intervene… they, the Chinese government, sent some counsel or something like that to negotiate with America… So the Mainland China is very powerful now. See, every country is afraid of them. Even the American government needs to be very polite with the Mainland government. I think they [the Chinese government] act very efficiently and their government is really protective of its people. So I think China probably cares very much about their ‘face.’ Well, there are two possibilities. One is that they care very much about their citizens. The other is they care for their own reputation so their leaders like the consulate would come to resolve this with a blitzkrieg strategy before it is reported heavily.” Mary’s surprise about the influence that the Mainland China held over even the United States underscored the fluid spatial relations in which the Greater China continues to emerge as discussed in the previous chapter. Her comments revealed both admiration and fear about the ways Chinese government resolved the situation in confronting the U.S. government.

I later read the article Mary showed me during our interview. The heading read “Six people from the Chinese Restaurants will be deported back to Mainland” (WJT, Nov. 23, 2004, B1). This article stated that most of these fifty Grand China workers have been released after immediate negotiations conducted by the Chinese consulate. Further, the reports pointed out that due to the absence of an alert to the Chinese diplomats about the operation, the U.S. officials expressed regret and guaranteed to never allow another similar situation to occur in the future. Similar reports occurred in EPT on the same day
where it says “Detainment upsets consulate: Chinese official calls the roundups illegal.3”

As a Taiwanese, I admitted to feel a sense of threat for the power Chinese government has acquired and a wicked sense of anti-imperialist pride on the other hand.

In the beginning of 2005, I overheard a conversation between Lan, a U.S. citizen from China and a Taiwan national at a church lunch. Lan commented, “[The U.S. government] are trying to get us Chinese. It is a distorted form of Chinese Exclusion in a more subtle way. The FBI searched crazily thorough. They used the same strategy all places in California, San Francisco, like the way they did it here. They did not find much. They were simply targeting the Chinese. [italics added]”

3 An article by Ouisa Davis, an executive director of Diocesan Migrant and Refugee Services Inc., appeared in EPT on November 28th questioning the change-of-address law that is a “seldom communicated to the newly arrived—whether non-immigrant or permanent resident” enforcement requiring “change-of-address notice within ten days of a foreign national’s move to another residence.” Davis pointed out that four individuals were discovered having failed to notify the Department of Homeland Security of their new address and questioned the possibility that their filed change of address had simply not yet been processed.

There was another report revealed that the restaurants raid was aired on television in China and announced “the workers were taken to a hotel, where they were allegedly held incommunicado for several days by agents of Immigration and Customs Enforcement. … Five people were eventually charged with failing to give notice of a change of address and could face up to thirty days in jail, a fine of up to $300 and deportation” (EPT, Dec. 9, 2004, A1). Representatives of the Chinese Benevolent Society, LULAC and the Mexican-American Bar Association expressed concerns that the FBI and Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement violated the civil rights of the Chinese immigrants during the federal raid. About a dozen immigrants said they were “at gunpoint during the raid and kept at a U.S. immigration facility until they went on a hunger strike.” Later they were offered special visas if they would testify against their employers for human trafficking (EPT, Dec. 15, 2004, B1).

None of the articles I read in either WJT or EPT mentioned the connection between the arresting Fu-Jou Gang members and the raids at the Grand China Buffets, not to mention any words on money laundering. This event was solely reported as an operation on illegal immigrant workers. When I last spoke with my friend, who was closely involved in this case, I learned that a few individuals remained in prison and/or under intense investigations. As my friend said, “My point of view toward these Chinese is that I am not condoning whatever wrong doings they have done or they have not done, much less I am helping them to do any wrong doings. But I am just trying to help them to recognize their wrong doings if they had done any wrong, and to pick up the pieces and face the reality, and face the consequences without being discriminated [against], without being hurt, or violated of their basic human rights. In this case, I feel compassionate toward the victims of this case, they have been victimized, once and twice, and they were helpless. If everybody runs away, they will be the 3rd time victims. I cannot run away. Although I know that I am getting into certain kinds of inconveniences or troubles [sic], and I am sacrificing morally, financially in many ways. I am willing to do that because I feel that it’s worthy to do that. I am gaining something that money would never buy. So when they are in need of me, I said I am here, I’ll do whatever I can.” I was moved by my friend’s courage and devotion in speaking up against some inhumane and unjust treatments practiced by the authorities upon this powerless group.
The Taiwanese added, “Well, there are so many Lao Mao working illegally in El Paso. How come you do not hear them being searched and arrested like this?” Lan agreed and said, “Yeah, and also in Wal-Mart, there must be many workers working there illegally as well, but the FBI does not seem to be interested in them.”

Upon hearing the exchange of grudge and suspicion, I was surprised to learn that there were some Chinese/Taiwanese challenging the authority exercising power unjustly. At the same time, I felt uneasy with the mentality of bringing down other minorities for scrutiny and punishment as a show of fairness and just. Nonetheless, Lan’s comment about Chinese being targeted as a new form of Chinese exclusion lay heavy on my mind for his acute awareness of the past discrimination. His statement also suggested the wounded past (i.e., Chinese Exclusion Act) remained in the shadow and left in silence instead of generating strategies in building solidarity and forming coalitions with other minority groups in assuring the past is not repeated. I feared how the Chinese and Taiwanese community might compromise, as well as at whose expense, to please the authority in exchange for having the crosshairs removed from their own back. On the other hand, I was not sure what options these new immigrants who are in the process of applying for permission to stay in this country hold when they feel targeted and threatened. Further, I wonder how the mentality of being targeted as Chinese affected my friends’ daily life, especially when many had tried to disassociate themselves from any possible stigmatized groups, even if they are Chinese. However, because they often are identified as Chinese, their hopes to be disassociated from the Mainlanders might not be granted.
During my stay, I often heard some of my Taiwanese friends making efforts in distinguishing themselves from the Mainlanders. Although most would refer to themselves as Lao-Chung, the differences between those from Taiwan and those from China were explicitly articulated whenever the situation allowed such an act. With the occurrence of the Grand China raids, my speculation on such efforts, in which the mixed perceptions toward a Chinese from Taiwan and one from Mainland China were to be complicated. As Estella once told me in the beginning of our interaction, “In America, the Mainlanders, to be frank, are not welcome.” “What do you think the reasons might be?” “Because they took over Lao-Mei’s jobs in America. Plus, they have many illegal immigrants here. So in the American white’s society, Mainland Chinese are not respected at all.” Months later, I recalled this statement along with another previous casual conversation when Mary described her need to distinguish herself from the Mainlanders. I decided to inquire more as to why they perceive the need to separate themselves from those from Mainland China as well as how they perform the dissociation.

Mary replied that she would say: “I am Chinese but I am from Taiwan.” She explained “I want others to know me correctly. Because Taiwan and Mainland are, after all, two quite different places, I would let people know in the very beginning that I am from there [Taiwan], so that it would prevent others from automatically using his/her thinking framework to think of me as a person.”

When I further asked her opinions on the differences between these two places, she articulated that “Let’s just simply imagine that one is a democratic country and the other is non-democratic. In addition, there is difference in terms of living standards. So
for example, different people are the results of different environments. Because of the backgrounds in which a person grows up, he is molded with different personalities. Or it is because what he has contacts with, he then naturally turns out to be like this. So, then, so... for example, since I’d introduce myself to others that I am a Chinese, it means we just met for the first time right? (Right.) So it means it is our first time to meet. I would let them know this thing [that is] I am different from them [the Mainlanders]. We, Taiwan is different from the Mainland. I think that the amount of people from Mainland seems to be larger now in America, so maybe people here also know people from Mainland. Um… regardless of their perceptions toward them, whether being positive or negative, anyway, I, I would tell them that I came from another place, so you have to get to know me with a fresh start instead of using your previous experiences to think that I am also like [someone from Mainland China]. No matter the positive aspects of the Mainlander, maybe I am not as good as their positive aspects. But anyway, I hope people would come to know me correctly.”

Mary’s desire to be differentiated from Mainlanders revealed her eagerness for a “correct” identity in this new environment on the El Paso/Juárez border zone. Her concerns for being lumped together with Mainland Chinese by people in the U.S. uttered her need to be recognized as an individual different from the Mainlanders. However, there are situations where such a desire is not responded to as one wishes. Mary mentioned she once encountered a conversation with an American friend who asked her “Is Taiwan a country”? She answered “No. Taiwan is a province of the Republic of China.” Her friend then asked “Do you have your own president”? She answered “Yes, we do.” The friend said “Well, then Taiwan is a country.” Mary laughed and said to me

4 Please refer to Chapter three for more discussions on this increasingly heated struggle.
“I felt that it was so difficult to explain it to foreigners because then I have to talk about the history in the past couple of decades. It is pretty annoying.” Her desire to be identified as a Chinese was denied because of the great amount of efforts needed to explain the complicated situation. The legitimacy of her self-identification required her to convince her friend, in English, with numerous historical backgrounds and ideological struggles.

Regardless of one’s political stand, that is, either to assert Taiwan as an independent nation or a province belonging to ROC which some believe to be the legitimate government for both Taiwan and Mainland China, asserting the national identity for these Taiwanese seems to be depending on their interlocutors instead of their own assertion. Particularly at times in which unpredictable consequences could happen if the Taiwanese assert their views. Such as entering El Paso from Juárez, one’s national identity is often not demanded by the Taiwanese border crossers. As Mr. Lee shared that “While crossing the border, some [officers] know [the difference between China and Taiwan] but some do not. Some asked me ‘Are you from China?’ I’d say ‘Yes, I am from Taiwan.’ {laugh} They would have two reactions. Those who understand the situation would say ‘Oh, the good China!’ I would answer ‘Yes, yes.’ Some who do not know about it would say ‘China, Taiwan, same thing!’ I would not say anything as long as they let me pass through the border.” In order to assert his national identity, it was inevitable for Mr. Lee to correct the border patrol officer. After deploying an indirect tactic with an unsuccessful outcome, Mr. Lee chose to compromise after weighing the situation and possible consequences of challenging an authoritative figure in order to travel back home after a normal day of work.
Estella narrated her experiences of crossing the border during one of our interviews.

**Estella:** [One] thing about crossing the border is that you will be questioned coming back to America from Mexico but not from America to Mexico because you just need to pass the traffic light, you only need to drive to the side when it is red light and they would check your trunk quickly. If you are returning to America from Mexico, then you would be checked with your passport. The officer would ask, well, it depends on their mood [italics added] to be honest. Sometimes they do not even ask questions. Some know you already and would say “oh, how come you are off so early today?” when they see you. Sometimes they see me having another person in the car, and would say “Oh, you got a new friend.” {laugh} Yeah, some know [me] already so it’s easier to pass through.

**Me:** What kinds of questions are usually being asked?

**Estella:** Well, the first sentence is “anything from Mexico?” and I’d answer “No.” That’s all. Some would be… most of them would ask that question like I said. There are some who are new birds [and less experienced], they would be holding your passport and checking it for a long time. Some would say “Oh, Republic of China” and some even know the difference between China and Taiwan and would talk to you about it. Some would feel because of China and wonder if it [Taiwan] is part of China. For me, I of course would say it is not. Why should I be part of China? {assertive tone with pouting lips and widened eyes} So I’d say “I’m not from China, I’m from Taiwan.” Well, most of their questions are about nationality or what you brought [to the U.S.] Though, even if I
brought someone or something secretively, I would say otherwise. So I never understood why they even bother to ask. {laughed}

In a later interview, I inquired about her response when being asked where she is from.

**Estella:** You mean being asked here?

**Me:** It should be here in the U.S. that people would ask you right?

**Estella:** in El Paso or Juárez?

**Me:** Both, aren’t your answers the same?

**Estella:** {laugh} Well, there are three different types of situations. In Juárez, I’d say “I am from Taiwan.” When crossing the border between Juárez and El Paso, I’d answer “I am [coming] from Juárez and returning to El Paso.” {laugh} In El Paso and usually within the boundary of America, I also would say “I am from Taiwan.” But for most people, of course because Taiwan has been reported more often in recent years on CNN or in the newspapers such as *New York Times*, so for most of Lao Mei or Lao Wai, they would understand the difference between Taiwan and China in that China and Taiwan are different. I am pleased about this. But there are some people who are ignorant and those who do not watch news. These people they would say “Oh, so you are from China”! I’d say ‘no no no no, China and Taiwan are different. I am from Taiwan, not China, not Mainland China. That is totally different.’ Then some people would ask me ‘So what’s the difference?’ Of course I’d answer that by saying that our government is different. Ours is democratic and then the one on the opposite seashore is communist, right? So I think at least this is very different. And those Lao-Mei, some of them would go “Oh, it’s kind of different,” after talking with them. Because they do not understand
our geographic environment, right? So if you tell them that Mainland China is a vast piece of land just like the huge America, while Taiwan is small like... like an island in the Caribbean Ocean. But then another problem is that they do not understand our culture, right? So I could only use the governmental difference to explain to them. So they would know immediately that it is indeed different.”

To me, young Estella was one of the few who would vehemently voice her opinion to assert her identities because of her language abilities and experiences abroad. Estella’s recounting of ways and reasons for self-identifying revealed her reliance on the logic of demarcating the difference between the democratic camp (i.e., Taiwan, U.S.) and communist camp (i.e., China, former Soviet Union). Such a polarized trope seemed to be enacted by many of my friends for its convenience and effectiveness even when one is well experienced internationally and interculturally such as Estella. Performing the rhetoric of identifying Taiwan as democratic as opposed to the communist China serves multiple purposes. First, it is an accommodating strategy for Americans to quickly understand the difference between these two places as Estella explained. It further disassociates oneself from being a Chinese from China, which is deemed as a communist country by the Americans. More importantly, such a label rhetorically increases the proximity between Taiwan/Taiwanese to the United States/U.S. Americans. Self-identifying as a member from a democratic nation therefore caters to people in the U.S. where such a value is deeply treasured.

No Pictures Here

It was a rather warm February Saturday afternoon. The temperature was somewhere around 60 degrees. Estella took me to Juárez for an afternoon as a send-off
celebration for me. On our way back to El Paso, we waited in the traffic for more than fifty minutes.

Me: Wow, there are so many cars!

Estella: Well, this is nothing. You should see the regular days when people are off work. That is why I would rather stay in the office to take care of some more work until 7 p.m. or 8 p.m. when there is less traffic.

I was taking pictures of the flags on the border, and the lines of cars waiting to enter the United States. There were vendors walking in between cars to sell snacks, decorative items such as lamps, statues, puzzles, and stuffed animals. There were women and men, and young children who were no taller than Estella’s Toyota Camry and older women who looked like they were in their 50s or 60s holding their merchandise in their hands to display to the captive potential customers in their cars. I thought to myself that fortunately it does not rain frequently in El Paso or they would not have time to move all their items. However, the regular 100 degree temperatures in summer wouldn’t make it easy for them, either. As I was thinking while trying to not look at them as if being in a safari, or sending out a message of interest in buying items, I had trouble in placing my eye contact. After waiting for more than half an hour, we entered the area where the Mexican vendors were kept away from the line on the bridge. Finally, we were up. Our customs officer was Latino. He wore sunglasses as most of the officials do.

Estella: Hi! Sir.

As he was approaching to Estella’s side of the window, Estella showed him her passport and I was holding mine along with my I-20 and school contract in front of me waiting. He
did not say a word while looking at Estella’s passport. Then he looked at me. I immediately offered him my passport with the page of my F-1 visa sticker open.

**Officer:** So you are from China?

*Estella did not answer so I did not say anything either.*

**Officer:** Did you bring anything back?

**Estella:** No.

**Officer:** Open your trunk for me, will you?

**Estella:** Okay.

*She stepped out of the car and walked to the back to open it up for him. I could no longer see them.*

*She came back in less than ten seconds and drove away.*

There was not a word, neither in Chinese nor English, exchanged between Estella and me. In fact, Estella stared straight ahead without any eye contact with me in the short three minutes, which felt like at least ten, during our border crossing. I wondered what would have happened had we conversed in Mandarin throughout the whole time instead of remain motionlessly silent. Regardless, it was not something that I would dare to try.

As we were driving away, I saw two German Shepherd dogs barking at the bottom of a car parked on the U.S. side of the border checkpoint and several border patrollers surrounding the car. The dogs were barking viciously. There was no one in the car or outside being held up. I assumed it was a rehearsal attack and said, “Ought to take a picture of that.” Deeming my action as a violation to border crossing, Estella immediately burst out “Hey, hey hey, [you] cannot take pictures here!” I sensed the high
level of anxiety and concern through her expression that I had never seen in her before, I assured her “Don’t worry. I am not going to, I was just joking.”

Her voice tone kept hovering in my mind for months afterward as it expressed someone being in such a tight situation loaded with anxiety. I could not understand why she needed be so tense especially since she has all the documents proving her legitimacy as an alien on an H1 visa. Is she uncertain about the border patrolling practices? I was indeed informed several times that the outcome of border crossing often is pending on border patrollers’ mood of that day. So I might have transgressed the rule of passing by acting suspicious. If I had taken pictures while crossing the border, I would probably cause trouble or even irritate some officers, I suppose. Nevertheless, Estella had told me she identifies herself as one of the legal investors as well as taxes payers in promoting the El Paso local economy. How is it then that such an identity was not performed and acted out, instead of this timid and terrified role that she donned during our crossing?

During my stay, many had told me that Taiwanese people are treated politely since most came to El Paso to establish factories in the borderland. After crossing the border with Estella, I wondered whether all managers experience this level of stress everyday while returning to El Paso from work? It was then that I experienced how my friends felt silenced regardless of holding a ROC passport or a PRC one. Neither of these passports would bring the recognition, respect, or security they desire.

All my friends were clear about the different treatment one would receive with different passports shown. They also agreed that traveling has become more difficult after the year of 2001. Hence, the task at hand would be to pursue a more powerful status, that is, one of Permanent Residence and eventually of U.S. citizen in securing their everyday
practices such as going home from work. During my stay, most of my friends were in the legal process of applying to become green-card holders as Permanent Residents (PR) or U.S. citizens. Among people I frequently encountered, only few were U.S. citizens who could enjoy full legal rights such as voting or crossing borders without difficulty. Some of my friends were on H1 without other means in applying for green cards.

“You have to be very careful in answering questions”— Non-U.S. Citizen Crossers

Traveling as a B, H, L, or PR

Jen and I would spend some time in the afternoon reviewing the English words with Mandy so that she would perform well when being quizzed by her father in the evening. Mandy’s father, Wen-He was recently approved with an H1, working visa for “professionals” and brought his family here in mid-November. Before then, he was traveling as well as working in and out of the U.S., Mexico, and Taiwan on a B1/2 tourist visa. Wen-He once told his experiences of entering the U.S. with his tourist visa. He said,

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5 H and L visas are non-immigrant visas. Both require the company in the United States to first submit a petition to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) for permission to hire a foreign worker. In several reports on immigration, it is said that “[m]aximum 65,000 H1B non-immigrant visas are issued per year. However, 6,800 out of these are reserved for Chile and Singapore under certain Free Trade Agreements between these countries and the U.S.” (WJT, Nov. 21, 2004). In December 2004, a bill was signed by the U.S. President to raise the 20,000 foreign nationals with Master’s degrees or higher from U.S. institutions of Higher Education. Such a bill was supported by corporations such as Intel and Microsoft as Bill Gates was quoted that “preventing smart people from entering the country by placing a cap on H-1B visas doesn’t make sense” (The Economic Times Online, May, 6, 2005; WJT, Nov. 22, 2004, Dec. 21, 2004). H1 visas are for individuals intended to come into the United States as temporary workers. H4 refers to individuals dependent on an H1 holder such a spouse and children. It is worthy to note that H2B is another visa that allows U.S. employers to hire seasonal non-agricultural foreign workers such as in the construction industry, health care industry, gardening, lumber, restaurants, and the food processing industry (WJT, Dec. 18, 2004). L-1 refers to the “Intracompany transferees” who either own or are employees of a non-U.S. corporation where they have worked for at least one of the prior three years in an executive, managerial, or specialized-knowledge position. The employer must be a U.S. corporation related directly to the foreign company. “The L-1 visa is perhaps the most direct conduit to permanent residency (PR) in the United States. Pursuant to the Immigration Act of 1990, ‘L’ visa holders are exempted from the requirement of having to establish their continued non-immigrant intent, greatly facilitating the transition to an immigrant employment based visa, leading to a ‘green card.’” L-1 visas are available to transfer executives, managers, or employees with specialized knowledge and their families (American Embassy in China, Visas for Work in the United States, September 10, 2005 available at: http://www.usembassy-china.org.cn/visa/hlopq.html).
“The first time the customs in Los Angeles gave me six months. He asked me my purpose of entering the United States. I replied ‘to support the company.’ The next time they gave me three months. The third time, I came in from San Francisco. The person only gave me one month. He asked me about my purpose of visit, I said ‘company meetings as well as sightseeing.’ He asked me for my return ticket, which was open. So he asked me the reason [for the open ticket.] I was thinking to myself ‘Because it will have to depend on your mood!’ {laugh} But of course I didn’t answer him like that. I said ‘It would depend on how long the team needs me here.’ So he gave me only a month. I guess it probably also was because that I have traveled in and out on B1/2 [visa] too often.”

Realizing the real power that the officer holds in determining his length of stay, Wen-He chose to perform resistance in a private and safe space while publicly conforming to the “official script” as anthropologist James Scott (1990) explained. That is, Wen-He knew he would achieve his goal, which was to be allowed entrance to the United States if he answered the border officer’s questions respectfully without showing any dissent. Besides, he was trying to apply for an H1 visa for the second time and could not afford any mistake then.

Even though Wen-He finally received an H1 visa around August/September 2004, his company announced a new policy not to provide documents for H1 people to apply for PR as green card holders. In the early year of 2005, there was a rumor that headquarters were seriously considering closing down the plant where Wen-He works. When I learned about this, I worried for him and others in similar situations since they
finally settled their families in the U.S. after a great amount of traveling between Juárez, El Paso, Taiwan, and even China.

For some Chinese and Taiwanese transnationalists such as Wen-He and Jen who are on the H types of visa, the goal of gaining U.S. citizenship was much too distant. As the company announced its new policy of not offering signatures for workers to apply for green card, some of my afield manager friends’ plan for gaining PR was deterred. I asked people’s thoughts about their future in the U.S. under such company policy. Many expressed that they could only wait and see. Some were considering working in another company since their H1 visa would then be renewed for another six years. Several mentioned that they had participated in the green card lottery every single time and will really have to count on it now. A few even joked about the possibility of becoming political refugees if Mainland China attacks Taiwan. The overall sense was that life is whimsical and that power- or policy-shifts within particular MNCs occur often. One can never predict what will come next. Such a precarious outlook extends to, or perhaps, is stemmed from their experiences within the Informational Technology (IT) industry as Mr. Lee commented more than once. “It is nice that you stay in school, which is stable.

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6 Ethnographers are writers who inscribe before, during, as well as after traveling (M. Pratt, 1986). Early March 2005 after my return from my “fieldwork”, the Chinese government passed an anti-secession bill stating that “We [China] shall step up preparations for possible military struggle and enhance our capabilities to cope with crises, safeguard peace, prevent wars, and win the wars if any.” (The Toledo Blade, Mar. 14, 2005). On a Taiwan-based online newspaper, there was an advertisement in the middle of a report on the import of Chinese military expansion as well as on the anti-secession bill. In navy blue color, the advertisement shows a Statue of Liberty holding up the torch and reads “想在美国工作？点击此处今天就加入官方的美国绿卡抽奖计划 Wanna work in America? Click here and join the American official green card lottery plan today.” Such a luring advertisement made U.S. citizenship look as if it was only a click away instead of the arduous process that really exists as illustrated in Delgado’s (1999) statements about how “[U.S. government] sends an emphatic message to the would-be immigrants in other parts of the world. And they burden those who are already here by making acquisition of US citizenship more difficult for many who wish to do so” (p. 248).
Unlike the IT business, its market fluctuates rapidly. There is no way in knowing the future.”

In the beginning of my stay, I heard about a Taiwan-based MNC, Infodisc Technology planning to close down its plant in El Paso and many Taiwanese managers had turned to selling furniture and cars. Mary later told me she knew a couple who came to the U.S. approximately two years ago and the husband was employed by Infodisc. She said, “Both of their children are Americans, but neither of them. So jobs in IT industry really are unstable.” I was curious about their job situation in Taiwan after returning and later learned that overseas expatriates are on a contract for a certain amount of time. When that contract is up, s/he then needs to negotiate with the company for a new contract. As for the couple Mary knew, the husband would need to look for a new job after returning to Taiwan because his original position was filled when he agreed to the overseas assignment. After the contract was expired, the couple had to return with their American children.

The closing of the plant had a larger impact than only on its Taiwanese staff. On December 30, 2004, *EPT* reported that Infodisc Technology decided to close down Mediaplay Texas, its DVD copier and distributor on the east side after “receiving nearly $1.6 million in tax breaks over a five-year period.” It had previously “laid off 256 full-time workers and 200 temporary employees in December 2003” and “began laying off almost 160 full-time workers” from mid-December 2004 through mid-January 2005 (*EPT*, Dec. 30, 2004, F1). Further, the local economists expressed concerns that the closing of Infodisc would create perils for many people beyond its own employees. The
interconnectedness of people’s economic and social lives was illustrated through the influences one MNC has toward hundreds of families across continents.

People travel as capital flows. When I had dinner with Estella for the first time in late August 2004, we saw/heard a group of Taiwanese workers at the Chinese restaurant. She told me that they are from another Taiwan-based MNC, one of the two large MNCs that recently established plants in Juárez, Mexico. We did not greet them because they were the competitors to whom her company lost a major client. Estella said, “We will have to see how it goes. Maybe it will be our turn next year [after the client tried their product.] Nothing is certain in the business world.” She then lamented “When we were at our apex, we too, had a whole bunch of Taiwanese staff. Each morning, there were several vans leaving from our apartment complex to the plant in Juárez. Alas! Now there are fewer than ten Taiwanese staff left here.” The vicissitudes of life are to be accepted and expected.

In another dinner with Estella after her bi-annual three-week visit at home, she told me about her encountering other Taiwanese managers when she was in the line to pass through L.A. customs. “I heard that they were going to Mexico and the custom officer asked why they were going there [to Mexico]. They looked so young, must be from F company, like the ones we saw last time [in the Chinese buffet]. They were on B1/B2 visa. I heard them say something like coming for technical support and they were so stupid for answering [the question of period of stay with] ‘Three months.’ I would have said a week or two since it is a business trip! {laugh} I saw that they were told to

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7 Estella and her co-workers had come up with codes for each of their major competitors. When encountering other Taiwanese in public occasions such as at a restaurant, they would exchange their guesses “they are with the F company or they must work for A company.” Moreover, due to the small amount of Taiwanese MNCs in El Paso/Juárez area, Estella chose not to stay in touch with her previous co-workers in order to obviate any possibility of being suspected as a spy or leaking company information.
take another route to the office for interviews. So when it was my turn, I was afraid that I would be perceived as one of them. I was asked a lot of questions. I was so mad. Everything is written clearly on my visa and passport. Why did [the custom official] need to ask me again? Couldn’t she read herself? And when she asked me the questions, she did not even look at me at all. She asked me which company I work for. I said ‘PacTide,’ and she asked me what my job is. I said ‘translator’ and she asked what language. I said from Chinese to Spanish, to English, whatever. That was when she looked up and started to maybe think that they probably need people specialized like this in their America.

{laugh} I was mad. I am on H1 and I am a taxpayer as well. What was the matter with these people!

It was commonsense to my friends to avoid arguing with or challenging any custom officials regardless of their legal status in the U.S. A friend who has obtained his green card demonstrated no objections when the custom officers confiscated some guava he picked out from the backyard of his California home while returning to El Paso to work. For a while, the guava event was used to make fun of the U.S. custom practices as well as the second-class status of El Paso in America.

Estella shared a story to illustrate how some border patrol officers may be easier than others to pass through, which ought not be expected as a norm. She once was let go by showing her TX driver’s license instead of her passport while returning from Juárez to El Paso. She decided to try again the next day with another officer who questioned, “Are you a citizen?” Estella said “I immediately took out my passport right at the moment when I heard that question. He then told me ‘Only citizens can act like that [cross the border with a driver’s license].’ I did not want to challenge him by saying ‘Well, I did
cross yesterday with this [driver’s license], you know?" [I worried that] what if he told me to go in the immigration office! {laugh}"

I then inquired about her feelings toward the statement that “Only citizens can act like this?”

“Yes, since being a foreigner here… hmmm… anyway, I am legal, so I don’t need to worry. However, in the past when I was working in another company, I was not legal. We did not hold a working visa, but a B1/B2, which means you are not supposed to stay in America for such a long time. Not to mention you are [even] working [in America]. That is not allowed. I lived here [in El Paso], so that was illegal. I did not even have insurance during that time.”

“You did not have insurance then?”

“Right, so that means if you are sick in America, well, because going to a doctor without insurance in America costs a lot. I mean it is so expensive to even have a shot. Luckily, I was still young at that time, so I did not have any serious illnesses. I was sick once in awhile, but I was fine to just take some medicine [I had] and naps, I would be fine the next day. However, to be frank, [such a practice] is really not too nice for the employees in the long run. I heard that even until now, the employees in that company still do not have H1 visas. It really is a pitiful situation.”

“I thought some people from that company obtained their green cards successfully, how did they manage to do so? There is a couple I’m thinking about who obtained their status.” I asked to understand why there were exceptions.
“I know whom you are thinking about. They had their green card prior to their employment because they had immediate family members as U.S. citizens. But for those who just came out of Taiwan, they do not have green cards.”

I asked, “So if that person [on B1/2 visa] is stopped at the check point, then s/he is stuck in Mexico right? Like what happened to Tan [a Mainland Chinese manager who worked with Estella and finally decided to return to China after being kept in Mexico several times]?”

“That’s right.”

“So, how does it work? I mean once this person is ‘caught,’ then the next time when s/he goes to apply for visa, isn’t the record going to show?”

“Right.”

“So s/he can never come into the U.S. with such a record?”

“If you are caught by an official, s/he has the right to detain you. S/he also has the right to deport you back.”

“Doesn’t the company have any responsibility in this? Because thinking logically, the company ought to handle this situation right?”

“Exactly. The company really should be accountable for that. But it is your individual behavior coming in [the U.S.] with a B1/B2. This is the tricky part. So you have to be very careful in answering the officer while crossing the border. I worked for more than one year in that company. We all were like that, everyday, going back and forth [the border] to work. I think there were some border officers who knew about it because they saw us everyday, they probably just did not care. But after the 9/11, they cared very much about it. They ask more detailed questions. What’s more is that some
people with B1/B2, the officer would ask ‘Where do you live? In El Paso?’ Some people even would say ‘You are not allowed to live in the U.S. with B1/B2.’”

“Young, how do you respond to a statement like that?”

“Exactly! So you could not reply anything because it is very obvious that [the officer] meant that you are illegally living in the U.S. So you cannot talk with them anymore under such a situation. You probably need to go into the immigration office with him/her, which means that you may not come in and out of the border customs for a while.”

“So what would the company do with such situation since it means this person cannot go to work in Juárez or return to the apartment in El Paso, what would the company do?”

“The company would not care about your situation. This is the policy of my previous company at least. … Well, the more inconvenient part for you is that maybe you stay in El Paso for several days to hide from the trouble until the situation has loosened up after two or three days before crossing again. That was the only way.”

“Besides, it must be nerve-wracking because you do not know what the border officers would ask or do?”

“Yes. Yes. So everyday when I crossed the border, I was thinking ‘I wonder if they would let me through.’ That truly was not a good feeling. To be honest, I was too young to understand. Now that I think back, I feel it was quite horrifying. I think the major reason is still the 9/11. After that, [crossing borders daily on a B1/B2 visa] has become tougher. There is no way for you to know which day you would be invited in [the
immigration office] to sit and it would be a long sit. So it is impossible to be dishonest now.”

Both Estella and Wen-He had experienced working with high risks in the U.S. on tourist visas. After years of traveling across borders between nations (i.e., Taiwan, U.S., Mexico) as well as legal status (i.e., B1/B2, H1), both felt fortunate for being in the space where they are today. By being attentive as well as compliant to border patrols’ questions and examinations, many of my friends slowly gain more space to hopefully assert their voice. For many, obtaining the U.S. citizenship represents the ultimate place they strive to travel to.

**Negotiating Nationalities**

Matters occupying our minds often occur in our daily conversations. Throughout my interactions with Chinese and Taiwanese people in El Paso, status applications were one of the frequently discussed topics. After being in the U.S. for more than a decade since 1992, Mama Gau and James finally were obtaining the citizenship for themselves and their son and daughter in November 2004. They had a horrifying experience while applying for their green cards. Their previous sponsoring company closed down while their cases were sitting somewhere to be approved for almost two years. Mama Gau often told this story to many new comers in attesting to God’s love. She shared how they succeeded in the second trial with faith through constant praying and total dependence on God who provided them with a more responsible lawyer.

She told me that “Afterwards we decided to start with a new case using my name instead of my husband’s as the primary applicant, for his case was impossible to continue. It only took three months for us to receive the L1 visa and we obtained green cards within
six months. We were extremely worried about being questioned extra thoroughly by the Immigration officers because of our previous application. To my surprise, it went really smoothly. I found a U.S. citizen from Hong Kong as my interpreter because my husband could not speak for me. It turned out nothing was required of translation. The questions were like ‘Is this your name? Is this your address? Is this your social security number?’ So all my questions were the ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ ones. {laugh} So when that stamp was pressed down, {her hand hit the table} the moment of the motion of stamping, the worries and anxiety for the past two years in which I lived in constant fear and pressure of status being blacken, was all lifted at once. Then the officer questioned my daughter, and my son. My husband was questioned last as well as the longest because we combined two cases together. Once we all came out of the INS building, we formed a circle right at the door and praised the Lord saying ‘Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!’ It is impossible to feel that kind of joy unless you actually endure the long and agonizing process full of uncertainty and fear. It was 1996 when we were blessed with our green cards and our business started to grow rapidly.”

Because of her experiences, Mama Gau decided to assist new immigrants with information about the procedure, the lawyer, or exam questions. She said “We [as newcomers] are unaware of much information in this area [of El Paso]. For example, for those who are going to obtain U.S. citizenship, there are classes offered on Naturalizing. We did not know about it at all. Awhile back, a brother from church did not pass [the exam for citizenship application] for the first time. I happened to chat with a client who is a Lao-Mo. I asked how long s/he has been in America. S/he said ‘Oh, more than twenty years and I even went to a class two years ago when I was applying for naturalization.’ I
didn’t know there are classes like this. So I asked around and found out the information. It turned out that the library close by on 7th Street offered naturalizing classes. See, now you know I am really nosey. {laugh} Immediately, I called up that brother to tell him about it.”

I asked her about the classes, she told me that it was on every Saturday for two hours. “It was quite nice. I felt so great each time after listening to all the stories about you know, how the Pilgrims came to America on the Mayflower to fight for religious freedom, and how they beat the British, how many States there are on a flag and what the meanings of those stripes are, I mean, it was taught in a systematic manner. How satisfying to learn all that in class. {laugh}” Mama Gau not only viewed these classes as an assistance to her process of applying for citizenship. The class knowledge is transmitted in an effectively manner which fulfills her desire to always learn more.

Mama Gau’s family had their interview for the U.S. citizenship in October 2004. Three days later, I went to her store. She took out a piece of paper upon seeing me and said “Meimei, I tell you, remember that I was having my interview right”? I said “Yeah, how did it go?” while reading the piece of paper which says she will be informed about the approval of her application in the future. She started to narrate the situation.

“Well, I am half passed… I had this immigration officer, so serious and cold. It was a Mexican person in his early twenties and was born and grew up here. He did not say much at all and was very rigid. He asked me some questions though those were really easy ones. I answered those questions.” She showed me all the sample questions divided into different sections including reading and writing. There were more than one hundred questions and each had Chinese translations next to it. This translated copy was later
made available for others needed to make duplicates. She continued “I did not sleep for two nights prior to the exam. The first night, our store alarm went off at one a.m. and then again at four in the morning. I was uneasy about it and told my husband that we ought to take a drive to check it out. It was past five a.m. after we came back and then I had to get up around six for work and to get my son ready for school. The second night, the night before our interview, I worried about our interview being scheduled at eight a.m. and it is not convenient for [James] to move because of his legs. So I got a room in the hotel close to the Immigration Office. See how people cannot depend on our own small cleverness. {laughed} The hotel is right by I-10 and the traffic kept me up for the whole night. It was around four a.m. and I was still awake. So I put the pillows against my ears trying to fall asleep and I started to panic because the morning call was going to be at six. I was worried about not being able to have a clear mind for the interview. Prior to this, I was so nervous and worried about the officer being tough on my husband. {whispered} You know about his situation, I was afraid that the American government would not want a handicapped person to depend on their welfare in the future even though his English is really good. So I was praying to God for him. When he came down with that smile, I knew he passed.”

Mama Gau continued, “After I went there, it was really scary. It was just me and [the immigration officer]. He would point at a question and ask me to read it or to write. He asked me some simple questions such as ‘Is this your address? Is this information correct? Where do you work at?’ [Those were] really simple questions and then he asked me to write ‘I want to go to work.’ I did not even think before writing it out. It really was God that was answering the question. He was typing on the computer when I was taking
the exam. It was just the two of us and the room was really quiet. I was really scared. He
did not say anything, not even look at me when the exam was done. He stood up after I
was done. So I followed what he did and stood up as well. I did not even know it was
over. He talked *really, really* fast and he mumbled a lot. I sort of thought that the
interview was over, but since he said nothing besides handing this paper to me. I had to
ask if I’ll receive the notice by mail. He then said ‘Yes.’ I didn’t ask too much since I was
so shocked by the experience. What does it mean that I’ll be notified later? Why is it like
this? My daughter said that he was making it difficult for me. This person, a Mexican
grew up here, was really cold. Unlike last time when I had the interview for the green
card, it was a white female who was really polite. She joked around with [my son] who
was then a first grader and asked him if he was married and he was mad. {laugh} Then
she told us that she knew we were scared and she wanted us to relax. It was a really good
experience. People here are pretty ignorant, I mean lacking of common sense. There was
a form that stated that I am from R.O.C. and he asked me ‘Where are you from?’ I said
‘Taiwan.’ So he crossed off R.O.C. and wrote down Taiwan. I said, ‘*R.O.C. is Taiwan.*’
Didn’t they learn it at school? *Republic of China is Taiwan.*”

As I was listening, I felt the frustration and anxiety that Mama Gau went through
since it has been more than a decade after their arrival to the United States in order to get
to this location. She was convinced that the situation was made especially difficult for her
because of the examiner. By comparing to her pervious interview, ethnicity was
attributed to these two different experiences. This is one of the few statements counter to
the prevalent perceptions of discriminatory acts performed only by white-skinned
individuals. Such an example points to the contradictions existing in any claims based solely on essentialism.

I comforted her by saying that “It would turn out fine since he did not deny you or raise many questions. Maybe they just need to have a couple of things checked out and will let you know soon.” Mama Gau then reminded me again to start working on my status if I have spare money. She said “I read WJT and it says that it will become more and more difficult for foreigners to apply for citizenship since they will have the unified standards starting from 2006.” I asked why the standardized system would make it harder. She told me that “Now it really depends on the officers, they do have 100 sample questions to follow, but it is up to the officer to pick which ones. But if it is standardized, it will be more difficult.” I am not sure what her concerns are about the standardized system. Before I could ask for clarification, she started to tell me how her husband prolonged their process of application by not working on the paperwork sooner. I wonder how her immigration officer decided which questions to ask her that day.

At this moment, Ms. Liang came out from the office and joined our conversation. She said “Our experience was really horrifying as well when my husband and I applied for our green cards. We sent off all the documents and they did not receive it. So later we received a letter saying that they did not receive the required documents and the deadline has passed since it was after forty-five days. So our case was closed. We were scared to death. {high pitch and quietly screaming} It was going to take so much work to reapply since it would involve having the school putting out an advertisement in the newspaper announcing they were hiring and then they had to arrange interviews as well as hotel fees. We were thinking about paying for all of that ourselves but then we still needed to ask the
school to put on the show. So my husband went to Human Resource and met this
great person. So this person in HR, a woman, she called the INS and directly asked
for the supervisor. She made so many phone calls and left numerous messages. Finally
that manager called back. You have to talk to the supervisor because if you just make
phone calls to INS, you can only get the secretary whom of course would only take
messages and tell you that the supervisor is really busy and will call you back. Of course,
they will never call you back. The HR woman, she is really good at having phone
conversations with the supervisor since my husband saw her laughing while she was on
the phone. I mean, really, thanks to her, because it is impossible for us to make phone
calls by ourselves and have the result like that since we would have been so nervous and
then people wouldn’t understand our English. When they do not understand what we are
saying, of course they would be impatient and then we would be more nervous about our
English, which makes it worse.” Mama Gau then said “Well, everyone experienced a lot
of anxiety when applying for green card and citizenship. There are so many stories.
Meimei, you can write a whole book about it. {laugh}” I smiled and replied “Yeah, I am
starting to realize that.” Meanwhile, I was impressed by the patience and courage my
friends demonstrated in their traveling to the space of “being an American.”

In applying for U.S. citizenship, my friends had encountered stress, resentment,
uncertainty, as well as surprises in their mundane routines of working and living in El
Paso/Juárez. Obtaining it requires psychological as well as financial strain over a long
period of time in that many turn to religions in seeking strength or comfort. Many would
share learned information such as reliable lawyers, questions and answers to prepare for
the exams/interviews, and the procedure of the application to learn about other’s mistakes as well as successful techniques in their own acquiring new legal status.

After about a month in late November, Mama Gau phoned me to tell me she finally received the notice of attending the 10th naturalization ceremony in December. I congratulated her immediately for knowing her anxiety and worries over this matter. I went to visit them on December 13th, three days after their swearing-in ceremony. When I entered the store, I asked her “How was it?” Mama Gau replied, “It was okay. We went there around 9 a.m. and there were so many people. More than 400 people were sworn in this time, the newspapers even reported it.”

“Yes, I read about it. Did it take long?”

“Yeah, we got in line with all the people, but then they saw Uncle James’ condition, so they told us not to wait in line. We just went ahead to the front. People here

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8 There were several articles about U.S. Citizenship that appeared in *EPT* during December 2004. Starting on the 6th, there was a story on the “31,000 so-called green card soldiers from thirty countries. … Many of them are fighting—and dying—in Iraq under the flag of a country in which they can’t vote. … Since the beginning of the war, more than 12,000 servicemembers [sic] have become U.S. citizens in expedited ceremonies, including 161 in El Paso. Nearly 20,000 have applied for naturalization since 2002” (*EPT*, Dec. 6, 2004, A1). In another article on the same front page, it says that “immigrants make up between 3 percent and 4 percent of all active-duty military personnel. [In 2002] President Bush signed an executive order allowing those who enlisted in the military after September 11, 2001, to immediately become eligible for citizenship. Congress sweetened the offer for immigrant servicemembers [sic] when it passed a bill waiving the $320 application fee and permitting naturalization ceremonies at military bases, embassies, and consulates abroad [in 2003].” (*EPT*, Dec. 6, 2004, A1). On December 17th, 127 were naturalized before being deployed to Iraq, and the article describes that, “During the ceremony, the soldiers sang a Samoan hymn, listened to a Border Patrol officer sing the national anthem a capella [sic.], heard speeches from U.S. immigration officials and the Fort Bliss commander, and watched a videotaped message of President Bush congratulating them (Dec. 18, 2004, 2A). The ceremony Mama Gau’s family attended was reported on the 11th newspaper where it reports, “470 take final citizenship step. … Annually more than 450,000 immigrants nationwide, including more than 8,000 military service members, become U.S. citizens, according to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.” The oldest to naturalize on this day was at the age of 85. In addition, the guest speaker gave “special recognition to eight of the new citizens who are members of the U.S. military” during the December 11th ceremony. Next to the article, readers are informed that a “link to more information about becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen” could be found at elpasotimes.com (Dec. 11, 2004, 3B).
are very nice, they saw that it was not convenient for him to walk around, so they helped
us.”

“What was the line for?”

“Oh, you need to turn in your green card and then they would give you the
naturalization certificate. It was a pretty rough day for him because he walked for such a
long distance. We waited for a long time, until noon I think before the whole thing
started.”

“So now you’re happy, after naturalizing?” I asked jokingly.

“How can it be so! We are Chinese, it does not matter whether we are naturalized
[into the U.S.] or not. It is not that we had to become Americans. {laugh} It is only that
this applying for the citizenship is now officially over after eight years, so it is no longer
lingering around us. Oh, let me show you, see there is a flier over there?”

I took it out from the stack next to the cash register. It is a pamphlet in which
there was printed the Pledge of Allegiance, oath of allegiance, and a list of names
followed by nationalities.

Mama Gau said “See, I am very glad that they have Taiwan separated from the
People’s Republic of China.”

“What do you mean? They changed it right there before you swore in?”

“Oh, when we had the final interview last time. I told him that I am from Taiwan,
not the People’s Republic of China, and he changed it right there. I am happy that they
didn’t put us together. There were people from so many different nations, like thirty-two
of them, and more than four hundreds people were there. They called your nationality and
then you stood up. When they called Mexico, a whole bunch of people stood up, {laugh}
so many people went to observe.”

I told Mama Gau that I would have gone to take pictures for them had I known it
was an open event. She said “Oh well, it is not a big deal anyway. We just went ahead
and got it over with.”

Gaining the U.S. citizenship seemed to be the ultimate goal for many of my
friends in El Paso even though there might be a sense of void in their choice of leaving
home. As Ms. Liang shared the hardships she experienced after coming to the U.S., she
lamented “sometimes I would think that had I stayed [in Shanghai], I would have been
doing really well now. I mean, when I was in my country, I really believed that nothing is
impossible. But after I came to America, I felt that everything is impossible. Like before
[at home], if something happened, I knew this person who knew that person, or
somebody’s gotta know someone to help. So I was like a fish in the water. I felt I was
elastic. But after staying here and getting used to the simple life here, I feel as a person, I
am more rigid. Plus, we are not Americans after all. So the lack of [U.S.] citizenship still
creates a lot of invisible pressure. If we were in our own country, how could citizenship
be an issue of concern, right? {laugh}”

Even though life in the U.S. does not feel as convenient in some respects as it was
at home, it was clear that obtaining the U.S. citizenship in addition to one’s original
national citizenship would enhance the flexibility of one’s mobility and security in
traveling across borders. The status of being a U.S. national moves my transnational
friends from one legal status to another that grants a broader social space and legitimacy.
When Mama Gau mentioned to Ms. Liang that she could apply for the Taiwanese
residency after obtaining her U.S. citizenship, Ms. Liang answered, “Why would I need a Taiwanese one? I would travel wherever [and cross any border] I would like to after having a U.S. passport.” The status of being a U.S. citizen was deemed as owning the utmost degree of freedom without any constraint. That is, the passport that speaks of the legal authority and walks to the unbounded lands as illustrated in James’ coaching of Mama Gau while crossing the El Paso-Juárez border, “just tell [the border patrol officer] that ‘I am a U.S. citizen!’”

However, gaining the U.S. citizenship does not mean one’s original nationality is given up, unless one’s nation does not allow its citizens to own more than one citizenship, such as China’s current policy. Thus, many Taiwanese transnationalists retain their Taiwanese passport so to enjoy their national benefits such as healthcare.

**Conclusion: Becoming More Legitimate Border Crossers/Dwellers**

Different borders pose different standards for passing as well as desires to be passed according to the spatial order in the global geopolitical relationships. Different travelers hold different capital in crossing and therefore acquire preparation, experiences and knowledge. My Chinese and Taiwanese friends in El Paso with different legal statuses encountered various situations of tension and risk while crossing borders between Taiwan and the U.S. as well as between Mexico and the U.S. Their experiences illustrate the complexity of border crossing, in that one’s status such as visa classification (i.e., B1/B2, H1/H4, L1/L2, PR), as well as one’s nationality (i.e., Mainland China, Taiwan, U.S.A.) influences the treatment received and behavior enacted. Nevertheless, each crosser endures various degrees of anxiety.
Besides literal border crossing, my friends engaged in another traveling activity in their crossing, guarding, and upgrading status. Estella shared her somewhat secure feeling with her current legal status as opposed to those days when she traveled as an illegal crosser working as a Taiwanese national in El Paso/Juárez. The inexperienced Taiwanese managers traveling and working in between Taiwan, U.S., and Mexico on B1/B2 visas and the H1 professionals engaged in different question and answer techniques while interacting with the border patroller. The H1 professionals such as Wen-He with a slim chance of receiving a green card, live and work with uncertainty and his concerns differ from some of his senior co-workers on L1 visas. For Jen, as an H4 dependent from Mainland China whose husband is a Taiwanese H1 holder put her in a different position in terms of her mobility in comparing to Ms. Liang from Shanghai with a green card. The ex-employees at Infodisk Technology in El Paso who returned to Taiwan with two children who are American citizens experience yet another kind of anxiety, privileges and complexities in traveling between borders.

Regardless of what legal status the border crossers hold, U.S. citizenship was deemed as their most credible status in crossing and living on the borderland. My friends devote their money, energy, and time in achieving the ultimate goal. The hierarchical order of nationalities was constructed through the everyday living as subjugated suspects in the eyes of border policy, immigration laws, local public perceptions, and global geopolitical realpolitik arrangement. Each of these agents pursues what is perceived as the most elastic position with various capitals to negotiate with border policies through maneuvering and engaging in various tactics. Besides striving for the most authoritative
legal identity in U.S., many of my friends simultaneously participate in activities to foster cultural identities in better adjusting to the foreseen global configuration.

With tactics and knowledge gained through the community members’ traveling across nation-state borders as well as legal status boundaries, I now turn to demonstrate that the Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists strategically hybridize their cultural identities in serving particular ends during quotidian communicative practices. Through interpretations of conversations and celebrative events I participated in, I intend to depict the ways and logics my friends cultivate their cultural identities. More specifically, I describe how my friends accomplish their culturing process through partaking in activities selectively when residing on the El Paso-Juárez border. These narratives attempt to further understand travel-related experiences, practices, and knowledge.
CHAPTER FIVE: CULTURING HYBRIDITY IN THE DWELLING

“Are We Americans Yet?”

One beautiful December afternoon, I went with Jen and her girls to a supermarket. Jen had a CD playing as she drove. Dolly Parton’s rendition of “God bless the U.S.A.” was playing so loudly that it shook the car.

Jen turned to me and said

“Mandy的爸爸說最重要的一首歌在這張CD裏” (Mandy’s father told us that the most important song for us to learn is on this CD.)

Mandy piped in and said

“是美國國歌,我知道怎麼唱.” (It’s the American National Anthem! I know how to sing it.)


“我在學校學的. 等阿媽來, 阿媽也要學!” (I learned that at school. When Grandma comes, she’ll have to learn it too.)

Speaking over her daughter, Jen asked me if the National Anthem was the one that was playing. I told her it wasn’t.

While the lyrics of “God bless the U.S.A.” continued, Mandy started to sing along, “God… U.S.A….” While letting the song continue, Jen mentioned that “Maybe it’s the next one…”

Mandy began to hum the song she learned in school (American the beautiful which she understandably believed was the National Anthem) using the few words she could remember.

“America America, la la… hum hum hum… sea.” She paused…

… and she said,

“所以我們現在就算是美國人了是吧?” (So… we are Americans now, aren’t we?)

We all quit talking, unable to explain, allowing the thundering stereo to fill the car, and probably a large radius outside of the car, with Dolly’s melody.

At that moment, I could not make sense of what happened in those confusing and chaotic interactions except I knew that even though nothing said or done showed certainty, some ideas were so bluntly certain. I pondered on the possibilities of what being “American” meant to Mandy, how she decided upon her status, and what criteria did she feel she had striven to meet? Was it the combination of being physically on U.S. land, singing its national anthem, and speaking English? Her desire to be an American revealed itself as she struggled through the song stressing the words USA and America. I was concerned how she would feel or (re)act if she found out that she is not an American yet.

Mandy has a Taiwanese passport that claims her as a citizen of the Republic of China (ROC). At age 5, she knew already the rhetorical strategy of grouping citizenships as a genus, and then to further particularize the differences into categories. How did the hierarchical spatial order discussed in Chapter three become so deeply embedded in the culture of the peoples I interacted with and how does it continue to constitute/reconstitute itself and be performed, even by this 5 year old? What does it mean to be an American in this community and what does it mean to not be one? Moreover, how does one become an American besides acquiring legal status? What are some of the ways that my friends had (per)formed or learned to (per)form in balancing and negotiating being Chinese, Taiwanese and American at the land of El Paso/Juárez?
Becoming an Interface, A Point of Articulation

I had heard stories about how some Taiwanese multinational companies assigned their expatriate managers to work and live in Juárez in order to avoid the trouble of applying for U.S. working visas for them. I was told that some would settle their family members in El Paso and pay visits whenever they could. As a graduate student who follows a schedule and executes plans, I was surprised to learn how people would be willing to engage in such a practice replete with uncertainty and anxiety. It seemed to bring on a great deal of agony.

My assumption about their life as afflicted was challenged after Estella told me that the position at the U.S.-Mexico border is highly competitive even without a U.S. working visa. Some MNCs provide high salary at the same time asking for much demand such as long working hours and strict deadlines. One Taiwanese company known for such a practice is famous for working its employees so hard that their utmost energy is exhausted. This type of working ethic was often described by my friends as “the militant style of management.” Their high pay even attracted some of “our Mexican managers to work for them,” Estella told me. She explained how many Taiwanese employees could endure such hardship in a foreign country for a couple of years in order to either buy an apartment or pay the mortgage in Taiwan. Some came to seek an opportunity to stay in America and would return if nothing works out.

Wen-He informed me how the experience of working in the American area would better one’s resume, therefore one’s competitiveness. Further, such an opportunity also improves one’s language ability to speak better English since it is the main language
being communicated in many MNCs. Again, it increases one’s chance of winning “the competition” in the long term. He continued his reasoning.

That is why I want my children to learn the language and culture here. I think in the future, they will still be working in Asia, but they’ll be familiar with not only these languages, but also these cultures. So they can be the *interface* [italic added] between the East and West. I mean, people in China may speak English, but they do not know the cultural differences, and my children will know because they acquired these cultures while growing up. So they will have something that others don’t have. I don’t expect them to support me when I’m old {laugh}. [That is] impossible, but I want them to be successful.

The term *interface* is often used in Wen-He’s field of expertise, which is computer science. It is defined as “the point of interaction or communication between a computer and another entity” in *American Heritage Dictionary* (1993, p. 437). *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (1990) defines it as

> a surface forming a *common boundary* [italics added] of two bodies, spaces, or phases; the place at which independent systems meet and act on or communicate with each other; an area in which diverse things interact; the means by which interaction or communication is effected at an interface. (p. 631)

Hence, an interface exists in the fluid space in which various systems and entities come into contact under different situations.
This idea of cultivating a person into an interface that bridges and communicates differences seems to resonate with the concept of “cultural hybrid” as the “culture’s-in-between” (Bhabha, 1994, 1996). Individuals as interface, or cultural hybrid serve as the fluid space with possibilities for forming multiple and subversive identities. Wen-He’s view of raising his children to become the fluid space and connect different cultural knowledges reminds me about how Mary Pratt (1991, 1992) argued that the “contact zone” occurs when people came to interact with others of various backgrounds. Within such an interactive space, there exists intermixing as well as conflicts. As Hall (1992, 1996a, 1996b) suggested, we need to understand hybrid identities as the process of constant and strategic (dis)articulating various positionings as one is always becoming. The seemingly unified identity is not the connection between two different elements. Rather, it is the continuous strategic linking with and separating from certain ideologies and practices under particular social forces. Wen-He’s strong belief of cultivating in his children the capabilities to perform as an interface for the “West” and “East/China” seems to illustrate Hall’s (1996a, 1996b) theory of articulation. However, it is the various processes of these (dis)articulations that are at the heart of my inquiry.

Wen-He believes having their daughters raised in the U.S. will equip them with dispositions to bridge two cultural entities—West and East/China. Setting aside the troubling view toward the “West vs. East” as two holistic and intact cultural units, his anticipation illustrates how cultivating multiple cultural and linguistic knowledge would greatly facilitate his daughters’ future positionings in connecting and negotiating between groups with different powers at play. Such cultivation was pronounced in the questions Wen-He asked his five-year-old almost every evening. “How would you spell ‘fork’?”
“What is the English word for 棍麵棍 (rolling pin)?” “Did you say hi and introduce
yourself to people at school?” or “Did you make any new friends at school today?” His
daughters are expected to master English words and their cultural meanings in order to
comfortably interact with the local peoples.

Such capability as Wen-He stated could only be acquired through lived
experiences in becoming multilingual and multicultural performers. On several occasions
I was even told that being bilingual in Mandarin and English is not enough anymore. As
another father told me, his youngest daughter will start to learn Spanish as an extra-
curricular activity so that she would grow up “naturally” with all languages and cultures.
He indicated that being able to learn both Spanish and English is one of the few benefits
of living in El Paso for Chinese because of its small Chinese population. Mr. Lee
informed me that the Taiwanese Chamber of Commerce has rough statistics suggesting
that there is less than 0.5 % of Chinese-overseas in El Paso (i.e., 1000+ vs. 600,000+).\(^1\)
The small amount of Chinese was perceived as an advantage in culturing one’s future
generation in learning both English and Spanish, which was deemed as increasingly
important in the U.S. as some of the community members mentioned. Being in the
borderland of Mexico and the U.S. without many Chinese-speaking children provides an
excellent environment for such cultivation. Sometimes pressure works miracle.

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\(^1\) According to the County of El Paso, TX Census 1990 population, Asian non-Hispanic was 0.98\% (5820
out of 591610) and the number of Chinese was 879 (Department of planning research and development,
July, 1992). In 2000, the Asian persons self-claimed are 1.0\% (Texas Quick Facts—El Paso Country Quick
Facts from the US Census Bureau at http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/48141.html acquired on
September 11, 2005). In El Paso County however, since Hispanics may include all races, it is difficult to
determine who is “Chinese” and who is not, even for the surveyee. As one of my interviewees claimed “My
father is Chinese and my mother is Mexican. So I am Hispanic, I guess.” This again points to the ambiguity
and contradiction in categories such as race and ethnicity.
Culturing Identities

While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extends what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for. (Pratt, 1991, p. 6)

Hybridity is almost a good idea, but not quite. (cited in Kraidy, 2005, p. vi)

As I continued to interact with friends and acquaintances in El Paso, I came to learn how various new practices and cultural knowledge were acquired in their daily activities and engagements. In other words, the newly learned cultural information was in the processes of integration and hybridization with values my friends were accustomed to prior to their relocation to the United States. Keeping in mind with Hall’s (1996a, 1996b) notion of (dis)articulating and positioning oneself in relation to various social forces, ideologies and groups, I devote the following discussion to illustrating specifically how certain practices were selected to be familiarized in the process of cultivating oneself into in-between cultural being—an interface. By “familiarize” I refer to gaining knowledge and repeatedly (per)forming religious rituals, parental teachings, holiday celebrations, and multiple languages. I engage in the concept of “cultural hybridity” popularized by postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha who suggested that cultural hybridity may be an interstitial subversive power beyond the often fixated hierarchical identifications such as the Master and his slaves. He wrote “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a differences that is almost the same, but not quite” (italics original, p. 86). Thus, cultural hybridity may be understood, under the premise that no culture is pure or intact to be hybridized or polluted, as indeterment and strategic mimicry with “an ironic compromise” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86) in which cultural agents
driven by various social forces disavowing or associating themselves with particular cultural practices and knowledge as mimic subjects.

While cultural hybridization could be perceived as a subversive tactic to the authority in its “almost the same but not quite” voice (Bhabah, 1994, p.86), it is also imperative to realize the risk of its complicity in perpetuating the hegemonic and imperial capitalistic discourses by some national bourgeoisies whose positions are “imbibed from metropolitan culture” (Ahmad, 1995, p. 3; Kraidy, 2002, 2005). Thus, cultural hybridity may not serve as a force of resistance but as one’s symbolic capitals to participate in the dominant ideology.

My goal is to illustrate various strategies of cultivating hybrid identities performed by the Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists in El Paso and some of the potential impact. My goal is not one that categorizes whether their hybrid identities create resistance as the oppressed or facilitate the dominant force as the oppressor. In reality, these practices may serve both purposes depending on the circumstances. Kraidy (2005) stated that hybridity is “always already permeated with power,” and it is the “context as a constitutive and constituting force” in articulating particular cultural practices and subjects at specific conjunctures (p. 156). From my interactions, I noticed that the Christian church serves as a significant milieu in which many of my friends were fostering a new sense of who they are (not) in the El Paso/Juárez border zone.

*Developing Religious Identities while Gaining Cultural Knowledge: “One ought to start with church”*

In our first interview, Mama Gau and I discussed the kinds of advice she would give to other newcomers to El Paso.
“I think for someone who just arrived here, I feel that one has to contact, because this place is quite eccentric to a newcomer, especially in terms of the language since Spanish is their primary language [in El Paso]. I feel that one needs to find a church and then uses it as a starting point to establish interpersonal connections and then uses these connections to solve those of our, for example, unfamiliarity with the place as new arrivals, and to inquire about how to handle many matters. [One] can start from the church. That’s my suggestion. Because church is a place with a lot of information, starting from the church is a good idea.”

“It seems that your circle is mostly in the church too, right?”

“That’s correct. When I first came, I did not know anybody. I did not see even half a Chinese in approximately six months. I mean someone with the same face [as me]. None! Because we were Buddhists in Taiwan, it never occurred to us to start [to establish interpersonal connections] from the church. Nope, we did not have any idea about that. It was because [the principal of the] elementary school my daughter went to sent [Chinese] people in the church to visit us. That was when we realized that ‘Oh! There are Chinese here after all,’ since we saw none. So then we learned that there are Chinese people who kept visiting us. We then started to desire for this religion. But because, you know, especially me, when I was in Taiwan, I was a converted Buddhist. I had already walked the path of practicing Buddhism for many years so it was a huge struggle for me to change my religious belief. [Since then] I have come to church for quite a long time since walking on this journey is truly God’s blessing. In that, I mean you would encounter many obstacles after you came here [to the U.S.]. First is the difficulty with applying for [PR] status. Acquiring the status is the most difficult one to solve. It was truly with God’s
help in leading us to pass one checkpoint after another. So I feel that, especially for us Chinese who come to this unfamiliar place, one ought to start with the church.”

Like Mama Gao shared, the longer I stayed in El Paso, the more I saw the crucial role of the Chinese church groups in facilitating newcomers’ adjustment to the new environment. Church became a space signifying comfort, safety, and hope. I was interested in learning whether there were other support groups for Chinese-ethnic newcomers from China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan.

During mid-October, Mr. Chou invited me to visit the Chi-Ai Chinese Language School organized by a few overseas Chinese originally from Taiwan. The classes are held every Sunday morning when the Chinese church has Sunday worship. During my visit, I had a brief conversation with a Taiwanese manager I knew as he was waiting for his children. He shared that there is not really a Chinese group that organizes people and calls up people to gather together with the exception that the Chinese church maybe one. However, he explained, not everybody is religious much less to say that all would go to the Chinese church since many probably attend the American churches after being in the U.S. for many years. In the end, there are few social events for overseas Chinese in El Paso. Our brief conversation inspired me to reflect on my own activities in El Paso. Most of my interlocutors either attend the Chinese church or I met them through the Chinese churchgoers.

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2 I was given a copy of the 2004-2005 & 2005-2006 syllabus during my one-time visit. As a non-profit organization and educational program, its main purpose is to “help children of Chinese descent to better understand their heritage and appreciate their culture [and] to provide people of non-Chinese background with the opportunity to study the Chinese language and foster a deeper understanding of the Chinese culture.” As described in its syllabus, the contents taught are based on the “Chinese pronunciation characters (i.e., Zhu-In-Fu-Hau) as a center and introduce related Chinese traditional characters, objects, holidays, traditions and cultures.” Most of the attendees as well as teachers may come from Taiwan. Some of the participants are partners or friends from Mexico, Japan, or the United States.
In a beautiful November evening, I was invited to join Mr. Lee and his family for a dinner at a Texas-style steakhouse. Because of his busy schedule, I seized this opportunity to have a second interview with him about his interactions with other Taiwanese (im)migrants in El Paso/Juárez before leaving for dinner. During our one-hour conversation, Mr. Lee stressed the importance of the Chinese church in El Paso.

**Mr. Lee:** Most Taiwanese business people in El Paso arrived within these past several years. There are only a few exceptions such as the president and vice-president of the Taiwanese Chamber of Commerce (TCC) who came here more than two decades ago.

**Me:** It is a non-governmental agency, right?

**Mr. Lee:** Yes. It is purely for [building] relationships. I don’t think it is registered. Everybody just started to… Well, it is that president Lo is more enthusiastic, so he is the president. However, there is no by-laws or things like that. It is only that during Chinese New Year, they would organize the celebration dinner party, something like that.

**Me:** So its main purpose is to socialize?

**Mr. Lee:** Yes. There are not many functions except for purely socializing and making connections.

**Me:** How many Taiwanese companies are here? Four or five?

**Mr. Lee:** Hmmm… There should be within ten including both large and small ones.

**Me:** Well, since there aren’t that many Taiwanese companies either here, are you able to interact with many other Taiwanese in this area?

**Mr. Lee:** Mm… {long pause} [We] would interact with those who have business relations. If there is no business relation, then there is no interaction, except for those people who we encounter during social events held by the TCC. It is not likely [for us to
interact] on a regular basis. Oh, right! We may also encounter each other in the church. So, in general, [we] only know of each other.

There seems to be a clear division between work and social/family life to Mr. Lee as well as many of my friends for various reasons. I recalled conversations with the manager who was waiting for his child as well as with Estella who chose not to interact with other MNC managers in order to stay secure with her job as discussed in Chapter four. Such a division may aggrandize isolation for the new arrivals who have very little interaction with other individuals who work for other Taiwanese-owned MNCs. The significance of Chinese church as Mama Gau had explained was underscored. Its role and function in the Taiwanese and Chinese community became imperative for me to understanding how these transnationalists are culturing in the El Paso/Juárez borderlands.

Later in our third interview toward the end of December, Mr. Lee expressed that “the Chinese church plays an active role in caring for the newcomers [from Taiwan and China]. TCC is actually not [that active] because people solely want to make connections through socializing there. I haven’t had interactions with other groups, so these two are the only ones I know.” Since many overseas Chinese Christians perceive their role in El Paso as “salt and light” working for Jesus Christ, many activities and services were arranged and provided in facilitating newcomers—both Chinese and Taiwanese nationals. These activities serve dual-goals. One is to assist them in better adjusting to this foreign environment and the other is for them to learn about Christianity.

**Church as a Site for Acquiring Language Skills**

Every Sunday, the Chinese church has various gatherings for different purposes. Starting from around 8:30 a.m. until one o’clock in the afternoon, there is the Sunday
worship in English, three adult Sunday schools for Mandarin, Cantonese, and English speaking members, various groups of age-bracketed Sunday school classes in English for children, and the Chinese worship. At eleven a.m., worship in Mandarin commences along with a Cantonese interpreter. During this one-and-a half hour worship, two Adult Sunday Schools—one in English and the other in Cantonese, take place. The last Sunday of every month is the combined service where the worship is conducted in English with an interpreter translating it into Mandarin. There were only a couple of Anglo and Latino members in the congregation among the approximately eighty regular members.

With a small budget (around half of which was held at another American church,) the infrastructure of the Chinese church was maintained mostly by the churchgoers. From time to time, announcements were made in both English and Chinese to invite the congregation for church maintenance. One announcement posted on October 31st stated: “Winterize Coolers: Building & Grounds are looking for volunteers to help to maintain the coolers & heaters. Please come on Saturday 10 A.M.” Another on the November 7th schedule flier asked for “volunteers to prepare our church building for our 40th anniversary: Will meet at church every Saturday morning at 10 A.M. Every helpful hands [sic] will be greatly appreciated.” These tasks often demonstrate the Chinese saying of “No talent is to be wasted and no utility of things should be exhausted.”

In order to reduce the cost of maintaining the facilities, Mr. Lan took lessons to earn a certificate on air conditioning and heating system repair to work on machines at the church. When tools or component parts were needed for the church maintenance, Mama Gau and James provided them from their hardware store. With all the help
possible, by late December, the church was ready for the 40th Anniversary—all walls were painted and all furniture was sanded and varnished.

During my stay, the church experienced the biggest event since its establishment, which was to raise money for the Gym Funds with the goal of US $330,000. The plan for reconstruction began in the summer of 2003 approximately a year after the hiring of its first full-time Chinese pastor. As it is described in the booklet celebrating its 40th anniversary from 1964 through 2004,

in November 2003, a cornerstone point was determined and a time capsule was filled with memories, photos, words of wisdom, and other items. The time capsule was then placed in this cornerstone spot. The date for it to be opened will be on the anniversary in 2029, the church’s 65th anniversary. The time capsule ceremony took place on a beautiful day on the Thanksgiving weekend of 2003.

Such a ceremony in which possessions of the church members (i.e., pictures, insights) were planted with the construction symbolized the rooting of these members to the land of El Paso for future blooming results. It further reunited these members, for although they had various backgrounds they were buried together for the same cause. They became not only a contributing member to the Chinese church body, but more importantly, part of them was transformed into the church infrastructure and history.

The construction of the gym/activity center started in June 2004 with the help of a couple of members in taking out a loan of $100,000 using their properties as security. Toward the end of 2004, the expansion and remodeling of the church was near its completion stage and all the Sunday classes were moved from the 2nd floor of the
building to the new area added behind the main hall. The new classrooms fit
approximately fifteen to twenty adults in each room. There was no heating or air
conditioning system in these few classrooms, except for some essential equipment such
as metal tables and chairs. A picture of Jesus in a blue and white robe, white skin with
blue eyes and blondish-brown hair looking down showing love and acceptance was given
a place in all of classrooms. The second floor was remodeled into two nursery rooms and
one for toddlers. The rest became the children’s reading and play spaces. Many Bible
storybooks were set on the bookshelf next to the colorful little tables and chairs. Puzzles
and Legos were on the other side of the room along with some coloring books, crayons,
and markers.

The church has attracted overseas Chinese from Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong,
and China. They practice their religion and interact with people of similar backgrounds.
Some are the “old-timers” who arrived at El Paso or Juárez half a century ago. Some
came one or two decades ago. Some have just arrived in recent years. The gym/activity
center was the vision promoted and shared by the pastor, deacons, staffs, and
congregation to work together to attract more members through helping and inviting
newcomers into the House of God. Their active role in the newcomers’ learning and
settling in the United States as a Mandarin speaking minority in El Paso is pronounced,
particularly through various cultural activities, language lessons, religious rituals, as well
as holiday celebrations. For some, the Chinese church remains as the only main circle of
friends and contacts even after living in El Paso for many years.

Besides this church, there recently was another Chinese Christian group closely
related to an American church that engaged in converting Chinese newcomers. A U.S.
citizen, Jay with help from a retired Anglo pastor William, organized this group. Jay emigrated from Hong Kong and speaks fluent English, Cantonese, and Mandarin. Most attendees are local graduate students recently coming from China. In addition to Bible study and worshiping, a few of its members volunteer to help newcomers by arranging trips to grocery stores, dental visits in Juárez for an affordable rate, and legal advice when it was needed. On a Friday evening in September, not long after my settling into El Paso, Mama Gau invited me to this Chinese Bible study group. At six o’clock in the evening, William started a prayer while everybody stood hand-in-hand in a big circle. A dinner then ensued. It was prepared by a few enthusiastic members including several of Jay’s relatives who also are members of the Chinese church.

After about an hour later, Jay called us to a small room where the adults went to listen to Bible lessons and children and some women went to another room to sing and play. Jay made several announcements. One was that the group was going to start their own Chinese school to teach children Chinese in the simplified characters in the Pinyin system used mainly in Mainland China while the parents attend the Bible study group. Another announcement was about their request to this church, which had a mainly Anglo congregation, to lend them space in having Sunday worship in Mandarin for mainly the Mainland Chinese students. He let us know that the request had almost been approved, and was in its final stage of paper work. The last announcement asked people to record those Chinese expressions that they had difficulty describing such as “How do you describe in English the nauseous feeling you get when you go to see a doctor?” In the midst of laughs, Jay said, “We’ll then invite some American White people like William
to translate and then we’ll have a booklet with the most difficult Chinese expressions translated into English.”

After the announcement, Jay launched into his lesson about how the Bible is called the Holy Script and that it means “the Book” and what Jesus Christ means. While around fifty people sat quietly listening and watching words like “Holy Script” and “Jesus Christ” being written in English on the blackboard, Jay asked “William, do Caucasians name their children Jesus?” William said “No.” Jay followed “Right, but the Mexicans do, Jésús. Actually, Jésús is Joshua, it is not our Jesus. But if you go to Mexico, they believe in Catholicism, there are Jesuses everywhere.” Jay laughed.

While listening, a chart was illustrated in my mind with two neat layers of nations/peoples/religions/languages hierarchically and stably fixed. The top layer was categorized as the “American White” people as Caucasians who speak the “authentic” English and believe in the “authentic” Jesus and Christian religion. The lower level was designated to the “Mexican-looking” nonwhites who speak “less correct” English and who follow Catholicism with “fake” and laughable Jesuses. These Chinese as newcomers to this borderland were then advised to position themselves within this rhetorically constructed hierarchical space. That is, the kind of peoples/religions/languages to articulate with, hence disarticulate oneself from, was presented persuasively according to this order. A Chinese Christian identity was crafted through the selective processes of (dis)articulations.

While Jay with the help of others such as Pastor William, were working on expanding the Bible study group and organizing their own Sunday worship in Mandarin and social events to best serve people from Mainland China, the Chinese church was
finishing its facility expansion/remodeling. With this new facility, it hoped to invite more members with the help of the long-time residents of El Paso /Juárez who speak Spanish, English, Mandarin, and Cantonese.

Both church groups provide Chinese lessons for the youngsters although they are taught in two different systems. When the remodeling of the Chinese church was close to completion, Chinese lessons resumed on Friday nights where the traditional version of Chinese is taught in the Zhu-In-Fu-Hau system practiced in Taiwan. Although there are two active Chinese church groups in El Paso, it does not mean these two groups do not interact or share some members. On Sundays, Kim, Joe and their children attend activities in the Chinese church. Kim participates in Adult Sunday School and worship for Mandarin speakers and Joe attends the English sections. Their children are in children’s Sunday school at the Chinese church. On Friday evenings, Kim and Joe participate in the Bible study with Jay’s group while their children learn the Pinyin system of simplified Chinese. Comments about the usefulness and practicality of the Mainland Chinese language, specifically the simplified version in their children’s future, were often made. For example, both Kim and another U.S. citizen originally from Taiwan explicitly commented at different occasions that children ought to learn the simplified version of Mandarin for practical reasons. They believed it is less frustrating, therefore more positive outcome for children to learn. Further, due to Mainland China’s rapidly growing significance in the world, the traditional version of Chinese employed mainly in Taiwan will serve no practical purpose for their children.

Regardless of what version of Chinese was taught to their children, most parents shared an opinion of Chinese being a globally influential language in the near future. On

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3 Please refer to Chapter three for the discussion on the future global arrangement my friends perceived.
a Friday afternoon, in February, I went to Mary’s home to spend an evening. Mary was reading *WJT* as I arrived and said to me “Hsin-I, do you know that the Chinese language is very popular in the U.S. now”? I responded that I read about how Mandarin will be included as a second language in some California high schools. Mary said, “In the past, I felt that it was so nice to be foreigners, I mean to be Americans who just speak English. Now it is our turn to be envied. Well, *fengshui* has turned. Finally, now it is our turn.” Her comments underpinned her faith in the import and potential of Mandarin as one of the future leading global languages under the ideology of the Greater China. Her faith was shared and expressed by many others through language lessons arranged for the Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists such as the church groups’ involvement in promoting Chinese language in El Paso.

In addition to identifying with the Chinese language, many of my friends crafted their sense of self through engaging in religious rituals, specifically Christianity while continuing to practice the familiar activities they (per)formed prior to their arrival to the El Paso/Juárez area. In other words, they were actively participating in the process of (dis)articulations by negotiating the perceived “Western” culture such as Christianity and the “Eastern” Chinese cultural language and knowledge according to their view of the future global condition. It is this pragmatic logic that influenced or sustained the Chinese and Taiwanese transnational parents’ decisions in cultivating their children’s dispositions. In addition to providing a space for learning to perform Christian religious rituals and the Chinese language, church groups serve as the main channel in which newcomers can

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4 *Feng shui* literally means “wind” and “water” in Chinese. According to *Far East Chinese-English Dictionary*, *Fengshui* means “the direction and surroundings of a house or tomb supposed to have an influence on the fortune of a family and their offsprings [sic].” In essence, it is an ancient practice of placement to achieve harmony with the environment. An equipment called *Luopan* which would gravitate to the most harmonious position. Therefore, *feng shui* moved instead of staying at one spot.
acquire knowledge on various issues from various prevalent practices in the U.S.
dominant society as well as practical information such as the phone number of a reliable plumber. My friends and their family members were able to become familiar with this new environment while forming strategic identities intermixed with Chinese language skills and American Christian knowledge. The following discussion illustrates the processes of becoming an interface as Wen-He termed through engaging in specific cultural practices.

*Church as a Site for Acquiring Knowledge on Holiday Celebrations*

The *Book of Luke* was the reading for Adult Sunday School during my entire stay. Each week, a chapter was assigned to read and then discussed during our Sunday School led by one of the three leaders, all male. During the last Sunday school in October, it was George’s turn to lead the Mandarin discussion on the *Book of Luke, 9*. Toward the end of our one-hour gathering, George mentioned that that day was Halloween and stressed that “it would be better for us Christians to avoid wearing ghost-like costumes. Instead, let us dress our children with Holy robes like Angels in white color.” I was intrigued by the hierarchical order within which Halloween costumes were positioned into the preferred white Angel-like ones being superior to those in the non-white ghost-like.

The meaning of Halloween was later explicated during the worship where the sermon was entitled “Halloween: All Saints Day.” The pastor began to explain the misperceptions toward Halloween, for the Chinese often mistakenly translate it as Ghost Day. He further explained “Hallow means sacred. … Some other nations like in Mexico celebrate two days: both All Saints Day and All Souls Day. All Saints are those who died in the name of Christ as believers. All souls are non-believers who died. This is a big
difference between, October 31st, All Saints Day, and November 1st as All Souls Day. In America, we celebrate Halloween on the first day…. You would see [people dressing in costumes of] Dracula, skeleton, demons, because all of them were influenced by pagans.”

The sermon continued to encourage the congregation during the time of Autumn harvest, to practice the path of a follower of Jesus Christ for the ultimate harvest in the future. The pastor distinguished that the “true believers” would be given rebirth while other unauthentic believers say there is reincarnation and bad karma, which is not what the Bible states. The congregation was reminded to practice the real Christianity such as “[on Halloween], we are scared to death because of the scary costumes, but those of us who condemn the nonbelievers are believers [who] have a hope, a glorious future without fear.”

It was my first time to learn about the distinction between the U.S. Christians as the true believers who celebrate only All Saints’ Day, and people in Mexico who celebrate an additional day for non-believers. Such rhetoric reminded me of Jay’s talk during the Bible Study I attended in which Mexican people, religion and culture was Othered as unauthentic in comparison to that of the United States. Discourse critic van Dijk (1996, 1997a, 1997b) explained how subscribers to the dominant ideology construct Others through public as well as private communicative acts such as storytelling in differentiating from those with less power and access to social resources. The constructing and reinforcing of the “invisible border” between these two adjacent nations and its peoples were once again demarcated hierarchically during religious ritual and practices. Talks such as “good white vs. evil non-white customs,” “authentic vs. unauthentic Jesus,” “white=Americans vs. brown=non-Americans,” and “true believers in
the U.S. vs. the otherwise in Mexico” not only attribute a homogenized identity to cultural groups in the U.S. and Mexico through various (dis)articulations. They further reinforce the spatial hierarchy discussed in Chapter three. Through these talks and interactions, my Chinese and Taiwanese transnationalist friends were encouraged to selectively cultivate their hybrid identities in this new land/life.

**Diasporic Chinese Christians: “Chinese in this strange land… are like Israelis.”**

After Halloween had passed, time seemed to fly by quickly as the Chinese church was anxiously readying for its 40th Anniversary celebration and the Christmas holiday season. The basic structure of the gym/multi-purposed center was a little bit behind schedule for the upcoming dedication ceremony and celebrations during Christmas and New Year. The deacons decided to push for the completion of the basic structure and left detail tasks such as restrooms, kitchen, sports utility, and interior design to be continued after the celebration. From December 25th, 2004 until the following Sunday on January 2nd, the congregation arranged a series events for its 40th Anniversary.

An evening dinner and open ceremony started the weeklong celebration on the 25th of December. Although the rarely seen snow in El Paso had stopped falling on the 25th, it was an extremely cold evening in El Paso even for Christmas time with the temperature in the low thirties. A Chinese buffet started at six o’clock in the gym. Approximately fifty adults and children lined up for food in the unheated gym with a couple of space heaters around the metal table and chairs to help reduce the freezing air. The elderly stayed in the heated main hall with food served instead of dining in the gym with the crowd. The unfinished concrete gymnasium was filled with laughter and conversation with the background noise of water dripping from the aluminum ceiling into
the many strategically placed buckets. Mr. Lan laughed while telling us that he spent the
day searching for large cardboard boxes to block the not-yet-completed windows and
finally found some in the Home Depot dumpster.

After the dinner, an opening ceremony was held in the festively decorated main
hall. Six banners in light green scrolled down from the ceilings on both sides with Bible
versus written in calligraphy by one member’s father in China. The pastor had sent a
copy of the Bible to him in China. He decided to write these verses and then shipped
them to El Paso for this event. A red banner reading “Chinese Church 40th Anniversary
Celebration” in both Chinese and English hung in the front above the altar area where the
pastor shared the messages for the night. He stated that “40” is a very special number in
the Bible. “When Moses led the oppressed Israelis out of Egypt, it took them forty
years to be out of the desert. It is like us Chinese in El Paso, the Lord has been caring for
us for the past forty years.” Such a comparison remained to be explored and repeated the
next day, Christmas Day, the largest turnout among all my visits with 147 attendees
sitting tightly together.

It was around 10:30 in the morning when we walked into the church. We found
some seats and started the worship that, for the most part, was conducted in English.
Several deacons and members introduced their family members who do not regularly
attend Chinese church. I noticed two Anglo pastors sitting with our pastor and recognized
one of them as Pastor William from Jay’s group. Mr. Lan then asked “Those who are
back from Austin, please stand up.” Almost all the young people stood up since most of
the 2nd generation Chinese attend University of Texas-Austin and later settle in the
Houston area due to job opportunities.
One of the deacons introduced his family and made a comment about how the Lord had answered his prayer of not wanting to marry to a Mexican woman after coming from Hong Kong to the El Paso area decades ago. Later, our pastor started to introduce his family who had traveled from California, Michigan, and Shanghai. He said “My oldest son and his wife who is Caucasian, a blonde, and their children who were baptized in this church last year. My third son and his wife who was a Vietnamese-born and raised in Paris. My youngest son and his wife, who is an Argentine born Korean and raised in the United States. Then my youngest daughter, who came from Shanghai where she works with my second son. Her brothers always tease her that we’ve had yellow and white in the family already, so she now has three choices: red, Mexican, and black. {laugh}” The congregation clapped when each person was standing up to be introduced when someone made a comment about Pastor’s family is like the United Nations.

Being impressed with the diverse members in the pastor’s immediate family, I also thought of how the postcolonial theorist and cultural critic Spivak in an interview reminded researchers studying in the context of globalization that positions beyond merely of being metropolitan multiculturalism such as the concept of “Rainbow Coalition” need to be unpacked (Hegde & Shome, 2002, p. 272). That is, the politics of building coalition and solidarity for fighting against racism and discrimination and integrating differences require further commitment to engage in the intersections of various identities (e.g., race, class, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality). Nevertheless,

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5 Technically, she was a brunette. Although, it may be difficult for Chinese newcomers in the U.S. to distinguish blonde from red, brunette, or brown hair colors as Lee (1998a) discussed the strategy of comparison such as “blonde hair is different from black hair” was often employed in determining hair colors in the U.S. However, by announcing that she is blonde and white in an introduction on how most ethnicities/races are represented in this family posed an interesting issue on the interconnectedness of racial difference, representation, and authenticity.
by making a joke that his daughter’s marriage would be based on skin-color and ethnicity, 
the pastor indirectly addressed the previous comment from the deacon’s testimony on 
refusing to marry anyone of Mexican decent in front of the congregation. This way, the 
mixing and breeding between races was encouraged as a strategy to further build 
connections and interface between various cultural groups.

As I was thinking, the pastor started the sermon in English with a Mandarin 
interpreter on this celebrative and reunifying day. He first read a verse in the Book of 
Jeremiah where it says “This is what the LORD says, he who made the earth, the LORD 
who formed it and established it – the LORD is his name. ‘Call to me and I will answer 
you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.’” The pastor continued, 
“Today I would like us to look at Deuteronomy 2, 7. Let us read together in English first 
and then in Chinese.”

The LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of our hands. HE has 
watched over your journey through this vast desert. These forty years the 
LORD your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything.

The pastor then narrated that God has been with Chinese at El Paso in the past 
forty years just like how he was with the Israelites. He continued his message asking 
members to learn to remember the privileges of being a Christian. Thus, one needs to live 
by being obedient and having trust in God. One needs to remember to learn to praise God 
for giving this church the vision of building the new facility for children to come here 
listen to God’s words so that “We [Chinese] as foreigners [italics added] who are settling 
down here have our own place.”
Following the sermon, Lan gave an introduction on the history of the church, which was established in 1964 and is the oldest Chinese church in the state of Texas. Finally, Lan led the whole congregation in recognizing pictures of those who had served in the church as we applauded. At this point, the pastor stood up and invited several people to lead a prayer. Several people including guest pastors, several deacons and two members, all male were invited to lead the prayers for the church. Pastor informed the interpreter not to translate the prayers for “this is a multilingual church.” Pastor William and Pastor Lee prayed to God in English to continue the care for this church. In David’s praying in Mandarin, he mentioned that the end of the world is coming just like the Lord says in the Book of Revelations where nations wage wars against nations and subjects are in war with subjects. He then thanked God for giving “us, these diasporic Chinese in this strange land in El Paso who are like Israelis living under other’s roof [italics added] with your own blessings and now with the gymnasium. You know how important it is for children to know you at a very young age.” Young Tommy, a 2nd generation American-born Chinese thanked God in English for “caring for us in the past forty years and now it is up to us to carry the torch to keep worshiping you and bringing more people to you.” A somewhat loud and firm “Amen!” could be heard during all the prayers in creating as sense of solidarity and togetherness.

A strong sentiment of remembering the historical hardship and uncertainty experienced by the Chinese as strangers/outsiders in El Paso floated around in these segment prayers. In addition, these prayers revealed an outlook to continue and further the path cared by God as how God had planned for the Israelis. The Adult Choir presented a few hymns in Mandarin followed by children performing songs and verses in
English as a way to symbolize the theme of the celebration, which was to integrate and carry on the heritages so as to pave the way for future generations.

Throughout my interactions at church, the comparison of Chinese to Israelites as both dispersed and oppressed groups was constant. Each time when I heard such an analogy, it reminded me of Chang’s (2002) article that excavated the rhetorical power embedded in the metaphor of “Moses coming out of Egypt” enacted by Taiwanese ex-president Lee Tung-hui first in a 1994 interview. Chang argued that such a metaphor facilitated in transforming and further empowering the uncertain and ambiguous Taiwanese identity. Moreover, the metaphor allowed the possibility for Taiwan to assert its self-consciousness in “the dialectical tension between drawing the two sides [of the Taiwan Strait] closer and also setting them apart” (p. 53). The metaphor of Israelites coming out of the desert was enacted by and onto a somewhat different group in El Paso. The Chinese-ethnic Christians dwelling on the “foreign” borderlands of El Paso and Juárez in the church came from various geographic and temporal spaces. The elder generation came mostly from the Cantong province of China during early 20th century or even earlier. Some came from Juárez in the mid-1900s. More recent ones moved from China, Taiwan or Hong Kong in the 1990s.

As the 40th Anniversary celebration was coming to the end, the Chinese Baptist Church completed dedicating the remodeled church and newly constructed gym to God. In taking up an essential character in the Bible— the Israelites as the chosen ones, the analogy expresses the role that the Chinese Christians perceive for themselves, as fulfilling the Christian narrative. Their role as a chosen people who endured hardship yet were cared for by God provides legitimacy as well as urgency to some extent in
constructing their Chinese Christian identity. Further, by assuming the role of Israelites, these Chinese whose people are ignored in the written word of the Bible are empowered by their association. In that association, the extraordinary and unlimited love from God is promised to the Israelite-like diasporic Chinese in El Paso who work toward serving God. One example of them being cared for and used by God would be the completion of the gymnasium/multi-purposed center for building a larger Chinese Christian community, particularly with the Chinese youth in El Paso.

The constant expression on the Chinese as foreigners in the U.S. caught my attention. Such an expression corresponds to the critique of how the Asian Americans being locked in the space of forever outsiders (Gong, 2004; Kawai, 2005). A long-term member, Kan, had once told me that he somewhat believed that “Chinese in the U.S. are like rats that strive for survival in a crack.” This status of being foreign bestowed by both the Chinese as well as the U.S. society assumes less legitimate, therefore a powerless space for Chinese to be in the United States. Moreover, for Chinese being in such harsh situation as if Israelis were in an other’s land, the congregation was encouraged to rely on God who has been providing care and love in the past four decades for their future path instead of on self-actions. These Chinese Christians were reminded to not forget one’s ancestry by following the example of the elders who came to the U.S. and kept their faith, for God was the responsible for what they are today. Hence, my transnational friends deemed themselves as somewhat powerless as outsiders whose lives are led and crafted by the supernatural power instead of man-made arrangements such as the geopolitical and socio-economical practices.
More strategies were enacted to form a more or less coherent identity between Chinese and Christianity in addition to taking on the character of Israelites in the Bible. During a combined service in September, the pastor gave a sermon on “Enduring the Life of Ishmael and Isaac” where the congregation was encouraged to become more like Isaac—a symbol of the promised son. The pastor explained that we needed to obey God in that “[w]e are either Ishmael or Isaac. One is obedient and willing to be disciplined by God while the other is earthy and untamable with hostility and rebelliousness.” The connection of becoming a Chinese Christian was articulated in the following rationale that “[t]here are people in this world who are morally good, but they do not accept God, their Father’s teaching. In Chinese, the biggest Chinese philosophy, filial piety, as it is said, is the most important of all virtues. Chinese philosophy is really similar to the Bible’s teaching.” In negotiating the teachings in the Bible as well as in Chinese philosophy, the pastor demonstrated how these two share congruent and fundamental principles by establishing the role of God as Father for the congregation, who should pay obedience to “His” word in the Bible.

Rituals and rhetorical performance in church ceremonies during holiday celebrations formed a hybrid cultural identity in which specific Confucius teachings are married with conventional Christian ideologies. The Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists in El Paso were guided to identify with the “true” Christianity and further to integrate such beliefs with Chinese virtues in order to continue the hardship of being the rat-like outsiders under the roof of other people. From my participation in these activities, I was curious to learn how these teachings were practiced in my friends’ daily lives.
Chinese Female Christians: “When God was making people, he gave men the right.”

Mary spent most of her day at home and enjoyed her time in El Paso. She did not drive much so I went to visit quite often in some mornings. During a conversation with her in November, I inquired about the education of her young daughters who relocated to El Paso from Taiwan a year ago in 2003. Mary shared:

[t]he first thing is that they need to be able to speak Chinese, and also they have to read Chinese characters. And of course, it would be better if they can know more about Chinese stuff. … Oh, for example, they need to understand that they have to have filial piety, and to respect others. Hmm… oh, one more obvious point is that, the concept toward sex. I mean… It is very open here, isn’t it? So they cannot be… too indulging. Wait, it is not that they cannot be too indulging. [It is that] they cannot at all. And then… hmm… I think for the most part, I hope they can abide by the teaching of the Bible. They ought to still see words in the Bible as the guide for life after coming here, to use God’s rules as their rules. And then, since it is not mentioned in the Bible about speaking their mother tongue, they will need to learn [Chinese].

Christianity was positioned as the center in Mary’s parenting philosophy, while acts of being Chinese were to be practiced in cultivating identity as Chinese in the El Paso/Juárez border. To Mary, both stress respecting one’s parents as well as behaving as a “respectful” female who does not engage in pre-marital sexual relationships. From her statement, she revealed concerns about young women being influenced by the local atmosphere in terms of sexual activity. Such a concern was to be addressed by actively
engaging children in Bible reading and church activities as Mary mentioned. Her view on parenting in El Paso stressed the combination of these two seemingly separate cultural views of “egalitarian Christianity” and “hierarchical Confucianism” as discussed in Chapter three. What was accomplished additionally was the reinforcement of a few selective disciplining ideologies and pragmatic practices. Her children were expected to continue familiarity with the increasingly important Chinese language, cultural principles on being respectful, and restraint upon one’s female sexuality, particularly prior to one’s marriage as instructed in the Bible as well as in Chinese perspectives on personal merits.

In a later interview, I inquired again about those teachings, specifically toward females. At one point, Mary challenged some prevalent Chinese beliefs that promote unnecessary goals such as getting into prestigious schools. I seized the opportunity to voice my views on certain oppressive common sayings. Specially, I was reminded of Lee’s (1998a) article which unpacked the Chinese ancient saying “A Chinese woman without talent/literacy is virtuous” and how such a saying was absorbed and practiced without careful examination and contextualization to differentiate the positionalities of the speakers and the addressed in different social conditions. Lee illustrated common practices such as how this saying has been utilized by particular people at some group’s expense at different historical times and space.

Speaking with confidence produced by the article that greatly inspired my understanding to the taken-for-granted knowledge, I expressed my opinion of Lee’s critique in questioning this particular saying and its impact, while Mary replied:

Actually what you just said, that is the truth. They say that “Women without talent/literacy is virtuous.” Actually that is the truth. You know,
because there are many problems in the family or within the couple. [These problems] are all due to the fact that both parties want to be the tough one. Well, it is the woman who wants to be the tough one actually. Actually for men, men they all have this desire to be the head, to be the master of a family. [It does] not matter if he has the talents or capability, regardless he has a high social status or things like that. He still has this desire. He wants others to obey him. He is just like this. Actually, you cannot blame him, because when God was making people, he gave men the right, which is for him to become the master of a family. And for women, women are naturally made to assist him. Isn’t it written in the Bible? She is only in the role of assistance. But then if this helper also wants to be the head, there will be two heads, right? Then there of course would be different opinions between one head and the other. . . . It was easier for ancient women to obey their husbands because they lacked education. But then now, we women are much luckier, because now women have the opportunity to receive education and being exposed to [the world]. Plus, nowadays men are more gentlemen right? So if we know this principle [that] we [as women] are no less than them, we know this strategy, we need to understand the technique as to how to make them [men] happy and at the same time, we are okay too {laugh}. But then human beings have blood and vigor, you know, so we are unwilling to obey or accept [the truth]. So with the condition of being unwilling to
obey in addition to the compulsion or impulse in our flesh, then two people would have problems.

Mary interpreted principles in the Bible as fundamentally congruent with the Chinese essential philosophy embedded in the ancient saying in which women are placed as one of the “two types of people that were difficult to cultivate” in addition to the ignoble men (Lee, Chung, Hertel & Wang, 1995). I stayed quiet for a long time to first demonstrate my disagreement, and secondly to search for a way to continue the conversation without challenging the teachings in the Bible after issuing questions about the unbalanced power relations in which this ancient saying was practiced. I gave up in searching for words and ideas that would not offend her religion. I felt tired and speechless. We moved on to another topic after a long pause.

A similar topic appeared in another conversation when Mary shared with me three principles she would pass onto her daughters as wives: obedience, endurance, and communication. When I asked if she meant to obey the husband on all matters, she took a long pause and said

I think these three points are together, because the husband must love for us [wives] to obey him because it will make everything convenient for him, right? So that it would not be troublesome for him [in his life.] Plus, he would have a lot of face. {laugh} But then we are human beings after all. Moreover, women nowadays are less and less likely to obey [their husbands] because women now have higher educations and are as compatible as, if not surpass their husbands. So being obedient is very difficult right? So then you have to endure, you [as a wife] must endure
sometimes. Because it is men’s nature, they like to control. So you have to force yourself to endure under all situations. The first step is to obey. For example, if you have conflicts, you have to first obey, then if we [as wives] think that we are right, for our position is helpful to me, to him, or to the whole family, then we [as wives] have to figure out a way to communicate. But if we are in the midst of anger, we cannot communicate. So we [the wife] have to endure first. And then, after communicating, if both of us still hold our own perspective strongly, then we might need to obey him as a final end because there can be only one head within a family. Then, especially for us Christians, we believe that God still is in charge. Because basically, if we are right but they [the husbands] just do not listen to us, but because of the Lord, we should still obey him and let him do things at his will. But God is in charge right? So in the end, God will let him hear who is right and who is not. But we [the wife] should not let our vigor take over, instead [we should try to] let him understand [our point of view]. Because if we follow our vigor and even if he agrees to our decision, he still would not think that what we were saying was reasonable, you know? So this is human nature. . . . It is more difficult for them [as men] to understand how others think. They are not willing to spend that kind of energy. The other possibility is that they are born lacking that kind of thinking as [their nature,] they cannot think of that. So in that kind of situation, I would be more assertive to try to let him understand. As for other [issues], I feel that… unless it is something significant, otherwise,
for small matters, I would let him take care of whatever. This is called

“Harmony in the family is the basis for success in any undertaking.”

{laugh}

Mary concluded again that human beings are vigorous animals of mortality and corruption, so it is important for “us” to endure anger or resentment instead of rebelling against “our” husbands. Regardless the taken-for-granted heterosexual practices, in the talk of negotiating between wife and husband, she strategically incorporated words and sayings in both Chinese and Christian ideologies where women’s voices are less encouraged, as the standards for women to live up to. By sharing her experiences, Mary proposed for women to make an effort to succumb to her husband on most matters and to strategically persuade him in significant instances.

However, the submission seems to be ostensible for saving her trouble to argue with the husband due to the controlling nature of men. There seems to be a sense of superiority, in that letting the husband decide to do whatever would actually save oneself a fight. It would even save the wife some possible risks in making wrong decisions. Therefore, letting the husband take care of the family with total support/submission from the wife, to Mary, is a strategy beneficial to all parties involved.

The strong belief that women and men are granted with different power by God as a “natural phenomena” buttresses the essence of interactions in couple-hood. Such an ideology was not merely rationalized. It was lived and practiced in everyday life. Keeping the family harmonious is the ultimate goal, which was to be achieved through keeping the head, that is, the husband content at all times. For others, words in the Bible also serve as an outlet for strength through difficult and even lonely times.
“I wish I had a husband who would be my head…” On a mid-December
Thursday after I had not gone to her store for a few days, Mama Gau called me at my
apartment after she finished closing the store. At first, she sounded normal while telling
me about her day. Soon, she said

I did not tell Uncle James about my son’s [out-of-state] trip until yesterday. …So [Uncle James] was really mad when I told him yesterday
and said ugly words to me. Basically, he was saying that I am so
wonderful and so capable now that I can make all the decisions myself
without asking him. He made it sound really ugly. I felt really sad and hurt
to hear that. I could only think that it is because he is ill [from his
weakening nerve system.]

She continued:

I have been really frustrated these last two days but the Lord has cared for
me. The Koreans next door [who owned a dock] were really out of line
these last couple of days. I had told them before that I had cargo coming in.
Yesterday morning, I walked over to ask if it was okay for my truck to
come in. I saw they had empty space but the owner told me she had to call
to check. I waited there for a long time and had to return… I went there
again in the afternoon, but still, the same situation happened. I stood there
waiting for a long time without her reply. I finally was fed up. I turned
around and left. I was furious but I did not have anybody to talk to. You
know Uncle James. He is super nice to other people. He would not even
let me throw away their junk mail, all pieces of mail have to be brought to
them [the Koreans next door use Mama Gau’s store address]. I was so mad. I am just a woman. I cannot fight with them. I wish I had a husband who would be my head to fight for me and yell at them just to make me feel better and less sorrowful. Well, other people would say that I am such a strong and successful woman [who takes care of the store on my own] but I am not. I am forced to be what I am now. I wish I had someone to lean against, someone to protect me. Like Ms. Chou, her husband is the head taking care of all business. How nice that is. But I do not have anyone.

Your Uncle James is getting more and more depressed as his health condition deteriorates. Today, I went to ask and the Korean said that one truck came too early before she opened, so there is an empty spot for my truck. She probably felt bad and sensed that I was mad yesterday. She even brought me in and poured a cup of coffee for me. {laugh} Lord did listen to my prayer and cared for me after all.

After I learned that the truck did finally come in and everything was unloaded to the warehouse, I apologized for not being there with her. She thanked me and told me she appreciated that although I still felt that I failed to fulfill my duty as a “daughter.”

Mama Gau then restated that God had helped her endure difficult times, especially since 1997 after Uncle James’ legs became crippled. While she expressed her thankfulness to God, I thought of our many conversations when she explained how she did not “have a gender” in El Paso. She had expressed her desires of being protected and cared for as an “authentic” Chinese woman would after coming to the borderland of Mexico and the U.S. It was in her religion where she found peace and strength to
overcome her insecurity or anguish because she had to take on the male gender role in managing the business and the role of female in caring for her husband and family without dissent. She always ended laughing about how blessed she actually is “with nothing else to worry except for Uncle James whom is a needle that God had put on her back to prevent her from flying to the sky.” I told her that she is an amazing female who has so much strength, faith, and love while asking myself how else she could live a content life as her husband’s health steadily worsens if not for the strength and comfort she finds within her religion.

**A Perfect Match: Christian Teachings and Chinese Traditions**

From these conversations, I witnessed the central role that the Bible’s teaching played and how it was articulated with traditional Chinese practices in people’s quotidian lives. In regard to being a virtuous woman, Mary presented a fluid integration of two traditions with one corresponding to the other in educating women how to maintain familial relationships by recognizing the “natural” hierarchy. Mama Gau relied on her faith in her Lord for strength and comfort to continue caring for her ill husband, her son who does not have a close relationship with his father, her daughter who lives in the Midwest, and their hardware shop. She abided by the rules for a good Chinese female Christian and practiced them as a loving, loyal, and responsible wife and mother. In regard to being a proper human being, the pastor connected the essential practice of filial piety in the Chinese tradition to a desirable Bible character Isaac as the promised child to his Father. Through incorporating these two perceived cultural ideas, one being the assumed Christianity of Americanness and the other being the filial piety of Chineseness,
many Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists were led to articulate and negotiate in being a Chinese Christian in El Paso.

However, it is not to say that the Chinese (female) Christians being oppressed by these teachings of the “natural hierarchy” are complete victims. As Bourdieu (1977) suggested those with less social advantages were left with little option but to “recognize the legitimacy of the dominant classification… submitting to them in order to make use of them” (pp. 164-65). Further, Bourdieu wrote how

[the interest leading an agent to defend his [sic] symbolic capital is] *inseparable from the tacit adherence* [italics added], inculcated in the earliest years of life and reinforced by all subsequent experience, to the axiomatics objectively inscribed in the regularities of the… economic order which constitutes as determinate type of symbolic capital as worthy of being pursued and preserved. The objective harmony between the agents’ dispositions… and the objective regularities of which their dispositions are the product, means that membership in this economic cosmos implies unconditional recognition of the stakes which, by its very existence, it presents as *taken for granted*, that is, misrecognition of the arbitrariness of the value it confers on them. (pp. 182-3)

Disarticulating the seemingly harmonious relationship between the product (i.e., agents’ dispositions) and producing the product (i.e., regulations) proposes a point of entry in discerning the taken-for-granted values economically and symbolically. Mary and Mama Gau recognize and submit to the space of a follower after their husband as a virtuous wife with all their inculcated knowledge and propensity. They both believed in
the value between gaining interests and harmony for their family, hence their own, and sacrificing some of their personal desires. Being in a foreign land such as El Paso, the path of being and becoming a dignified woman lies in the articulation of perceived values in both Christianity and Chinese traditions. In a similar vein, through integration of Chinese and Christian practices, the congregation was encouraged to articulate their foreign status in El Paso/Juárez area, spiritual status as Isaac and the Israelites in the Bible, and Chinese ethnic status into a somewhat coherent hybridity based on the selective ideologies.

**Culturing Identities Outside of Church Activities**

Since the history of the individual is never anything other than a certain specification of the collective history of his [sic] group or class, *each individual system of dispositions* may be seen as a *structural variant* of all the other group or class habitus, expressing the difference between trajectories and positions inside or outside the class. (italics original, Bourdieu, 1977, p. 86)

The only “legitimate” inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites. (Anzulduá, 1987, p. 4)

The process of negotiating various cultural meanings and identities was practiced through other cultural events outside of church rituals. Various practices such as holiday celebrations, cultural evaluations, and tastes of lifestyle cultivations, underlie the intermixing and molding of these various cultural traditions. With caution not to suggest “American-ness,” “Mexican-ness,” and “Chinese-ness” as separately intact cultural entities or that such concrete objects exist, the following narratives continue to illustrate processes of cultural hybridization in the everyday living and doings enacted by agents to particular ends.
Flavors of Thanksgiving: “It was too good of a deal to pass.”

November 20th is the Mexican Revolution Day. I was told that the 20th is a widely celebrated national holiday in Mexico. From what I heard, most MNCs employees worked on both the 20th and the U.S. Thanksgiving Day (the 25th) in 2004 and had the following Friday, Saturday, and Sunday off. Mr. Lee had invited several Taiwanese managers who were alone in El Paso as well as me for a Thanksgiving dinner after their return from work on the 25th. It was a cold day with the temperature in the 30’s. Mr. Lee insisted on picking me up at 5:30 p.m.

As we walked into the house, the children were decorating the dining room as if for a high school dance—the only American style they had recently experienced and learned. There were different sized balloons in purple, yellow, and white colors. Streamers in purple and orange twisted and hung on the ceiling reaching out to each corner of the room from the center where a reflective spiral hung and glittered in the dimmed light. There was no music or decorative items in the resemblance of autumn that I normally associate with this holiday such as pumpkins, cornucopias, turkeys, pilgrims, and fall-colored leaves. Lee’s family had bought a Thanksgiving dinner package from Sam’s. Inside the package, we found a cooked turkey, a box of mashed potatoes, corn stuffing, bread pudding, and a can of turkey gravy. Mary also made some Chinese-style fried shrimp, broccoli, and miso soup. The dinner was served with many types of wine, Coke and some apple cider. One guest was questioned as to why it is Thanksgiving drink.

It was around 6:30 or 7 p.m. when Estella and another Taiwanese male manager arrived after work. Mr. Lee and the children had rented Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon from the video store as entertainment while waiting for dinner to be ready. After
watching it for less than half an hour, we started the dinner in buffet style. The dinner table was set up with six sets of red plastic forks, knives, napkins, and six pairs of wooden chopsticks. After everyone was seated, Mr. Lee said “Let us pray.” Estella, the only non-Christian in the group immediately put down her fork and covered her already chewing mouth. Mr. Lee thanked God for the opportunity for us to gather together and asked for God’s care for all the employees and their family members.

During the meal, Estella asked me about the origin of Thanksgiving. I told them what I knew which was that the Europeans came to this land and received assistance from the American Indians. I then shared with them that one of my mentors, who has an American Indian heritage, told me that it was not a holiday to celebrate. I continued on how the Europeans brought many new diseases to this land as well as much killing so many American Indian nations did not survive. At this time, Mary commented that that was why the American government had built reservations in order to honor them. Without noticing the dense atmosphere I might have created, I replied “Hmm… there are very few American Indians left and I think the purpose for the reservations is to keep them in place.” Trish, their 18-year-old daughter asked “So where were they [the American Indians] before?” I said “They were everywhere because this is their land. I read a news piece today about how the mayor of Boston had just repealed a 329-year-old law which forbid Indians from entering the city. Even though this law has not been practiced for centuries, it remained until today” (EPT, Nov. 25, 2004, 7A). “Oh, really?” everyone responded as I tried to reduce my reputation as a party spoiler by generating my conclusion “Yeah, so for some people, it really is not a day to celebrate.”
After a short period of silence, the conversation started again to how “Lao-Mei seem to enjoy Chinese culture. Like the Kung Fu stuff, the *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* we were watching,” said Mr. Lee. Most nodded while Trish shared how most of her classmates enjoy Jackie Chan’s movies. “They all think I know Kung Fu, too,” she laughed. Mr. Lee then commented that Lao-Wei are starting to learn to appreciate “our Chinese culture, which is extensive and profound for more than five thousand years.” I withheld my tongue struggling with my arrogance wanting to comment, “How has Chinese culture been commodified as well as consumed in the mainstream U.S. society? How might we have partaken as complicit in this business of exoticizing Chinese as Others?” I remained silent while remembering how such pride for Americans to learn Chinese culture and language reflected to the import of China’s role in the global stage as most of my friends had shared at various occasions.

The next day, Estella and I went with Mr. Lee’s family to their co-workers, Mike and Sara’s home for a belated Thanksgiving dinner gathering. On our way there, a “gotta try list” was being constructed with various restaurants such as Tony Roma’s, Fudrucker’s, and VillageInn as the van passed by each of the spots. Immediately, another list of favorites was compiled with places such as Arby’s, Red Lobster, and Olive Garden. As we were approaching Mike and Sara’s house located in the newly developed residential area at the far-east side of El Paso, I saw many houses with Christmas lights up on the roof as well as various decorations such as an illuminated snowman balloon next to the palm trees in a front yard. I caught my midwesternly cultivated knowledge and tastes being revealed in my arrogant judgments on the “American norms” for Christmas. This would be the first time for the Lees to spend Christmas together in the
U.S. with the exception of their oldest child who attends university in Taiwan. Everyone started to throw in comments about how each would want to decorate their home just like what they saw.

When we arrived, everyone else was there. There were three families and each couple was in their thirties with two young children. Among the total nineteen people, only Estella and I were single adults. Mike and Sara had prepared a hotpot, which is a pot of hot soup in the middle of the table for each person to select her/his desirable ingredient to cook. It symbolizes togetherness and closeness among family members or friends, especially during cold days.

Mike and Sara told us that they had purchased all items from the newly opened Chinese grocery store where, I was told, one can find mostly Taiwanese brand names instead of Mainland Chinese ones. The hotpot was on an electromagnetic heater. After being asked where it could be purchased in El Paso, Mike described how he carried it from Taiwan. While the food was still being prepared, Mike asked whether everyone had gone shopping today since it was the day after Thanksgiving. Jack shared how he had been waiting for this day to buy a Kitchen Aid mixer with a great price of $199 and waited in line for an hour to pay for it. He laughed and said “I could not find a cart, so I had to carry it with me to shop for a couple of hours. It was really heavy. But it was too good of a deal to pass.”

Mr. Lee inquired the discount rates for the day and said “I dropped Mary and Trish off around 10 a.m. at the mall. I had never seen so many cars in that parking lot. {laugh}” Mike continued “Lao-Mei all use this opportunity to replace their furniture or equipments at home because everything is really cheap. Though it would have to be
something at a higher price so that the discount will be worthwhile. Otherwise, I am not going to spend a whole day to save only a little bit.” He then continued to explain how stores even have different time periods for different discount rates.

At this time, Sara took out the casserole and baked ribs she had just learned to make yesterday from an El Paso famous chef whose wife invited them over to their Thanksgiving party. She shouted out loud “Food is ready. Go ahead and dig in.” Mike showed everyone the sauce area with soy sauce, barbeque sauce, fresh eggs, hot sauce, sesame oil, vinegar, salt, hot pepper, diced garlic, and chopped green onions. The aroma of hot soup mixed with baked ribs and melted cheese permeated their rather spacious two-story new home. As several of us went to make our own sauce and find a seat, parents went off to bring their daughters and sons to the children’s table and started to ready food for them. Someone asked about Mike’s three-year-old son’s broken leg. Without knowing what the question was about, I asked “What happened?”

“He was playing while standing on his blanket. He fell from the bed as he was pulling it up. He kept crying for a long time and holding his legs, so we thought we ought to bring him to the emergency room. When I saw the X-ray negative, I almost fainted. His leg was broke.”

My foot twitched a bit, “Ouch! It must have been really painful for him and he was even too young to say what happened.”

“Yes, that was when we realized there must have been something wrong since he could not stop crying.” Mike let us know the doctor said everything is fine now with his son’s leg. Mary and Mr. Lee then inquired about the health insurance plan and how to use it. Mike and Jack took turns to explain that they could go to either private or public
doctors as long as they are on the plan’s list. I threw more sliced beef and some seafood into the hotpot as Mike kept explaining how much extra they had to pay for the emergency room and what was included in the health plan.

Mike then recommended Providence and Columbia Hospitals instead of Del Sol, as what Dr. Kwan who worked with these hospitals on a special project, once told Mary and myself. I recalled Dr. Kwan commenting that “Del Sol is really bad with lousy management unlike Providence that is built like a five-star hotel and it is for those rich white people. Go to Providence.”

As I was listening, I saw the many functions these small talks served. Supportive relationships were often built through information exchange during the informal gatherings such as this dinner at Mike and Sara’s home. Information about survival matters such as usages of health plans and prevalent local activities such as the biggest sales after the Thanksgiving Day was shared. Further, participants absorbed knowledge of cultural evaluations in terms of superior versus otherwise services during these interactions. Dinner gatherings also provided precious opportunities for the managers’ family members or friends to meet and bond.

I happened to sit next to Jen, whom I had heard of but not yet met prior to that day. I asked her how she liked the U.S. and told her to give me a ring if she needed someone to take care of her daughters or anything else since we lived close to each other. I learned that she spent most of her days at home and was extremely bored because she didn’t know anybody in the area. She also inquired about and showed some interest in the English as Second Language courses offered at El Paso Community College. We then
were interrupted by Li-Ning asking me to take some food from the hotpot for her since I was closer to it.

At one point, the conversation went to border crossing. Jack said “Those venders who are selling chips and snacks on the border actually make quite a bit of money.” Wen-He joined “Yeah, I was told that an on-line operator makes probably five or six dollars a day and these people [venders] can make up to ten dollars a day.” Mike asked “But is there anyone would buy stuff from them”? Jack answered, “Yes. There were many people who would buy pop, snacks, and even those bags of red sauce from them.” Estella joined the conversation while standing up to get more food from the hotpot and said “Yeah. I’ve bought CDs from them while waiting to get through the border. {laugh} You know those CDs they are selling look just like the real ones. I mean the cover is printed and the case is nicely wrapped. They were going to sell me US $10 for two and I bargained down to six for two. I could not wait anymore, I was almost driving into the customs [area].” Mike told her, “Hey, that’s a really good deal. It is at least sixteen or seventeen dollars for a CD in America. Wow, that was a good deal.” I recalled Kathleen’s work in which she wrote about the underground economy but could not remember the details in the book nor the main points of it. I wish I remembered the information. The only thing I could remember was its blue cover! I was screaming inside while biting my teeth and upsetting with myself for not able to bring “scholarly information” out at the moments when pertaining issues were mentioned.

After I returned to Ohio in February, I dug out Kathleen Staudt’s 1998 book on the informal economic activities on the El Paso/Juárez border area. Staudt examined from the bottom up on how the lower- middle-income groups resist the institutions and policies
that subjugated them to disadvantaged economical conditions. The informal economic activities were the self-defensive buffer in sustaining one’s family. It would have been a great chance to discuss ways of subverting the political and economical policies with these MNC managers, I thought to myself while reading in my Ohio apartment. On the other hand, I pondered upon my assumed role as the information disseminator and what kind of impact I would have had had I shared such information. Perhaps they would have recognized their own agency and challenged subversively the unbalanced and exploiting labor division at their own working environment. Perhaps they knew all these being experienced business practitioners and that was why they perceived their economic acts in the El Paso/Juárez border area as to bettering the local lives.

After dinner, as everyone took the dirty dishes to the kitchen, it was mainly women who stayed in the kitchen to arrange uncooked items back to the fridge while preparing for desserts and tea. About ten minutes passed and everyone sat down again. Somehow, it turned out that two groups were formed and occupied two different rooms. Estella, Sara, Li-Ning, Mary, Jen, and myself ended up chatting at the dinner table having desserts. The men came to take desserts and returned to their space.

Sara shared some pictures of her family and their ranch in Argentina where she grew up. We were all astonished by the beauty of her home and joked that those must be taken in some national park instead of her home. Due to attending college in Australia, Sara is fluent in English, Spanish, her mother tongue Hakkanese as well as in Mandarin. As Sara was narrating how she struggled in Mandarin in the first few years after marrying Mike, Trish came to join us. I asked her “Where did all the husbands go?” “They are in the living room probably discussing work-related topics while watching TV with the
kids.” “Probably discussing business-related issues,” someone added. Li-Ning then praised how wonderful it is that Mike would help Sara out with house chores, unlike her husband Jack. She then joked that she comes in fourth in her husband’s heart after their sons, his Audi SUV, and his plants in the backyard. Everybody laughed.

As it was a little past ten o’clock, Mr. Lee entered the dining room standing by the table. Upon seeing that, Mary then stood up, so the rest of us all followed somehow knowing it was time to leave. Mr. Lee then thanked Sara and Mike for the gathering as Trish went upstairs to get her younger sister. Sara and Mike walked us to the door. Everyone repeatedly thanked them for the gathering as we walked to the company’s Toyota rental van.

That was one of the three times that I had dinner with this group of particular families together. The first time was the celebration of the Autumn Festival in September, and the last dinner was a house warming party for Jack and Li-Ning’s new home three weeks before Christmas. Through these gatherings, I learned how each individual was one another’s support materially and spiritually through bemoaning in a joking form, providing tips on daily coping, and on activities practiced in the local environment. Further, these gatherings served as an opportunity in maintaining relationships and familiarity with certain Taiwanese/Chinese cultural practices especially for the children. Moreover, they were opportunities to share traditional food, which is uneasy to acquire in the U.S.-Mexican borderland.

Since Jack and Li-Ning do not attend the Chinese church, I did not have much interaction with them until January. Their children attend Chi-Ai Chinese School; therefore, they keep close contact with some parents who also participate in the school.
Most of them reside in the west side. As someone who spends most her time at home with her two-year-old son, Li-Ning often invited another five or six friends who are married with no jobs outside of their home to her house for food-making or conversation over coffee. Her friends are more mobile, for their children attend grade school or daycare during the day.

“Do you have a lot of Lao-Mo children in school here?”

In mid-January, I received an invitation from Li-Ning to her home to make nian gau, a glutinous rice cake eaten during the Lunar New Year celebration, on the following Wednesday. I was excited about this invitation even though it was toward the end of my stay. Traveling by bus to this residential area in the westside is time-consuming. Therefore, I spent most of my time with the east side dwellers, a choice I made after learning that it took me close to three hours for a trip one-way including long waits for buses and another 30 to 40 minutes on foot to get to my friends’ homes. Besides, I did not form close relationships with the west-side dwellers after several unsuccessful attempts. Li-Ning was an exception and called me quite frequently toward the end of my stay.

On that Wednesday at 10 o’clock in the morning, May whom I had met once prior came to pick me up along with Pat since the three of us all lived on the eastside. After we arrived, we met Chang Chin, a nurse who left Beijing almost ten years ago for Canada and then to the United States. Later I learned that she was taking nursing courses at the local community college. Li-Ning gave each of us a copy of the recipe found on the Internet. We then all watched her blending rice powder with water, sugar, cooked red beans, and oil. As she was stirring all the ingredients, May started to show us how to make almond cookies. Pat, Chang Chin, and me all stood by the kitchen counter watching
and copying the recipe as May was mixing butter, sugar, egg, flour, and cornstarch. Li-Ning’s two-year-old son was playing in the living room next to the kitchen and dining area with a hamster Chang Chin had just bought for her daughter that day. Occasionally, he would come to his mother to ask for candy in the cabinet. Pat and Li-Ning expressed the excitement to finally learn how to make this cookie because it is pricey in the bakery yet their children love it.

While we were waiting for the nei gau in the rice cooker and the almond cookies in the oven, Li-Ning took out pots of rice soup and some dishes for us to have a light lunch together. Pat asked how big Li-Ning’s new house is and mentioned the possibility for her and her husband to purchase a house after renting for almost ten years in both westside as well as eastside of El Paso. She had told me that they were never certain if they could obtain the legal status to stay and become a house owner until these recent years.

**Pat:** I heard that houses on the other side of I-10 [which is south of it] are much cheaper.

**Chang Chin:** Yes, because of the bad school district. [Similarly], houses in the west side are almost twice as much as those in the east side.

**Me:** Why is that?

**Chang Chin:** The qualities of the schools. Originally, there were all Lao-Mo here who do not have much culture. Then later there were people coming from outside with more culture so the houses in the west side are almost as twice expensive as those in the east side.

**Me:** What do you mean by better schools? Do you mean more resources?

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6 Please see Chapter three for a discussion on how “culture” was understood by my friends and acquaintances in the borderland of El Paso/Juárez.
Chang Chin: Yes, yes.

Pat: Well, I guess our children are older so it doesn’t matter. Although I also heard people say that there are good schools in the east side as well. Do you have a lot of Lao-Mo children in school here?

May: No. It is really different [from east side.] Like when I went to visit [her son’s] school [here in the west side] last time, there were almost no Lao-Mo children in the class over here. It is because my husband needs to go work in Juárez [through Zaragoza bridge.] Otherwise, I would have moved to the westside a long time ago.

As the conversation focused on various topics from residential area choices, living quality, to the makeup of students, Pat told us about her daughter who currently works in Houston having difficulty finding a spouse.

May: {to Pat} What would you say if your daughter wants to marry to a Lao-Wai?

Pat: Lao-Wai… hmmm… Whites are okay, I guess. Well, my daughter was telling me that she’ll bring a black boyfriend back next time.

I looked up at Pat from eating and frowned as Chang Chin cut into the conversation.

Chang Chin: When I was working on my part-time job in a restaurant, one day, a Korean woman came in with a black baby. I was surprised by her holding a black baby. I mean, it was just very odd, {her eyebrows risen} I cannot describe my feeling, but my body just did not feel right.

Li-Ning: {To Pat} Then you just need to purchase those dolls, you know you can buy black dolls… {interrupted by Pat}
**Pat:** Yeah, yeah yeah. We had two black dolls in our apartment and I put them on the couch, and my daughter saw them and said “Take them away, take them away, I cannot stand seeing them there.”

**Li-Ning:** Yeah, ask your daughter to hold them, and I promise you that after that, she will be afraid and won’t [marry a black person.]

**Pat:** Well, she was just joking around with me. She won’t do it. But you know, it is not easy to find someone even though you work here [in the U.S.]. There are so many races in America, so it is difficult since there are fewer options. It is not like in Taiwan, everyone is the same race.

**May:** Lao-Bai are pretty good, Lao-Hei are scary. My [five-year-old] daughter’s teacher told me the other day that my daughter has a boyfriend. So I told my husband. My husband’s first reaction was “Hei de hi shi Bai de (of black or of white)?” {laugh}

**Li-Ning:** Our Eric has a little girl that he likes. He would even bring her flowers. {laugh}

“What the hell do I say to them?” I said to myself while looking down silently. I wasn’t close to them. Did they feel funny about what was just said? How do I insert questions to arouse self-critiquing in this friendly gathering? What kind of atmosphere would it turn to if I asked what was wrong for a Korean lady to have a (half) black baby? Is it possible for me to not offend or degrade these women, especially since two of them had made comments about envying me being able to get around in the U.S. by myself because I speak English? Would I show disrespect or make Li-Ning lose face for having an impolite guest? I wish my colleagues were here to help me out. I wish I knew better!

Much regret and uncertainty about my utterance and gestures occurred as the conversation kept moving on without my voiced interruption. I let the conversation pass...
by without saying a word or looking at anyone. “They might see my objection” I tried to comfort myself, not knowing what impact my (inter)action had on these women. The conversation bounced along happily with(out) me. I awoke from a stupor. The conversation moved to dating.

**Pat:** Girls do not need to get too much education. You send her to a good university and graduate school. After she is married, isn’t she still just a housewife, the same as us? So why invest so much? {laugh}

**Li-Ning:** Well, the most important thing for a woman is to find a long-term ticket for meals. {laugh}

**Pat:** Although, on the other hand, she needs to go to a better school since it is easier to find someone better in a good university.

Li-Ning suddenly shouted and asked “What time is it?” She took a look at the clock and immediately jumped up. “It is 3:30 p.m., I have to go to pick up my son. Well, that is as far as I dare to drive to,” she laughed and grabbed the key.

While she was running out of the door, Pat and Chang Chin commented on how Li-Ning has been practicing her driving more now that their house is so far out in the Franklin Mountains. As we were waiting, the phone rang. Pat said that she did not want to answer it, for she feared it to be in English. Chang Chin told me that maybe we should let the answering machine pick up and she prepared to leave for her daughter. After more than six rings, I told them that they might not have an answering machine on so I answered the phone. It turned out to be Li-Ning who started “I knew you people were not going to pick up right away.” She laughed and continued “Could you please tell Chang Chin to bring the bag of *nei gua*, I prepared for her, home for her family since I may not
be back before she leaves”? I agreed and grabbed the bag from the fridge for Chang Chin before she left.

I remained in the mixed feelings of anger, frustration, admiration, and sympathy. I was extremely concerned about the oppressive ideologies being promoted and perpetuated in the actions of words and thoughts in daily conversations. At the same time, I came to understand as wives of the MNC managers, each woman sacrificed her previous life and career with much courage to face the new life in which anxiety permeated all daily activities such as answering the phone. I was mad with myself for not having known/ tried to communicate with them about my concerns. I was at the same time ambivalent about casting myself to the role of “teaching them to think right.” Soon, Li-Ning came home with Eric, who immediately went to the kitchen for almond cookies and milk. Eric and his younger brother then occupied the living room for cartoons, which many Taiwanese/ Chinese mothers repeatedly affirmed its effectiveness for their children to improve their English with.

As we started to bag nei gau to bring home, May saw an empty vase on a shelf and said “Li-Ning, put some flowers in it so your husband won’t have an affair.” “Huh”? Lin-Ning responded with a confused expression. “Don’t you know that? It is a mythical practice to not have an empty vase to invite other flowers in.” Then Li-Ning said “Oh, no wonder my husband recently kept bringing sauces from work, you know, the sauces that the Mexican people eat. He brought some back the first time before Thanksgiving and then again for Christmas. I joked about him being so popular recently.” May said “You said that to him”? “No! How would I dare to say that in front of his face? I was just
venting here with you, that’s all.” We laughed while May said “See, don’t keep any vase empty in your house to keep away wild flowers.”

It was almost five o’clock in the afternoon, which was the time for many wives to start preparing dinner before their husbands returned from work. We thanked Li-Ning for her hospitality. May dropped off Pat and me before picking up her daughter from the daycare where she goes after preschool. I brought nei gau to Jen’s apartment. She had to miss our gathering in order to drive Mandy to and from preschool during the early afternoon.

The gathering opened a safe-space for these wives and mothers to grumble about their husbands, chat about their views toward life, share their hopes for their children, and forming support. Most conversations dealt with new strategies of best caring for their husbands and skirted around these wives’ somewhat insecure feelings about living in El Paso/Juárez with limited knowledge of English or Spanish. Rarely having direct contact with people outside their husband’s contact, these occasional cooking gatherings are precious, as Li-Ning expressed how these meetings provided her with the opportunity for friendship. Through learning to prepare, making, and eating foods, they not only satisfied their need to have friends and an outlet for comfortable interactions, they further acquired skills to please their family, which is the highest priority in their lives in El Paso. Hence, these gatherings were legitimized since they were not merely self-beneficial activities. Their family members enjoyed the gained knowledge as well.

Yet, what was exchanged and learned during these meetings carried other impacts. As van Dijk, Ting-Toomey, Smitherman and Troutman (1997) wrote, “the ways members of one ethnic group speak among each other are of course related to their position in
society, and how they are spoken to and spoken about by dominant group members” (p. 145). Our daily conversations and discourse shape and mold our experiences with other ethnic groups. van Dijk et al. further indicated that “they” are often portrayed as “difference, threat, and deviance” to “us” during prejudiced discourse. The talk over lunch at Li-Ning’s home revealed how these Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists discussed ethnic minorities from their own positions as a non-white minority in the U.S. The evaluations and reactions of “us” being threatened by the other ethnic minority “them” suggest the pervasiveness of the fluid racist comments crossing various ethnic discourses. As particular racial groups being classified as more desirable for them to marry or interact with during their culturing in El Paso/Juárez, my friends again deployed a strategic (dis)articulation in determining whom they are willing to become. That is, certain positions were privileged for acquisition in the process of becoming for these newcomers and their family members.

Further, such talks and ideas may very well continue to be disseminated via technological means of communication as many spent much time on the Internet to communicate with one’s family members and friends beyond the locality of El Paso. In other words, stories shared and information exchanged was not confined to the physical space of the dinner table or even El Paso. These women’s role is more than merely caregiver. In an anthology that Chaudhuri and Strobel (1992) edited, the roles of Western women as both complicit and resistant traveled with their missionary husbands to previous colonies were interrogated. Their viewpoints had an impact on their surroundings through daily interactions or segregations from the local environments. Their thoughts were shared in the diaries or letters to their native lands during the
nineteenth to early twentieth-century. At the borderland of El Paso/Juárez, my female
friends and acquaintances who followed their husband to this land, with the aid of
technology, disseminate knowledge and practices in faster-than-ever speed and scope that
impacted people physically close as well as far away from them.

*Stay Away From Them: “The problem is …they don’t want to improve.”*

These rather new (im)migrants strategically determined their residential location
based on what they perceived as better school districts and surroundings for their young
children. Being at the El Paso and Juárez borderland, Li-Ning and Chang Chin decided to
stay in the Coronado area “where it really is American-style” with rich white residents.
This area is different from the Lowery Valley or the Second Ward for those are more like
the Mexican section (as quoted in Vila, 2000, p. 62). The influence of a housing location
projects the kinds of friends and even future partners the Chinese/Taiwanese
transnationalists’ children would have. These children would grow a particular taste
closely linked to their frequent interactions and learning within certain social fields.
These parents position their family with particular types of neighbors, restaurants to visit,
lifestyle and sociality within which they would cultivate familiarity or dispositions—a
particular “*habitus*, understood as a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which,
integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions,
appreciations, and actions* and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified
tasks,” as Bourdieu (1977) explained (italics original, pp. 82-3). That is, these parents
selected an environment where they and their children would be accustomed to
distinctive ways of living in El Paso.
However for some, even the Coronado neighborhood in El Paso is not good enough for their children regardless of its perceived “higher cultural” level or better educational resources. To them, El Paso overall is not an ideal habitat. In a conversation after Christmas, Kim shared with me her concerns for her children growing up with people in El Paso/Juárez for the prevalent atmosphere and cultural practice such as marital attitudes.

**Kim:** This [El Paso] is not a good place to raise children. Better to leave here if it is possible.

**Me:** How so?

**Kim:** There is too much temptation here. [Our] children’s friends only want to party all day long. They all want to get married at such a young age with their high school sweet hearts. I mean it is very difficult for parents to pull the children out when all their friends are like that. It is very tiring and powerless for the parents to keep the children motivated if none of her friends are pursuing a goal, or to go to college. If the child is surrounded with friends who all want to go to college, and all want to be somewhere, then there is no need for parents to work hard to encourage the child to go to college and to work hard.

**Me:** I guess this may happen in other places such as Midwestern area as well.

**Kim:** {silence} I remember sending my child to kindergarten when he was five. I met one of his classmate’s mother who was only 21 years old. So that means she had the kid when she was sixteen! {gasp with her eyes wide open} Then she asked me whether I had gone to college. I had to count how many years it was since I graduated from college. I had never been asked such a question before. {laughs} The educational resources are so convenient and opportunities are so abundant in America, they can definitely make it if
they want to. But the problem is that they don’t. They don’t want to improve. {shrug her shoulders with arms jutting out and around} I mean I have never seen a place with services to help a parent with their children so that [the parent] can go back to finish up their high school education. I mean, geez, that was something new! How novel [that question] is. I believe they can make it as long as they work hard. It is simply like this here. In American society, it will depend on you to work hard and to want to get somewhere.

It was not the only time during my stay in El Paso that I heard comments about how Lao-Mao refuse to engage in meritorious behaviors, therefore becoming less successful collective individuals in such a resourceful and equal society. Marital relationship was often used as the exemplar in characterizing this failure of personal control. Mama Gau shared with me her understandings of people’s practices in El Paso/Juárez:

[The Mexicans] are more… less likely to be on-time, they are less likely to keep their words. This is their drawback. Also, they act recklessly in their marital relationships. Plus, they often give birth to many children, five, six, seven, and eight children so many that your head would explode after hearing about it. But they all give birth prior to marriage at around 17 or 18 years old. They all get married because the child is on the way but then they have a divorce after three or four years and marry a second wife. The other day, an employee of the supermarket came across to our store. She told me that she has been working there for fourteen years. So I asked her “Do you live here or over there?” She said “I live in Juárez over there in
Mexico. My 2nd husband lives in El Paso, and my 3rd husband lives in Juárez.” When she mentioned the 2nd and 3rd marriage, it seemed all very natural and delightful. {laughs} It would be “Good Heavens!” for us to marry to a second man, not to mention marrying the 3rd one. Their kind of marital relationship… I mean although they talk about valuing family very much, I wonder how their marital relationship can be so chaotic. I cannot understand it. They often tell me that for them, their families come first, so then their job comes in 2nd. So I often doubt why then their divorce rate can be as high as it is.

From these conversations, Mexican cultures and its peoples were evaluated unidimensionally and labeled as strange and even replete with undesirable behaviors and practices. However, it is not to suggest that my friends did not appreciate or incorporate some Mexican cultural perspective in their quotidian being and doing. As Estella explained to me how

Mexicans have many values that are quite similar to those of Chinese. Like for Lao-Mei, they would send their parents to nursing homes when they get old and they would not live with their parents. But Mexicans will not be like that, especially Mexicans here [at the border,] many families live with their old parents and care for them. Like there are many in our company, some of their parents are quite old and they live with them. [Their parents] have some illnesses, of course, older people have more sickness and you would often hear them say “Uh, I have to be absent next week to take my mother to check her health.” Or that “My mother is in the
hospital and I will have to go visit her.” These situations are very common in Mexico. So it is really quite similar to us.

The merit of valuing family and showing care for one’s parents was deemed as positive to my friends. Yet, it is understood in relation to the Chinese practice of filial piety such as avoiding sending one’s elderly parents to nursing homes. In other words, the Chinese way in terms of being deferential to one’s parents was centered as the default performance. The Mexican culture was praised for its similarity to this superior way of treating one’s elderly.

In my transnational friends’ culturing process via dwelling and traveling on the borderlands of El Paso/Juárez, they often engaged in comparing and contrasting between Chinese, Mexican, and American ways of living and behaving in order to sort out or create more appropriate and desirable ideas and demeanors. Although such practices might have brought a sense of certainty to their unfamiliarity with the new environment, these comparisons inevitably perpetuated and further reduced vastly complex and heterogeneous cultural traditions into one or two fixated essences. These essentialized traits were then viewed as unchanging entities being further leveled hierarchically. This order then was revealed in and enacted upon during people’s everyday decisions such as choosing which residential areas, whom to befriend with, what social activities to engage in, or even which kinds of food to acquire a taste for.

For example, I had only two visits to Mexican restaurants in El Paso with my Chinese/Taiwanese transnational friends. I initiated both visits. However, I was treated to dining places such as Cattleman Steak House, Red Lobster, Olive Garden, or Tony Roma’s many times. Leeds-Hurwitz (1993) argued that different foods symbolize various
identities such as one’s ethnicity, geographic regions as well as social class. The choice of Italian restaurants over Mexican cuisines may symbolize a particular type of taste as tastes are culturally as well as socially shaped and controlled.

During my stay, there were discussions amongst people I knew aimed at producing actions or solutions to potential “problems” or “threats.” These concerns were about the large population of Mexican people and their cultural influence in this borderland where the transnationalists’ children are learning and becoming the interface between future global power holders. Even Kim who resided in the whitest area expressed the necessity to eventually move away from the Mexican-U.S. border in order to avoid what they perceived as an undesirable cultural prevalence such as marriage or childbirth at a young age. For others, different strategies may be invented and engaged in. As a devoted Christian, Mary relies on lessons in the Bible to foster her children’s character in performing adequately as a Chinese female living in the borderlands of El Paso/Juárez.

An Interface or Forever Outsider?

During our conversation on the elements she deemed imperative to teach her young daughters who moved to El Paso, Mary explained the importance of gaining more familiarity with traditional Chinese activities.

Mary: … And of course, it would be better if they can know more about Chinese stuff…. As for other parts, I think they are all taught in the Bible.

Me: And you mentioned about some Chinese stuff. What would be some of the examples besides the language?
Mary: Oh, the purpose for me to encourage them now to have more interests and understanding of Chinese stuff is that… because in the future, people are gradually becoming very curious about Chinese stuff. I feel that if they know a little bit more about it, it will help them to let others understand or for them… I mean if they know something like… che ling, Chinese toys, or those Chinese tricks, if they know a little bit, I feel it will help them to be friends with others in this country. They can have something that others do not know.

Me: Ah.

Mary: So I hope, I don’t want them to just become exactly and completely the same as Americans and let go off their identity because no matter how they change, they still have yellow skin right? They are still different from others. Didn’t people say that those of the Asian decent here [in the U.S.] still end up hanging out with peoples of Asian decent?

Me: Yeah? What do you feel about that statement?

Mary: It is true. I heard the same thing from many others. Like one of my classmates [in Seattle.] I told you before about her son who had no confidence in himself for being different and then later went to learn tai-kwon-do. He gained so much confidence in himself as a teacher, many Lao-Wei including adults have to bow to him as their master. {laughs} She said even though he is actually an American Born Chinese [who grew up in the U.S.], he still plays with people of Asian decent. He cannot really speak Chinese and either can his friends [of Chinese descent]. They all speak in English. They hang out together but not really with others. I mean that there are no Americans among their

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7 Che ling (扯鈴) is a toy for children to juggle. Sometimes referred to as a top, one tosses the toy back and forth on a string with sticks until the top spins so fast that it hums and balances on the string. Che ling is one of the cultural objects/activity that Chi-Ai Chinese Language School incorporated into their curriculum in learning about Chinese culture.
friends, which is strange… but, well, I suppose there may be Americans [he is friends with] but it is just that he is not going to be in the group with them.

Mary explicated the benefits of learning Chinese toys or tricks in order to attract more “American” friends who do not look like Asians. In particular, as “Chinese” culture is becoming more and more popular in the United States while China is becoming more globally influential, knowledge of Chinese practices perceived as “authentic” becomes increasingly desirable. Such a view revealed how one would benefit from cultivating one’s “Chineseness”. Acquiring the skills in performing the Chinese language and ancient practices was deemed advantageous in this foreign land. Further, this (per)formed identity would offer opportunities in drawing more “American” friendships.

Along with absorbing new cultural knowledge, equipping Taiwanese/Chinese children with Chinese cultural practices in the U.S. to enhance their social circles may suggest the complicity of “self-Orientalizing” in pleasing or gaining recognition and appreciation (Ong, 1993, 1999a). However, such a practice might also be interpreted as what Scott (1990) described as how the less privileged act along with the “official transcripts.” That is, by performing “Chinese tricks” for the mainstream U.S. society where Chinese culture is objectified for consumption, self-interests such as being accepted to the dominant group are served.

In other words, my friends make efforts in simultaneously cultivating cultural practices engaged in both Taiwan/China and the United States. For example, both Autumn Festival and Thanksgiving were celebrated. Children are encouraged to learn both Mandarin and English. Such a strategy caters to a possible entry into the mainstream U.S. society where Chinese practices are gaining more popularity.
Driven by the logic of usefulness and utmost interests, my friends live and travel on the borderland of El Paso/Juárez constantly tailor their identities through articulating or disarticulating themselves with particular cultural performance in accordance with the assumed future global arrangement. Mary explicated how her children may very well work in China according to its current speed of growth. Thus, they will be positioned “in the middle of [Lao Wei and Chinese] and therefore, some efforts need to be made. In addition to their professional knowledge, they need to work a bit on the cultural aspect.”

Regardless of their efforts in cultural practices such as partaking in “(white) American” holiday celebrations, acquiring (white) American dispositions, and negotiating principles in Christianity and Confucianism, and learning to perform “Chineseness,” most of my friends were clear on one reality. That is, it is impossible for them as non-white persons to be included in the mainstream white society. It does not matter where they choose to live or how hard they learn English, my friends were acutely aware that a yellow skinned person will not be embraced by the mainstream American society which was perceived to be a white society.

When Ms. Liang shared her experiences in the U.S. as someone who knew little English, she concluded her story by saying “I don’t expect to really mix into the mainstream lifestyle here. It is impossible to melt into the American society. Never! It is never possible. Our language is not good enough, and cultural background is different. For example, when we hang out with Chinese people and it only takes two words to express our thoughts perfectly and we would all laugh without the need to explain. It is

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8 Please refer to Chapter three in which spaces such as El Paso are understood and demarcated in relating to other spaces such as China, Taiwan, the United States, and Mexico. Thus, the kind of cultural practices chosen to be engaged in and the kinds of purposes they would serve are to be interconnected to the dynamic and complex transnational relationships in which my friends are located.
the same. Lao-Mei talk two sentences and then they all go ‘Ha Ha Ha Ha.’ I don’t know why they laugh and it is not appropriate to always ask people to explain for me, right? So even though I’m learning English now, I don’t think it will ever be possible [for me] to blend in. I only hope to have a healthy body, a harmonious family with enough food and money. It is then enough for me. I have few close Chinese friends, like working here with Mrs. and Mr. Gau who are really nice and our relationship as employers and employees is really good. So I am content.”

**Mimicry Power of Resistance or of Complicity?**

On a December Monday morning, Mary called me to check on my health after I had been ill for couple of days. Over the phone, she told me that Frank’s mother came from Boston to visit and planned to stay until after Christmas. We started to chat about how many Chinese and Taiwanese people we know live in Boston. It was then that Mary told me about her friend who moved to Boston from Taiwan more than twenty-years ago. She said

My friend’s next-door neighbor in Boston is also a Chinese family. I remember she had told me that she would never interact with any Chinese/Taiwanese in America. When she first came to America, she had a very difficult time and there was no Chinese/Taiwanese willing to offer help. So she was very mad at Chinese people, maybe that was why she did not want to hang out with Chinese. But then it is very difficult [not to interact with Chinese]. Well, it is almost impossible to get into the *white people’s* [italics added] circle. It is impossible to get in. She probably gave up and finally ended up hanging out with Chinese after all. {laugh} For
you young people who come here to study it may be a different story. [It would be] a lot easier, I guess. Those Lao-Wei would talk about their history, politics, or some football games. It is impossible for us older people to engage in a conversation with them. Our language ability is not good enough, not to mention knowing about those [historical or current] events.

After hanging up the phone, I was stuck by the perceived difficulty as well as the desire for being included in “the white people’s circle.” I recalled the young man in Seattle that Mary had mentioned earlier, who had finally made friends and gained confidence through practicing and instructing *tai-kwon-do* even the Lao-Wei. His grouping with those of similar appearance was interpreted as being excluded, or not completely accepted by the dominant society. Mary had concluded a slim possibility for a yellow-skinned person raised in the U.S. to be embraced by the U.S. mainstream society. Perhaps that adds to why Mary would encourage her daughters to retain some Chineseness in becoming more mobile in various societies in the future. It could also be the logic buttressing Wen-He’s hope for his daughters to become the interface between two cultural worlds with the capability of interacting with both as a hybrid cultural-being mixed with Americaness as well as Chineseness growing up in the El Paso-Juárez borderlands.9

However, the young *tai-kwon-do* master might have chosen to group with those similar to him in various aspects instead of striving to be accepted in the predominantly

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9 These labels are employed here for a figurative sense in describing particularly the kind of cultural identities being acquired and performed. The issue of naming or describing what “Americaness” or “Chineseness” is or whether such things exist is beyond the discussion of this research. This research is interested in illustrating the process of becoming an American or/and a Chinese as accomplished through various strategic legal and cultural practices.
white groups. In other words, being included by white Americans might not have been as important of goal to those who grew up in the U.S. as to some of the recent arrivals. It is this indeterminacy that resists to conform in which Bhabha’s (1994) idea of “almost the same but not quite” might serve in subverting the meaning of being Chinese/American in United States at this time (p. 86).

Literature critic Mary Pratt (1994, 1999) borrowed Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz’s term *transculturation* to stress the agency of the marginalized groups in inventing and selecting strategically from materials transmitted to them by the dominant or metropolitan forces. Pratt (1999) explained such a term exceeds the “reductive concepts of acculturation and assimilation used to characterize culture under conquest” (p. 4). When people with different forces make contact, a space in which “subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other” is created (Pratt, 1992, p. 7). With transcultural translators speaking to both groups of unbalanced power as Pratt argued, merges and infiltrations would occur due to strategic negotiation by such agents. That is, they possess the ability to speak in both tongues to invert and challenge the unbalanced power structure. The potential possibility for these hybrid Taiwanese and Chinese youth who are positioned in various social fields of “structuring and structured structures,” in Bourdieu’s sense may recognize the force of their agency and choose to speak against harmful constructions such as racial superiority and gender hierarchy. The unknown task remains as to whether this generation will speak against forces of dominance and subjugation, and strategically subvert the authoritative structures with being the camouflaged mimicry. Or they may grow up choosing to participate in perpetuating practices such as promoting historical determinism and class stratification as
cosmopolitan complicit as what Ahmad (1995) had reminded the postcolonial intelligentsia.

**New Space, New Start, New Identities, New Possibilities**

As parents, my transnationalist friends in El Paso offered their children what they perceived to be the most beneficial arrangement for their children who emigrated from Taiwan or China to El Paso. Crossing the Pacific Ocean and through numerous checks and examinations, settling down in El Paso symbolized a calm space full of hopes and possibilities—A new beginning. As Mama Gau lamented, “It is piteous to be Taiwanese, for we are like duckweed without any roots. We only hope that our children would grow old here [in America] where they can grow their roots early.” Life in El Paso is seen as an unspoiled page for many of my transnational Chinese/Taiwanese friends. Particularly to the next generation where the wounded and difficult past is no longer important as Mr. Lee commented in several occasions that “We’re now in a free country, let’s forget those unhappy events [such as the 228 event and White terror era] in the past.” When asked to share his response to the parable on the fall of the tower in Siloam in Book of Luke 13, Mr. Lee expressed that “We need not to dwell in the past event. Instead, we ought to forget the past and repent for the future.” The relocation to El Paso represents a starting space being crafted to nurture cultural identities for the global future in which our foci ought to locate.

As Kraidy (2005) argued, the concept of hybridity itself is the logic of globalization replete with mobility; however, the crucial task is to discuss the capability or incapability that groups could change their social conditions with cultural hybridities. That is, whether one’s cultural hybridity serves as agency in changing one’s inhabits is

10 Please refer to Chapter two for more information on these events.
not guaranteed. The process of my friends’ culturing their offspring into hybrid identity of an interface between two perceived future powers led by the United States and China had started in the borderland of El Paso and Juárez and it may form a kind of transcultural Chinese consciousness. Agents with such consciousness are now becoming more economically as well as culturally vocal than ever. Such consciousness of becoming “almost the same but not quite” to the U.S. dominant ideology may have the potential to serve as a resisting force in countering the western imperial power. Yet, it may be enacted to serve self-interests in joining or even directing the imperial force.

Ong (1999a) explicated the racist logic on immigration in the United States where new Asian immigrants are positioned into either side of the “black versus white” continuum. The much celebrated model-minorities such as Chinese, Koreans, and Sino-Vietnamese for their “Confucian values” with the “‘can-do’ attitudes closer to the white ideal standards of American citizenship” (p. 272) are embraced as the white Asian according to this logic. Ong critiqued that such a citizen-making process bifurcates the “darkened underclass” Asian newcomers such as those from Cambodians or Indonesians and the otherwise “whitened ideal” ones such as most of my Taiwanese and Chinese friends.

Inspired by Kim, communication researcher Kawai (2005) wrote that “Asian Americans have been racially triangulated with African Americans and White Americans. . . [as the model minority, they are] positioned to be superior to African Americans [while being] ostracized as immutably foreign in comparison with White Americans” (p. 117). Thus, discourse on the Asian Americans as model minority who are able to assimilate may be perceived as the “public transcripts,” while posing them as the
forever outsiders for the incommeasurable difference to the mainstream U.S. society in the dominant’s “hidden transcripts” (Scott, 1990). My transnational friends in El Paso understood both official and hidden transcripts. By participating in strategies such as publicly complying to border patrollers, gaining U.S. citizenship, celebrating Thanksgiving, converting to Christianity, acquiring cultural capitals from the dominant lifestyle, and striving to become more “authentic” Chinese; they followed the official story in gaining security and acceptance to the power holders for making their lives easier. Meanwhile, as non-white newcomers, they made certain that their second generation retain their Chineseness while acquiring English and Spanish language skills, and cultural knowledge with an acute awareness of the impossibility or scarce interests to be accepted completely by the mainstream Americans. In the minds of these Chinese and Taiwanese transnationalists, the future world belongs to and will be dominated by both China and the United States. Their reactions to discourses subjugating them as model minority and forever outsiders are strategic, which include to cultivate their future generations to the utmost flexibility and elastic positions by becoming familiar with cultural practices practiced by two dominant groups in their mundane dwelling and traveling—their quotidian culturing on the borderlands.
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

Ending as the Beginning

After six-months of fieldwork living/(re)searching in the border area of El Paso-Juárez, I packed up and flew out at the end of February, 2005. Prior to my departure, I visited or phoned to express my gratitude to all my friends who had allowed me into their lives. New events occur even though I am not there to record or process them. Mama Gau was busy searching for the person who stole her purse, who later returned it to the same spot less some cash and her son’s Green Card. Mary began to give her daughter rides to driving school everyday. Jen had registered for ESL courses finally as Wen-He figured out a financially manageable way to look after their younger daughter—his mother was on the way to El Paso from Taiwan. Estella continued to work long hours while contemplating a return to Taiwan to settle down for a possible marriage opportunity. I was getting excited to return to my long-time partner in Ohio and sort out all the stories I had logged.

It has been almost a year since my return to Ohio, and I am finally arriving at the conclusion of what I learned from culturing with this community. I recalled being asked, at an academic conference prior to my departure, about which culture I was to study during my fieldwork. Granted that culture constantly produces and is being produced through communication, the implication of such a question lies in understanding not only what, but also how cultural meanings are shared and constructed strategically by the group of Taiwanese and Chinese people in this particular temporal and spatial conjuncture as transnational agents. That is, I came to understand their daily culturing processes as living in between and traveling across both physical (i.e., nation-state
borders) as well as spiritual (i.e., religious and various social dispositions) boundaries.
These processes of becoming are to be related to the global realpolitik, specifically the relations between Taiwan, China, Mexico, and the U.S., in which my friends adopt various corresponding and pre-emptive interventions of strategies.

In this concluding portion, I attempt to succinctly present the key interpretations, with biases, from my (selective) participating in and observing and interpreting the lived experiences of these transnationalists. My belief is that any generated knowledge/understanding needs to be responsible by engaging in relevant disciplinary discussions and so I then provide several implications of this research. Knowledge is representations produced within the realm of unbalanced relations (Said, 1978). In the final part of this chapter, I narrate my various positionings in relation to my journey of conducting and constructing this ethnography as an intermission to this project.

**What Have I Learned?**

There is no innocent observer or participant who exists outside the hegemonic social structures (Behar, 1996). As discussed in the first two chapters, I went into the fieldwork with a perspective that the culturing processes were accomplished through dwelling and traveling in this de-territorizing time. Thus, I assumed my transnational friends experienced culturing processes in their mobile lifestyle. However, I did not know what kind of dynamics would accompany such processes. Nor did I understand the crucial elements as my friends’ (per)formed an understanding of these dynamics. More specifically, I was insensitive and ignorant to what kinds of forces there would be in driving these transnationalists’ culturing processes; what kinds of strategies they would invent or enact to redirect various historical, socio-economical, and geopolitical forces;
and what may be the ramifications of these strategic actions. I returned with not a coherent, but a contradictory understanding.

Writing here and now about my experiences of living with these Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists, I came to learn of the centrality of the global spatial relationships in daily interactions in the El Paso-Juárez borderland. As discussed in Chapter three, my friends’ understandings toward themselves and their lives as newcomers to this border space are derived from the hierarchically arranged spatial identities between the U.S., Mexico, Taiwan, and China. With the legacy of imperialism as described in Chapter two, El Paso is understood as a space of “unauthentic” America. However, it is also seen as a much more convenient space with a better quality of living compared to Taiwan, China, and Juárez. On a symbolic level, China represents an unlimited hopeful space that will join the U.S. as a dominant world leader while Taiwan stands for a narrow and desperate path. Many of my friends from Taiwan hold a rather pessimistic outlook for their home nation by describing it as “a fragile egg” juxtaposing it to the boulder-like China within the global conditions.

Since the meanings of places are politically (re)negotiated and (re)constructed throughout the history of colonial and imperialistic dominance (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 1995, 1999a, 1999b), the legacy of these spatial identities had a great impact on my friends’ outlook toward their senses of being/becoming. They understood their current lives in relation to the perceived geopolitical relations, specifically between their various homes—Taiwan, China, and El Paso/Juárez. Further, this spatial hierarchy is connected to all aspects of the place including its peoples, cultural values, and other parts of life.
Since I intended to learn more about my friends’ culturing processes during their constant traveling/dwelling in-between places, I focused on writing about particular experiences, activities, or knowledge they deemed worthwhile to share. In Chapter four, narratives on traveling through various borders were shared with connections to the larger contexts in which these crossings took place. From these stories, an overall strategy of “crossing” emerged. Working within the understanding of future global spatial arrangement and the current local/global events in mind, most of my cosmopolitan friends knew to always comply with the officials who hold the power of determining their and their family members’ traveling as well as dwelling. Such a decision was often based on weighing the consequences of issuing challenges. In order to successfully upgrade one’s legal status in the U.S. (e.g., from B1/2 to H1; H1/L1 to PR with Green Cards; PR to citizenship), staying silent and keeping a low profile was deemed imperative. Complying does not necessarily mean admitting one’s wrong doing or agreeing with the officers. It simply is a strategy of acting as docile on the surface to prevent repercussions. In addition, making inquires to those successfully upgraded Chinese/Taiwanese Americans facilitated one’s chances to cumulate the utmost mobility. However, I am not making claims such as the Chinese or Taiwanese transnationalists all enact the same strategies in the same way at all times to cultivate their identities. For such conclusions are not only unconvincing but dangerously homogenizing of a vastly heterogeneous group. I have tried to illustrate the different experiences and outlooks expressed in my limited amount of transnational friends from Taiwan and China to underscore the various kinds of agency different actors have in their being mobile to cross boundaries.
In Chapter five, I delineated the ways in which the spatial hierarchy discussed in Chapter three served as the undercurrent logic in my friends’ participating in communicative events. From these activities, particular cultural knowledges were cultivated and various conventional and novel meanings were integrated. However, I argued that they were strategically hybridized rather than naturally or neutrally intermixed in their becoming of “an interface.” I view this culturing process from Hall’s theory on understanding identity as various (dis)articulated positionalities under socio-economical as well as political forces. For example, selective Confucian practices such as filial piety was congruently connected to Christianity, the supposedly non-Chinese tradition, in order to achieve the Chinese legitimate status in American Christianity. However, when it comes to all true Christians being equal, Confucianism was discarded as non-civilized for it values social stratifications. In a similar vein, select American practices were performed to fashion cultural identity. Choices of cuisine and activities during holidays celebrated in mainstream U.S. society implied a kind of lifestyle to acquire. Other strategies such as acquiring the perceived dominant languages skills, the preferred direct and straightforward communication style, and interacting with selective social groups are part of the process of my friends’ positioning and becoming in readying themselves and their next generations for the future global condition.

Almost all of my Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists friends view themselves as passive players in the unavoidable current of history and global realpolitik. Lacking the desirable future with prosperity, stability, and dignity in their former habitat, they seek one safe shell after another until they feel the most secure and stable. They rode the current of transnational political and economical arrangements to El Paso/Juárez,
which to many is a temporary safeguard until the next current comes along. Their
whimsical view toward the global environment drives them to be ready to move when
they see an opportunity. However, they are not complete victims for they chose to
cultivate themselves in becoming hybrid cultural beings by accumulating various social
capitals (i.e., dominant cultural beliefs, cosmopolitan dispositions) for future
competitions. Nevertheless, while they are articulating various positionings, they stay
alert to protect themselves by recognizing the long-term as well as short-term authority
holders and strategically complying to the demands of those. The tactic to observe the
macro-environment for adjusting micro-behaviors is a mundane practice (per)formed in
all aspects of our quotidian lives while traveling and dwelling in between various borders.

In order to explicitly address the research questions for this ethnographic study, I
provide my key interpretations on how these Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists
understand their culturing experiences on the border of El Paso and Juárez as well as how
living on and crossing over borders is comprehended and negotiated. The unique location
of the El Paso and Juárez borderlands is significant to my friends’ making sense of who
they are. In other words, through (re)constructing the spatial identities of El Paso, TX in
relation to those of Taiwan, China, and Juárez, the Taiwanese and Chinese
transnationalists were able to explain their lives on this land. That is, in order to survive
and excel in the present and future global condition, relocating to El Paso was beneficial
to them and their family members. Positioning El Paso in a spatial hierarchy, my friends
are therefore able to decide how to interact with various groups on this border area. As
frequent travelers and residents of the borderland, the Taiwanese and Chinese
transnationalists constantly encounter novel experiences, generate new understandings,
and integrate various perspectives. That is, my friends are culturing while traveling and living in between nation-states. This culturing process includes all new knowledge experienced and gained from, for example, one’s interactions with border officers, applying for more legal status, acquiring tastes to foods and home decorations, and performing Christian rituals.

For this research, I also intended to understand the kinds of strategies being invented and/or enacted in the Taiwanese and Chinese’s culturing processes at the El Paso and Juárez borderlands. By forming a community based on Religion such as Chinese church groups or on Occupation such as homemakers, my friends are able to provide support and pragmatic information for one another. Through engaging in social activities such as rituals in church, cooking gatherings, and holiday celebrations, cultural knowledge and practices are cultivated. By cultural knowledge and practices, I mean the dominant ideologies such as believing in the great success comes after individual efforts, associating with those who speak “correct” English, and partaking in local activities, for example, shopping the day after Thanksgiving. Moreover, these ideologies are integrated with their beliefs in Confucianism. Hence, my friends are able to congruently cultivate hybrid identities in intermixing various cultural practices and beliefs (i.e., Americanness and Chineseness), particularly for the next generation.

**Engaging in the Conversations of the Field of Culture and Communication**

Cultural communication scholars Collier, M., Fitch, K., Hall, B. and Lee, W. S explained that studying culture and communication from a communicative perspective would underscore the fact that “culture is always marked as inherently tied to all communicative activities,” which demonstrate the performance of culture wherein people
“make sense of their world, coordinate activities, and negotiated their identities” (B. Hall, personal communication, September 10, 2004). This ethnographic research paid special attention to the kinds of communicative activities being (dis)engaged in as well as the ways they were (per)formed.

Lu (2001) stressed in her ethnographic study at a Chicago Chinese language school that it is “the process of negotiating for identifications, not looking for an identity” that ought to be the foci in understanding how the Chinese immigrants strategically adapt to the new life (p. 129). This study illustrated the processes of these Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists’ sense-making and identity negotiating by tracing and mapping the logic of various communicative practices in the mundane (dis)articulating positionalities in relation to the macro-level structures such as nation-state policies and multinational agreements. Striving to be a critical ethnographer, I kept in mind Conquergood’s (1992a) suggestion to rethink how “macro forces of political economy impinge on micro realities of lived experiences” (p. 93).

Further, one of the hopes for this research is to engage in scholarship on Chinese communication, which has established much in our understanding of Chinese/Eastern ways of communicating. Chinese communicative styles are often viewed as oppositional to their Western counterpart as discussed in Chapter one. There seems to be a homogenized perception toward Chinese communication and the values that buttress such behaviors. However, Chinese communication critical scholars such as C. Lum (2004), W. S. Lee (1998a, 1998b), Lee, Chung, Hertel, and Wang (1995), K. Wong (2004) and many others have vigorously complicated the differences within such a uni-dimensional representation. Following their mission, this ethnography described multiple ways of (not)
being Chinese by paying specific attention to the kinds of privileges the agent possesses and the situations and interlocutors she or he might have. Thus, Chineseness as well as Americanness for that matter, is understood as not an essence, but a strategy to serve certain purposes and better position oneself in particular contexts.

The second implication for this ethnography to the scholarship on culture and communication is the rarely heard voices being added to the border studies as a significant research in the era of globalization. As mentioned in Chapter one, experiences of groups other than that of Mexican or Anglo descent have not yet been adequately heard in academe (Vila, 2000, 2002). People came from China to El Paso/Juárez even as early as the 19th century as I described in Chapter two. The Taiwanese and Chinese friends I interacted with are mostly newcomers or second generations of the early Chinese immigrants. Although they may share some of the cultural values the “old-timers” had, their struggles and understandings are divergent particularly for the global changes in political, economical and cultural climate. Thus, the voices of these transnationalists contribute to the borderlands— the space of fluidity, contradictions, and possibilities.

Scholars from various disciplines such as Vila (2000, 2002) as well as Ong and Nonini (1997) cogently argued for the insidious nature of oppression which is not discreetly fixed based on any essence especially in a time of abundant movements. My Chinese and Taiwanese friends as somewhat mobile cosmopolitans living in the United States cannot be categorized as either victims of racial discrimination or oppressive capitalists. Many of them travel with different kinds of material and sociocultural advantages, their positions and privileges are to be contextually analyzed as Lee et al.
(1995) called for “a sociohistorical approach to intercultural communication” through a “laminated process of culture” in detailing layered construction of cultural claims (p. 281). For example, when claiming that the Chinese value Confucianism, it is imperative to examine how differences such as gender and status impact on the way one becomes a particular kind of Confucius Chinese. This study pleaded to historicize and politicize the diverse strategies of being/becoming Chinese as well as Americans. Thus, when Chinese values such as female virtues are highly praised by many of my transnational friends because of its compatibility with that of Christianity practiced by my friends, the historically hierarchical gender relations in Chinese societies are perpetuated. Both Confucianism and Christianity serve as a strategy by the highly mobile transnationalists with much capital to form a hybrid identity preferred by mainstream U.S. society.

Further, Ong and Nonini (1997) had critiqued the scarce scholarly attention paid to the “ethnic chauvinism” (p. 327) performed by the more privileged under globalization. They further cautioned for speculation that this “new Chinese transnational triumphalism” achieved through hybridity and flexibility accumulated by elites with “elements of a reflex racism [that] has now percolated down to nonelite segments of Asian populations, with invidious and harmful effects on mutual understanding in a period of global integration” (p. 329). Thus, this ethnography demonstrated the ways in which these elements of superiority and exclusion are accomplished through quotidian communication with various strategies enacted to cope or excel their positions during their culturing processes on the borderland. As Kraidy (2005) insightfully pointed out, hybridization is the essential logic of globalization. It is never more urgent to examine how this logic is performed with what kinds of impacts and on whose expenses.
**Future Research**

This ethnography hopes to serve the discussions on cultural differences in a multidimensional manner. In today’s world, the primitive imperialistic domination is no longer the doctrine that strives to oppress differences. Rather, differences are exoticized and consumed under cultural pluralism and a more-than-ever adaptive capitalism (Hall, 1997). Challenges remain ahead. Rodriguez (2002) argued that human beings are essentially culturing beings who are constantly negotiating meanings. He asserted that this culturing process has great potential for moral action-takings, for new meanings are reached while describing new experiences and new environments. On the other hand, language can never completely encompass our world full of uncertainty. It is particularly this openness for multiple reasoning in which Rodriguez believed in the possibilities for changes and new interpretations as he stated “[m]eaning and ambiguity are ontologically intertwined…. [W]ithout ambiguity life has no meaning. It is ambiguity that catalyzes and inspires our proclivity for meaning, and through meaning life finds expression and articulation” (pp. 2-3). Hence, one of the tasks is to construct the inclusive languages in describing culture and identities for these concepts themselves are a never-ending process of multiple meanings with conflicts and changes.

Secondly, our current intercultural communication struggles are connected to the violent human history. Scholarship needs to address the ways in which balanced relationships between the local and global could be grounded. Cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1996) articulated the intricate relationships between home and world that human beings exist in. Tuan indicated the catastrophic results for extreme disempowerment or nationalism if balances are not reached. Hall (2000) also pointed out that any temptation
to “essentialize ‘community’ has to be resisted—it is a fantasy of plenitude in circumstances of imagined loss [of] their vertical integration into their traditions of origins exist side-by-side with their lateral linkages to other ‘communities’ of interest, practice and aspiration, real and symbolic” (p. 232). Further investigations may pursue how Taiwanese and Chinese transnational agents travel/dwell in between multiple communities, and particularly how their interactions impact the global “ethno-scape” (Appadurai, 1990, p.7).

Lastly, one of the identified goals for intercultural communication scholarship is to encourage the population in becoming “more insightful consumers of public and private communication and enabled to make better choices about their own lives and have a productive influence in the world around them” as diversity and global integration are imperatively prevalent in all aspects of people’s lives (B. Hall, personal communication, September 10, 2004). Such a commitment is for Chinese communication researchers to meet, particularly as Ong and Nonini (1997) wrote

[The new global cosmpolitanism of Chinese transnationalists needs not only a self-critique; it should also provide an occasion to reflect on the wastage and devastation caused by many peoples more “local” than diasporic Chinese. There is an imperative for all persons—whether transnational or not—to come to terms with the debris of contemporary history…. [Since one of] the promises of transnationalism is the new possibility of negotiating democracies that cut across gender, class, racial, ethnic, and national divisions. Modern Chinese transnationalism must grasp the opportunity to transform the old shibboleth Chinese
cosmopolitanism, “All persons are as older and younger brothers” (*jie ren xiongdi ye*), into the principle that all persons are equal the world over. (p. 330)

Intercultural communication scholarship is in the position to strive to articulate, disseminate, and communicate these ethical imperatives to all circles—whether within or outside academe—to counter the oppressive outcomes ensued from globalization. Researchers of culture and communication are not inescapable from such an ethic of self-critique.

In “Writing the New Ethnography,” Goodall (2000) incorporated the critical notion of rhetorical ethos into ethnographers’ writings as he referred to the speaker’s characters as the writer’s “positionings… revealing the influences that shape who you are and what you think about, value, and are prone to believe and do” (p. 132). Unfolding these positionings—fixed positions (e.g., age, ethnicity, gender), subjective positions (e.g., pass experiences) and textual positions (e.g., choices of languages, styles) that one is writing from is moral and inclusive to the readers. Interrogating these positions enables the readers to discern the locations in which knowledge about “the Other” is produced and to invite readers to join the collaborative activity of scholarship. As postcolonial scholar Raka Shome (1996, 1999a) pointed out, it is imperative for the knowledge producers to engage in self-reflexive examinations of her/his own positions as a way to unveil the anonymous authorship. Shome stated that cultural and communication scholars need to take political responsibilities in addressing issues pertaining to power such as why certain people’s voices are heard and not others and what experiences the knowledge producer had that affected her/his perspectives.
Thus, in the following note, I reflect upon my own self-reflexivity in relation to this ethnographic research as well as my accountability as an intercultural communication researcher/learner.

**A Self-Critique of A Transnational Researcher**

To acknowledge that the oppressor is not necessarily only outside of “i,” “she,” and “we,” but is also well alive within each oppressed self. So the use of “I” is very ironical both toward He-the-Master and toward myself, or the He-in-Me. (italics added, Trinh, 1996, p. 9)

I was born into a lower-middle class family in Taipei, Taiwan during the mid-1970s. My father moved from Fu-Jien Province in Mainland China when he was six years old after the war and has since lived in Taipei. When he was to marry my Taiwan-born mother—a daughter of a farmer in the countryside, they encountered much resistance from my maternal grandmother during the 1960s. As a strong woman, my mother insisted on marrying my father. The political atmosphere was rather stable with an abundance of tension during most of my childhood. KMT was controlling the island particularly with its military force and many policies such as curfew, air-defense drills, “watch out for the Chinese spies” campaigns, and restrained contact with the Mainland.

Growing up in Taipei, I learned and chose to not speak Taiwanese for its stigma associated with the lower class even though it is the primary language of my mother’s family. I remember my classmates in elementary school were fined for speaking Taiwanese and me being proud of not having such a problem since all my relatives, including my grandmother had learned to speak Mandarin. Being a Chinese to me meant more than a body with yellow skin and black eyes, it also meant being a Taiwanese who only speaks Mandarin. At my junior high school, there was a rumor about how you
would be a pure “Han” person if you have wrinkles on certain parts of both arms when pulling them toward you. I was proud for having both lines every single time I tried.

My family was never well-off, but I was proud to be a daughter of a Mainlander as my identification card says. Then I learned about “our national” and world history. I became ashamed to be a Taiwanese/Chinese after reading about how my supposed ancestors strove for Westernization, but remained defeated by the “civilized” countries during numerous wars. I thought they must be better than us. At one point of my life, I even resented the fact that Taiwan was colonized by Japanese instead of by Great Britain, or better yet, the United States of America. At the early age of six, I displayed my total submission in imitating English conversation from television shows, drinking coffee, preferring Western style steaks over Mom’s food, and using up all my coins to order a banana split while sitting by the swimming pool on a family trip just like they showed foreigners doing on TV. I tried to convince myself that it was surely possible to be one of the foreigners regardless.

Martial law was repealed in the late 1980s and the resurgence of “Taiwaneseness” started. I felt that I was half Chinese — for I only speak the language with little knowledge on the people and cultural practices in Mainland China; and half Taiwanese — for I know the people and cultural activities but speak little of the languages. As a Taiwanese Chinese growing up in Taiwan, I never learned to reflect on issues of ethnicity and race, which existed and still do along with a perplex, ever changing and intertwining geopolitical environment.

In the 1990s, both of my parents declared bankruptcy and sold our home, a home that was bought with the money they won through the then soaring Taiwanese stock
market. After we moved out, my parents asked me to go back to pick up our mail because they did not want to deal with the buyer who had been uncooperative with his payments for the apartment. I (sub)consciously brought a white male friend I knew through a language exchange program with me. I associated myself with a white body in hopes of preventing him from treating me as the lower class person from a poor family. It turned out, I was told in both subtle and coarse manners that I should never go back to bother him because I no longer lived there, not to mention his denial of receiving any of our mail due to the fact that it was no longer our home. I cried on my white male friend’s shoulder after holding my anger and humiliation during the ten minutes of degradation from the rich, successful businessman while my friend comforted me with jokes about the wealthy Taiwanese businessman’s “impotency.” I never told any of my family or friends because no matter from what angle to narrate, I felt shame.

After passing an English proficiency examination, I came to the United States as an exchange student in 1997 for a semester and returned for my graduate education in 1999. During the year of 2003, an opportunity came to me when my uncle was assigned to director of the plant his company established in Juárez, Mexico. After conducting several intercultural workshops with the managers from Mexico, Taiwan, and the U.S. over two summers, I decided to launch a study to further understand the experiences of Taiwanese and Chinese living on this border area. So, there I was—a daughter with an “unsuccessful” family going to live and learn with the mostly upper-middle class Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists.

My privileges as a doctoral student in the U.S. and experience with American English has served me a more secure position in Taiwanese and Chinese circles. Being
the niece of the managerial director as mentioned, I represented power to other Taiwanese managers to a certain extent. Thus, I am a member of the Taiwanese and Chinese living community in El Paso/Juárez because of my kin relationship and friendship with other members who speak the same language. However, with my specific sociohistorical activities, my belief in the need for individuals’ interrogation on transnational exploitation on the disadvantaged remains strong. I made friends rather quickly after arriving in this community for the many privileges such as my educational background, family connection, my young age compared to most of my transnational friends, and even my physical appearance. My various identities were “transparently present” in my learning (i.e., participating, interviewing, observing, analyzing, and writing) about the interactions and thoughts that my friends had shared with me.

Prior to my departure of fieldwork, I thought of critical ethnography as an enterprise to assert justice and make changes. At the outset of my interactions, I was fearless to express my opinions. Until one day, a friend stopped finishing the sentence “Thank God that we are not Mex…” realizing my presence in their home. I was proud of myself only to later wonder whether my daily behaviors were becoming so obtrusive that I even evaded people’s safe spaces such as their home. I started to think more about accountability as well as consequences of my everyday acts.

Throughout the journey, I came to understand a little more about the meaning in Conquergood’s theory/practice that views ethnography as a corporal way of learning and an ethical dialogical performance where energy, imagination, and courage are necessary to discuss and even debate differences during researching. The closer I became to my friends, the more hesitant I was to express my objections during conversations.
Sometimes it was fear of hurting their feelings; sometimes it was fear to scare them away; sometimes it was fear to exhaust myself physically and mentally. But most of the time, it was fear and discomfort to act like an authority. I recalled an elder male friend who paid a compliment to me for “acting smart.” He explained that if I always corrected or asserted my opinions, I would be deemed as an arrogant person without being excused as having a rough day like other people would because of my young age and educational background. I felt the urge to challenge this statement for its embedded patriarchic thought since I believed that my (compliant) gender performance was crucial in his analysis on my smart behaviors. However, I did not express my opinions because I disliked being in the position to issue objections with him. It seemed that I would rather assert my authority in other matters/peoples such as how different ethnic groups were treated or wives were to become more independent while living on the borderlands.

After spending more than a month trying to find information for taking ESL classes and reasonable daycare services, the financial burden remained too great for Jen to attend these classes. Finally, Wen-He’s mother came from Taiwan to care for the children a couple of weeks prior to my departure. I was happy, even proud of Jen’s assertiveness with her husband about her education. At the same time, I was reminded of Moraga and Anzaldúa’s anthology *This Bridge Called My Back* and became ambivalent about whose back was made the bridge because of my intentions and actions to help Jen. I met her mother-in-law twice after her arrival to El Paso. She once said to me somewhat quietly, “Well, I don’t know, she said she wants to go to school, so I’ll be taking care of the girls here. But I don’t speak English… So what do I do here [in the apartment at El
Paso] all day?” I was knocked out in déjà vu. Whose justice was I working toward/against? Did I make their mother’s back into a bridge to be walked on?

One day, a friend gave me a blouse, which was a gift she received. I was greatly moved for her to think of me until I heard the comment “[my daughter] would not wear this kind of clothes. She only wears those good, fancy brand ones.” I could not describe the sharp pain I felt. In another occasion, a comment was made about me being thrifty because that all my clothes seemed to be from high school. I suppose my insecurity about my class is always with me. The feelings of interacting with that wealthy businessman flooded me once more. It would be a lie to say that I was detached from those comments after returning to my pad refining my field notes as it would be to claim that these memories had little impact on my writing and rethinking of my research about/with the Taiwanese and Chinese transnationalists.

While reflecting on my interactions during the fieldwork, it is important to explain several “wishes” that I have. Thus, I wish I was less fearful so that I could have interviewed more people. I wish I had invited people of Mexican cultural origins to ask about their experiences in interacting with Chinese and Taiwanese. I wish I tried to interview or at least to have conversations with border patrol officers. If I could do this again, I would like to interview the 2nd generation of Chinese/Taiwanese who were born in this borderland in order to understand their experiences as border dwellers. I would also want to research a more detailed history of the interactions between people of Chinese and Mexican ethnicities in this study.

Ethnographies are never complete stories. As Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995), along with many other seasoned researchers said, ethnographers are always in the
selecting process in their writing. Postcolonial literary critic Chandra Mohanty (199) argued that the “Third-World” women are homogenized as victim in the representation of the feminists in the West. I have striven for being vigilant during my researching and representing those whom I studied (with) and yet, still felt less than adequate as a communicator both in and outside the field. As van Maanen’s (1988) words hover in my mind “culture is expressed (or constituted) only by the actions and words of its members and must be interpreted by, not given to, a fieldworker… Culture is not itself visible, but is made visible [italics added] only through its representation” (p. 3), still in my writings and representing these transnationalists’ culturing on the borderlands, I am not sure whose backs I made to be my own bridge.
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Title of Research/研究題目:
文化在邊界:一個從台灣人/中國人的角度看美墨邊界的生活經驗的批判民誌學
CULTURING ON THE BORDERLANDS: A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT FROM TAIWANESE/CHINESE PERSPECTIVES

Investigator/研究者:
鄭欣怡 傳播學博士研究生

親愛的研究參加者:
Dear Study Participant,

附上的是邀您參加此研究的同意書。這個研究主要是想要對於台灣人/中國人在美墨邊界的生活與工作經驗有更深一部的了解。這也同時是我在傳播學的博士學位論文研究，將來會在學術界會議發表及出版。您必須滿十八歲才能參與此研究。

Attached is a form that requests your consent to take part in this research study. This study intends to gain a better understanding of the Taiwanese/Chinese experiences of living and working at areas of Cd. Juárez, Chihuahua and El Paso, Texas. I am conducting this study for my dissertation research in the School of Communication Studies at Bowling Green State University and will be presenting at academic conferences as well as publishing the result in the future. You have to be at least 18 years old in order to participate in this study.

這研究將會訪問您在這美墨邊界的生活或工作經驗，感受，或看法。在這五個月中我將會和您作多次訪談，大約共為五個小時，過程將會錄音。我會將訪談內容轉譯為文稿，並且將您的名字或任何可能讓人聯想到您的身份的細節移除。
This study involves interviews that will discuss your aspects and experiences of living on the border of Cd. Juárez and El Paso. The interviews will approximately be a total of five hours spread across 5 months, and will be audio taped. I will transcribe the interviews and remove your name and any detail that might allow someone to identify you.

錄音帶和文稿都將會鎖在只有我有進入許可的地方，您的姓名除了在研究參加同意書外將不會在任何地方出現，以保密您的身分。我會將研究參加同意書和訪談文稿及分析分別鎖在不同的地方，您個人提出的想法及資料絕對會被妥善保管，除了我的論文委員教授們及我個人，不會有人有任何機會看到您的隱私。我會在論文研究正式結束後將這些錄音帶摧毀。

Both the tapes and transcriptions will be kept locked in a secure area in which only I have access to. Your name will not be anywhere in any of the transcriptions, and I will remove information that might allow someone to identify you. The only piece of paper with your name on it, the signed consent form, will be stored in a separate locked location, and will not be used in any part of the transcription or analyses. There is no other person besides my dissertation committee and myself who will see the information you contribute. I will keep the tapes until the completion of my dissertation and they will be destroyed.

由於這個研究特別想對台灣人/中國人在邊界的點滴生活經驗有較詳盡的了解，所以會直接引述一些訪談內容，我絕對不會在引文中用您的真實姓名。另外，我計劃將來利用從訪談中學習到的知識和台灣人/中國人團體分享，期望將會對於大家對於日常生活中的互動有所助益。不過，這些從訪談中學得的資訊會以最基本的形形式呈現，並且絕對不會有任何線索可以連結到任何個人。由於這項研究必須是出於自願，所以如果在參予過程中您想退出此研究，可以隨時當面或經由電話或電子信件向我(hcheng@bgnet.bgsu.edu)提出您退出的意願。我會將您提供的資料移除此研究。

Because the goal of this study is to get a detailed picture of the Taiwanese/Chinese perspectives and experiences of living in the border area, direct quotes may be used in the report. I will not use your real name with your quote. In addition, I plan to use some of the insights from the interviews to share with the community for a deeper understanding of our daily communication in various cultural environments. However, such information will only be very general and will not be attributed to any specific individual. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw your participation from the study at any time by contacting me verbally in person, telephone, or via email (hcheng@bgnet.bgsu.edu) with your request. I will remove any of your provided information if requested.

如果您對此研究有任何的問題，請撥(419) 372-6076 或 電傳(agonzal@bgnet.bgsu.edu)和 González 教授或和我本人聯絡。
If you have any questions about this study, please contact Dr. González at (419) 372-6076, (e-mail agonzal@bgnet.bgsu.edu) or myself (hcheng@bgnet.bgsu.edu). You may also contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, (419) 372-7716, if any problems or concerns arise during the course of the study.

Please keep this cover letter for your reference, and sign the attached form if you agree to its terms.

Sincerely,

Hsin-I (Cynthia) Cheng
Doctoral student, School of Communication Studies
Title of Research/研究題目:
文化在邊界:一個從台灣人/中國人的角度看美墨邊界的生活經驗的批判民誌學
CULTURING ON THE BORDERLANDS: A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT FROM TAIWANESE/CHINESE PERSPECTIVES

Investigator/研究者:
鄭欣怡 傳播學博士研究生

我已經讀過摘要信件，並且我同意參加這個對於台灣人/中國人在美墨邊界的生活與工作經驗了解的研究。
I have read the attached cover letter, and I consent to participate in a study that focuses on exploring Taiwanese/Chinese perspectives and experiences of living and working on the borderlands of Mexico and the United States.

__________________________________________________________
請書寫您的姓名 Print your name

_________________________________  _____________________
請在此簽名 Sign here  日期 Date

我十分感謝您對此研究的參予與支持!
Thank you very much for your participation and support!