UNDERSTANDING ASIAN AMERICAN STUDENTS’ IDENTITIES AND THEIR LEARNING IN SOCIAL STUDIES

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to examine how the identities of Asian American students interacted with their learning in the social studies curriculum in two high schools in the Midwestern United States. It investigated: (1) how do Asian American students identify themselves within school settings, (2) how do they perceive and interpret their social studies instruction, and (3) in what ways do their identities influence their learning in social studies and in what ways does the social studies instruction influence their identity.

This qualitative study employed a naturalistic inquiry paradigm to collect data. The data were collected through participant interviews, classroom observations, and relevant documents. A constant comparative method was implemented for data analysis. Analysis of the data in the study suggested three main findings. First, the Asian American students all recognize being scholar/student as a crucial part of their identity and demonstrate different perceptions of their racial/ethnic and cultural identity. They employ different strategies to negotiate with their dynamic, multiple, and sometimes contradictory identities when being confronted with the challenges and opportunities within different social contexts. Second, the teachers play a significant role in how well the Asian American students have learned in social studies curriculum. These students
also express their values of social studies education. Third, the Asian American students’ identities have influenced their learning in social studies in certain ways, and likewise the social studies instruction has affected their identities. The findings of the study have some implications for the teachers, teacher educators, curriculum policy, and future research.
Dedicated to My Unique Husband, Children, and Parents
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

We live in a changing world due to processes of globalization even though societies have been connected with one another to some degree throughout history. Modern communication and transportation networks and new information technologies have made the interconnectedness of different peoples more extensive and intensive. Globalization today implies that many aspects of political, economic, and social activities are becoming interregional or intercontinental in scope, and there has been an intensification of levels of interaction and interconnectedness within and between states and societies (Held, 2000). Although there are different opinions around either pro-globalization for cosmopolitanism or anti-globalization for equality and equity, Held (2000) offers a succinct definition of globalization:

Globalization is best understood as a spatial phenomenon, lying on a continuum with 'the local' at one end and 'the global' at the other. It denotes a shift in the spatial form of human organization and activity to transcontinental or interregional patterns of activity, interaction and the exercise of power. It involves a stretching and deepening of social relations and institutions across space and time such that, on the one hand, day-to-day activities are increasingly influenced by events happening on the other side of the globe
and, on the other, the practices and decisions of local groups or communities can have significant global reverberations. (p.12)

Globalization intensifies the diasporic flows of cultural and economic capital, deepens patterns of communication, and weakens the nation-state boundaries by increasing immigrant population. For example, immigration from Asia and the Pacific Islands has been increasing steadily over the past four decades (Zhang and Carrasquillo, 1992). The term Asian American is broad and comprises different ethnic groups’ experiences, histories, and cultures. Ng, Lee and Pak (2007) define Asian American as “the individuals of Asian descent in the United States (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, and other Southeast Asian groups) who have been racialized and grouped as Asian in policy and legislation” (p.122). The Asian American population in the United States was 1.4 million in 1970 and 3.5 million in 1980, with each figure accounting for 1.7% of the total population; in 1990, the population had grown to 7 million, constituting 3% of the nation’s population (U.S. Census Bureau, 1993a). Asia became the top contributor of U.S. immigrants in the year 2005 and this trend is likely to continue (Immigration Statistics, 2005). It is estimated that in 2010, the Asian population will reach 17 million and account for 6% of the U.S. population (Edmonston & Passel, 1992). American society may benefit from the heterogeneous cultures represented by and among Asian Americans (Rong & Preissle, 1997).

In the processes of globalization, demographics in American schools are changing. These changes have implications for pedagogy and curriculum if schools wish to prepare all students to be citizens in a multicultural democracy. Nearly 40 percent of public school students are members of minority groups (National Center for Educational
Statistics, 2003). The Asian American student population is becoming more diverse both within and across ethnic groups and has increased by 78% from 3.6% of the total student population in 1994 to 4.6% in 2004 (NCES, 2008b). As with most immigrant groups, there is evidence that some Asian Americans have felt that their culture has been marginalized in American schools. Studying schools in California, Pang (2006) wrote that “few schools have curricula where AA [Asian American] issues, history, culture, art, communities, role models, and literature are integrated throughout” (p.71). Many educators have raised the question of how minority students’ identities –whether African American, Latino/a, Asian American or other--should be reflected in the school curriculum, especially the social studies given its focus on national identity, cultural studies, and citizenship. Studies that have examined how students of color experience the social studies curriculum have noted that the invisibility of race and race-related issues in the curriculum can lead to marginalization of minority students’ identities and impede their learning of history, government, etc. (Epstein, 1998; Gunel, 2007; Halagao, 2004; Howard, 2004).

There is a need for research on Asian American students in social studies classrooms if we are to give voice to those who have been marginalized. The focus of this research is examining their current learning experiences in American high schools with the ultimate goal of creating and implementing the optimal school experience for all students. Findings from this study will also contribute to understanding how the variety of experiences, practices, and worldviews of Asian American students can bring diversity of knowledge and experiences to the social studies curriculum and help teachers teach cultural sensitivity to different groups of people, and equip all students with knowledge,
skills, experiences, and dispositions for a rapidly changing and increasingly interdependent world.

**Purpose of the Study**

My study aimed to gain understanding of Asian American students’ identities and their social studies learning experiences in American high schools. It portrayed the perception of these students about who they were and captured their interpretations of what they were learning in the social studies curriculum at schools. It examined the relationships between the identities of Asian American students and their learning in social studies. For the purposes of this study, identity is defined as the social and personal identifications of the individual over time (Charmaz, 1991). It is characterized by different categories such as race, ethnicity, culture, nationality, gender, age, language, religion, and socioeconomic status. Identity is a process due to the reality of diverse and ever-changing social experience. It is socially constructed, dynamic, changing, and constantly negotiated. It plays a significant and active role in teaching and learning. As McCarthey and Moje (2002) discuss, students’ identity in terms of race, gender and class affects how they interact, respond and learn in the classrooms. “The experiences they have had in their families, their previous experiences with institutions such as schools, as well as the larger social and political frameworks in which they have operated, have shaped their classroom interactions” (p.229).

There have been some studies in particular that have examined how factors related to minority students’ racial, ethnic, class or national identities influence their learning in the social studies curriculum. Seixas (1993) conducts one study on six 11th-grade students of different ethnicities enrolled in the social studies classes in an urban,
multiethnic Canadian high school about their historical understanding. The findings show that the students’ families and their life experiences related to their ethnic identities and immigrant status have greatly influenced their ideas about the concepts of historical significance, agency, change, and empathy. However, the social studies teachers draw little upon the students’ diverse backgrounds and understandings when teaching them about social science concepts or interpretations. Seixas recommends that social studies teachers bring the knowledge and understandings of the students from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds to historical inquiry as a tool to teach young people to think historically.

In another study, Epstein (1998) examines the relationship between adolescents’ racial identities and experiences and their historical perspective taking in two 11th-grade American history classes in an urban Midwestern high school. Epstein finds that African American and European American students in the same classes construct different explanations on significant actors, events, and themes in U.S. history. They also construct contradictory perspectives about the credibility of secondary historical sources. African American and European American students bring different perspectives into historical inquiry, which come from race-related different experiences of the students themselves and their family members. Epstein critiques on the limitations of current history curricular frameworks in American public schools and suggests a curricular framework with the consideration of the different historical perspectives constructed by the African American and European American students in this study.

**Research Questions**

In my study, I investigated how the identities of Asian American students interact
with their learning in the social studies curriculum in American high schools. This study addressed the following research questions:

(1) How do Asian American students identify themselves within school settings? (could include as a poet, an athlete, a scholar, a musician, a gamer, as well as racial, ethnic or religious identity --as a Korean American, as a Buddhist, etc.)

(2) How do they perceive and interpret their social studies instruction? (including topics under study, instructional methods, experiences such as field trips or town meetings, assessments, etc.)

(3) In what ways do their identities influence their learning in social studies? In what ways does the social studies instruction influence their identity?

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical perspectives underlying this study are based on social constructionist views of identity, which emphasizes the constructed and dynamic nature of identity (Gee, 2000; Hall, 1996; Holland et al., 1998; Lee & Anderson, 2009; McCarthey & Moje, 2002; Norton, 2000). Identity is not an essential, static and fixed individual while it is a constructed and open-ended process embodied in social practice. According to Sarup (1998), identity is defined as “a construction, a consequence of interaction between people, institutions and practices” (p.11). It is constructed from multiple experiences and relationships that are performed within specific social settings. Holland et al. (1998) suggest that identity is “figuratively combines the intimate or personal world with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations” (p.5). A person understands and views self and is often viewed by others, at least in certain situations where the self perception constantly achieved. These forms of self-
understanding are always explained relative to a social world. Selves as socially constructed are subject to positioning by the powerful discourses that they come across. These identities influence how a person acts in the world of social life.

McCarthey and Moje (2002) cite Anzaldua’s (1999b) concept of identity as clusters of stories, which means identity is constructed by not only one’s own but also others’ perceptions - we tell about ourselves and others tell about us, to further explain the hybrid, complex and contradictory nature of identity. In particular, they point out that others tell those stories about us raises an important issue that identities are “always situated in relationships, and that power plays a role in how identities get enacted and how people get positioned on the basis of those identities” (p.231). Some people are allowed by certain social class structure to wield power over others. People have some choices to work against the structure, yet the power that they hold to work against it relies to some extent on their positionality. Including agency in the construct of identity, it further captures the notion of a self in contest, changeable, dynamic, and resistant to positionalities.

When identity is considered as fluid, changing, or shifting, McCarthey and Moje (2002) discuss that the role of institutional forces and physical markers such as race, gender, and social class cannot be underestimated in identity construction. The categories of differences are important influences on how identities are represented, how selves are positioned in relationships, and how identities are understood within specific social contexts. “Physical markers of identity do play a role in stabilizing, to some extent, how identities are enacted and interpreted, read and written, and how selves are performed” (p.234). They suggest that it is more important to study how physical markers intersect
with one another in relation to particular interactions in particular spaces. For example, Yon (2000) conducts his ethnographic study of how race and identity are negotiated among the racially and culturally diverse students at Maple Heights, an inner-city secondary school situated in Toronto, Canada. He finds that these students are continually in the process of negotiating and renegotiating their identities. They claim the categories of race and culture relate to others in the group, and the context shapes how they talk about themselves and others. Yon states that the students’ racial and cultural identities emerge as unstable and contested, and their identities are constructed “in relation, and often in opposition to, the constraints imposed by gender, race, and culture” (p.122).

On the other hand, Lee and Anderson (2009) argue that it would become problematic when identity categories and labels are regarded as absolute truths about individuals and when they force limitations on potential actions. For instance, the terms English learner, underachiever, and gifted that are frequently used in institutional discourses, play an active role in shaping students’ identities, and in this sense, schools may have reinforced the social inequalities among different persons and groups. In general, social constructionist views identity as a social construct, “not an inherent fact relies on how categories of difference come to matter across time and context and how they are lived through persons, be they in action, communication, appearance, achievement, location, or affiliation” (p.189).

In addition, Lee and Anderson (2009) use Brown’s (2004) conceptualization of identity as “a set of discursive domains that are evoked and constructed based on shared or negotiated assumptions, categories, and knowledge in classroom spaces” (p.183), to help understand how classroom interactions exert influences on students’ identity by
desiring to assimilate to such acceptable ways of being (i.e., *talking the talk and walking the walk*) in academic practices. The negotiation of discursive domains acts out in contestations and acceptances within different interactions. Identity is also the result of negotiation between an individual’s “identity claims” and expectations raised by social contexts and interactions. Lee and Anderson further explore three different paths of how minority students negotiate their identities in their academic and cultural performance in schools: assimilation, opposition and straddling since they are the more common ways documented that adolescents use in their identities negotiation. Whereas educational institutions have reproduced social hierarchies that advance the ways and norms of the mainstream group, “The pressures to conform to the dominant language and cultural patterns in educational settings have reinforced normative ideals of what identifications and dispositions are necessary in order to succeed within formal learning contexts” (p.195). In identity negotiation, racial, cultural, and linguistic minority students may adopt assimilating or oppositional strategies to make a choice to accommodate to or oppose mainstream norms and expectations in American schools. There is also another possibility that students learn how to perform cultural norms and practices to meet expectations of the school while maintaining their own ethnic and cultural heritage, dependent upon the resources in their community as a form of support.

The theoretical perspectives about identity as socially constructed and negotiated form my research questions. They assist me in explaining how expectations and practices in schools, families and communities have played significant roles in the Asian American students’ multiple socio-cultural identities construction, which strategies the students use to negotiate their senses of self when confronted with challenges and opportunities in
American schools, how they perceive and interpret the social studies instruction, and how their identities impact on their learning in the social studies curriculum and vice versa. These theories help me to understand the Asian American students’ identities construction and negotiation through different social practices within particular relationships and particular settings. I examine and interpret their experiences based on their knowledge and understandings, and I, an Asian/Chinese woman as a knower translate their knowledge, ideas, and emotions to bring their situations into social awareness.

These theoretical perspectives also have methodological implications for my study and align with the paradigm of naturalistic inquiry. The naturalistic paradigm supports the incorporation of theoretical perspectives regarding identity as socially constructed and negotiated. It aims to explore the reality of diverse and varying social experiences of the Asian American students as well as how they experience and interpret their multifaceted identities in their social studies curriculum learning. It allows me to see the complexities of the Asian American students’ experiences from multiple perspectives.

**Methodological Framework**

I employed a naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to study the intersections of the identities of Asian American students and their learning in social studies. Naturalistic inquiry assumes that reality is constructed by individuals, and there exist multiple realities as diverse people experience teaching and learning (Glesne, 1999). It is characterized by natural settings (the schools), natural language (language actually used by students and teachers), responsiveness to concerns and issues of stake-holders (what is important to students and teachers), and collaborative checks on trustworthiness.
Naturalistic inquiry fit my study well. This study was based on the understanding of the Asian American students’ real experiences, how these experiences had shaped their identities, and how the students’ socio-cultural identities influenced their perceptions, ideas, and behaviors in learning the social studies curriculum in American high schools. Naturalistic inquiry allowed me to explore the complexities and realities of students’ everyday experiences and examine how they made sense of the social studies course content and pedagogy. In their natural environment, I was able to see how the students’ everyday experiences in schools were alike and understand how they interpreted their reality or multiple realities from their points of view.

Naturalistic inquiry supports emergent design which allows me to follow up on new insights and tentative findings as they are identified in the data. From week to week the results of the data collection help develop research questions and allow the researcher to be responsive to new directions valued by participants that may not have been identified at the outset (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This does not mean that an emergent design allows me to enter a research site and begin data collection without any plan. Instead, the flexible nature of the emergent design helps me to collect more relevant data by being responsive to the participants.

**Sampling**

I used purposeful sampling in this qualitative study in accordance with Lincoln and Guba’s contention that “All sampling is done with some purpose in mind” (1985, p.199). Patton (1990) proposes that qualitative inquiry generally focuses more on fewer, *purposefully* selected respondents, even single cases, in more depth rather than a large number with little depth. I applied the snowball or chain sampling as the method of
sampling. It is an approach for locating information-rich key informants, which results in “obtaining knowledge of potential cases from people who know people who meet research interests” (Glesne, 1999, p.29).

Eight Asian American students in two high schools in a Midwestern city were selected in the study.

_Criteria for the selection of student participants include:_

(1) Students who come from diverse Asian American backgrounds (i.e. they could be immigrants or descendants of immigrants from East Asia, South Asia or Southeast Asia);
(2) Students who are taking social studies;
(3) Students who gain the informed consent of their parents to participate in the study;
(4) Students willing to participate in the study.

Two teachers in these schools were selected in the study.

_Criteria for the selection of teacher participants include:_

(1) Teachers who are teaching social studies to the students selected for the study;
(2) Teachers willing to participate in the study.

**Data Collection**

I used interviews and observations as the methods for data collection throughout the three-month study. I also collected the documents that were relevant to the study, including curriculum guides, lesson plans, textbooks or other materials, and student work.

Each of the students was interviewed four times during the study. Beyond initial questions related to their background and identity, the students were asked to share what they were learning in social studies, their interpretation of content, and explore their work, interests, and motivation. Each teacher was interviewed three times in order to
understand their beliefs about teaching and learning, their background, their goals and their perceptions of their instruction in the course relevant to the study. Interviews were semi-structured, face-to-face with open-ended questions. Each interview lasted approximately twenty minutes and was recorded on audiotape.

Each week relevant social studies classes were observed once or twice to see how the students interact with and respond to the instruction. Teachers worked with me to decide which classes should be observed. Those observations further generated questions for the students in order to understand their perspectives and experiences in the social studies classrooms. In observations, field notes were taken.

At mid-study and again at the end of the data collection, each student and teacher was given a compilation of data collected from him/her to review. This process did not take more than one hour each time. These checks allowed for feedback, questions to be raised, and omissions noted. The goal is to improve the data.

**Data Analysis**

In this qualitative study, I employed inductive data analysis to code and categorize all data. That is, as the data are collected, they are analyzed. A constant comparative method was implemented. This method involves an inductive data analysis whereby theory evolves from data collected (Merriam, 1998). The main goal of this method is to compare data categorization constantly and repeatedly, both across sources and data collection methods. Following this method, I coded all of the data collected and constantly compared and sought out categories and relationships in the data. I categorized and re-categorized the data by examining and comparing them repeatedly to develop meaningful findings for the research questions. I also started writing a memo along with
my first analytic sessions and continued it throughout the writing phase, to keep the process of the analysis transparent and to maintain a self-reflexive stance.

**Significance of the Study**

This study investigated how the identities of Asian Americans affect their learning in the social studies curriculum in American high schools. It aimed to explore the complexities and fluidity of students’ identities in their everyday social life experiences. It also looked at how students perceived and interpreted knowledge in social studies, and how their cultural identities shaped their interests, motivation, and achievement. It will help students and teachers to think more deeply about students’ beliefs, values, and identities in relation to what is being learned, what meaning it has for the students, and how these connections affect student engagement and academic success.

According to Epstein & Shiller (2009), “The perspectives or frameworks of knowledge and beliefs that young people bring to their social studies lessons are significant not only because they can serve as a scaffold or springboard for learning, but also because they serve as filters through which teaching, subject matter, and learning must pass” (p.95).

This study will enrich the current literature on Asian American education and social studies since there is currently limited research in this area. It will give voices to Asian American students and contribute to a better understanding of how both students and teachers are responding to the challenges faced in many schools as demographics change. It will also have implications for teacher education and the social studies curriculum, and encourage awareness in this field that might affect future educational practices and policies.
Limitations of the Study

The limitations of my study began with the small number of participants. Eight Asian American students in two high schools in a Midwestern city do not represent the heterogeneous Asian American groups in the United States. More students and other places would provide different perspectives and broaden the study.

The time for conducting this study was another limitation. Longer periods on the research sites would provide more depth.

As a non-native English speaker and international student from China, I recognized that my findings might be limited by my lack of experience in American schools, my language skills, and my cultural background. Yet the goal of this study was to examine Asian American students’ identities and their learning in the social studies curriculum. In this sense, my background and experiences might have contributed to a better understanding and interpretation of my study.

Definition of Terms

Students of Color / Minority Students – The individuals whose school districts have identified as being from one of four ethnic categories used for official reporting: Latino/Hispanic, African American/Black, Asian American, and Native American (Gordon, 1994).

Asian American – “The individuals of Asian descent in the United States (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, and other Southeast Asian groups) who have been grouped as Asian in policy and legislation” (Ng, Lee & Pak, 2007, p.122).

The Midwest – The region defined by the U. S. Census Bureau in its reporting, is
comprised of twelve states in the north-central U.S.: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

Mainstream – For the purpose of this study, it refers to the members of dominant group.

Identity – For the purpose of this study, it means social and personal identifications of the individual over time (Charmaz, 1991).

Social Studies – The National Council for the Social Studies (1993) defines social studies as the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy – “A pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These cultural referents are not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p.18).
Global Education – An approach that educators use to develop students’ global perspectives and prepare students for an interdependent world (Alger & Harf, 1986; Merryfield, 2002; Pike & Selby, 1999).

**Overview of Chapters**

I organize my dissertation into six chapters. In this first chapter, I introduce the background and purpose of my study, and address the research questions proposed to help understand the relationships between the identities of Asian American students and their learning in social studies in two Midwestern high schools. Then I propose the theoretical perspectives, methodological framework, sampling, and research methods for data collection and analysis for the study. This chapter also includes significance of the study, limitations of the study, definition of terms, and overview of chapters.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the current literature on the topics of Asian American students’ identities, minority students including Asian American students’ education in American schools and the social studies curriculum. In Chapter 3, I explain my research methodology. In Chapter 4, I present the Midwest context of my study and provide the background information of the school sites and teacher participants. In Chapter 5, I present and discuss my findings on Asian American students’ identities. Finally, in Chapter 6, I present and discuss my findings on Asian American students’ perceptions and interpretations of their social studies learning, and provide some implications for teacher education and the social studies curriculum.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The demographic shift throughout all grade levels in today’s schools in the United States is trending toward greater diversity. It is estimated that by the year 2020, 40% of school children will be non-white (Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989). The term students of color or minority students refers to non-white individuals whose school districts have identified as being from one of four ethnic categories used for official reporting: Latino/Hispanic, African American/Black, Asian American, and Native American (Gordon, 1994). For example, the Asian American student population is becoming more diverse both within and across ethnic groups and has increased by 78%; from 3.6% of the total student population in 1994 to 4.6% in 2004 (NCES, 2008b). The increasing diversity in the American educational system has brought forth the necessity to pay attention to Asian American students in relation to their background, life, and school experiences.

In this chapter, a review of the literature on Asian American students’ life and learning experiences in American schools, including their identities, background knowledge and experiences that they bring to schools, and negotiation with their non-
mainstream identities in everyday schooling experiences is presented. Charmaz (1991) defines identity:

Identity refers to social and personal identifications of the individual. More complex than merely present social and self designations, identity takes into account both past and future definitions of self --- Hence, past identities, when validated, provide continuity of self in the present and expectation for the future. Here, self refers to the organized set of internalized attachments, commitments, attributes, images, and identifications with which a person creates a concept of self. (p.72)

Identity is often attributed as “being a certain ‘kind of person’ or even as several different ‘kinds’ at once --- at a given time and place” (Gee, 2000, p.99). It cannot be seen as a stable entity, but as something that people use, to justify, explain and make sense of themselves in relation to others and the contexts in which they operate (Galindo, 2007). Identity is socially constructed, situated in different social contexts, and switches from one context to the next. The multiple, dynamic, and sometimes contradictory identities influence people’s behaviors within social interactions (Holland et al., 1998; McCarthey & Moje, 2002). Identity is also the result of negotiation between the individual’s identity claims and expectations raised by social contexts and interactions (Lee & Anderson, 2009). Thus, identity is multifaceted, socially constructed, dynamic, evolving, and in constant negotiation.

**Asian American Students’ Identities**

The identities of Asian American students unite phases across their life and reflect how their different and discrete biographical experiences with race, ethnicity, gender,
language, religion, culture, and social class relate to their current schooling and lives. Through the exploration of Asian American students’ knowledge and experience in their families, communities, and schools, it is helpful to capture who they are and what they bring to schools as students is significant.

First, family and community values have contributed to the identity formation of Asian American students. Scholars suggest the role of “ethnic enclaves” among Asian immigrants in which Asian American families maintain forms of the “home culture” and its beliefs and practices with distinctive cultural qualities. Park (2006) explains that Asian Americans, especially Chinese and Koreans, and to a certain extent Filipinos and Vietnamese, have unique cultural values, such as a high emphasis on education which is ingrained in the Confucian traditional culture, conformity to authority and respect for elders, strong social hierarchy, male dominance, being reserved instead of expressive, and having higher educational and professional aspirations for boys.

While assimilation is the normal experience for all immigrants to the United States, Asian immigrant parents believe that schooling is crucial to success in life, promotes academic achievement, and maintains strong ties to ethnic culture without seeing their children’s cultural identity at risk if they perform well in school (Ogbo & Simons, 1998). The academic achievement attained by most Asian American young people relies on their belief in hard work and persistent effort. Zhang and Carrasquillo (1992) analyze some information of Chinese American students’ historical, social, economic, linguistic, cultural, and family environmental situations in the review of literature. They find that Chinese culture is possibly the major explanation for the educational achievements of Chinese Americans. In culture, Chinese American families...
value the need to succeed educationally, with emphasis on educational accomplishments, expectations for achievement, and controlling the behaviors of the students.

Asian American families value the respect for elders, parents, and family, especially parental influence is authoritative for first-generation Asian American students. Independence may not be regarded as personal choice or a valued life outcome and is more often perceived as rebelliousness. Asians do not want their children to be encouraged to make decisions for themselves (Dennis & Giangreco, 1996). Leong (1991) also identifies Asian American students’ dependent decision-making style and interprets it through traditional Asian value on collective and well-structured decision making.

According to how family values have shaped minority people’s life experiences, Galindo (1996) undertakes the study on three Chicana teachers through interviews, autobiographies, and papers written by these teachers for a graduate program in education. Galindo finds the influences and contributions of family values to these teachers’ identity formation within their family context. It has promoted their understanding of the minority experiences. For Rebecca, her family value is identified as being well educated; for Rosana, it is about being proud of their own cultural heritage and working-class origins with critical perspectives - the undervaluing of these within educational institutions and society; and, for Elena, it is a reflective oppositional identity, “based on critical thought and reflection of Chicano history and identity within the New Mexican context and the need to thoughtfully consider one’s life decisions” (p.91). Different family members such as grandparents or parents are involved in the communication of these family values with them. These family values have positive influences on the teachers’ early conceptions of education and become part of the central
issues around which these three teachers’ identity is formed. They also facilitate the types of relationships that these teachers establish with parents and students and the responsibilities and obligations that they identify for themselves.

On the other hand, Asian American families reveal the complexities of identities and conflicts of experience, such as country of origin, time and conditions of arrival in the United States, parental status in home country in contrast to current occupation, languages used, and gender. For example, Gordon (2000) points out that first- or second-generation Asian immigrants still keep their traditional values strong and tend to compare their American educational experiences and concept of success to those “in their home countries” (p.176). Immigrants tie to traditional cultural values less rigorous when they stay in the United States longer (Ogbu, 1990). Ng, Lee and Pak (2007) propose that immigrant parents often divide Asian culture with American culture and interpret their children’s behaviors as rejecting their family traditions, as a result second- and later-generation Asian American children struggle to define their own culture, while at the same time, their life experiences in the United States are often affected by anti-Asian racism.

Cultural differences within immigrant families can cause tension. Qin (2006) explores the factors of alienation between two Chinese immigrant families and their children over a five-year period in the United States. The findings show that one of the factors is culture perspectives: parallel dual frame of reference and high academic pressure. The immigrant Chinese American students interact with American teachers and peers and acculturate much faster than their parents. At the same time, cultural gaps differ in terms of the compatibility of parenting styles with the mainstream American parenting
values and practices, which may increase dissonance at home and produce a parallel dual frame of reference between parents and children. Parental pressure for achievement is another factor resulting in children ultimately becoming alienated from their parents in some Chinese immigrant families.

Ng, Lee and Pak (2007) demonstrate that language loss and language differences between Asian immigrant parents and their children may have significant negative impact on family relations and other aspects of children’s health and social development. Language loss generally takes three generations or less, and children have little or no working knowledge of their parents’ and grandparents’ native language and cultural traditions. This phenomenon has been attributed to “the assimilative pressures of culturally and linguistically dominant groups over others as well as perceptions of linguistic inferiority internalized by minority individuals and affecting their social identity” (p.106). It calls for the necessity and possible strategies to foster and revitalize threatened languages and involvement in rich literacy environments and experiences.

According to the issues of bicultural development and linguistic attitudes in the context of existing social power relations, Weisman (2001) conducts one study informed by a critical perspective to examine the relationship between the bicultural identities of Latina teachers and their attitudes toward English and Spanish. During the study, Weisman interviews four Latina bilingual teachers, Angela, Christina, Luisa, and Sandra, each teaching in different elementary schools within two separate school districts in the southern California area. These schools feature a predominately Latino student population and provide the bilingual programs to help students’ transition into English as quickly as possible. The finding reveals a strong correlation between teachers’
identification with Latino culture, political awareness, and value for the Spanish language as a means of affirming Latino students’ cultural identities. Angela was born in the United States and grew up in a primarily white, middle-class community. She never talks about the existence of racism and educational practices that devalue Latino students’ culture and language as significant factors in their schooling experiences, and has a strong acceptance of the mainstream values. Christina was born and raised in the United States, and very assimilated in the mainstream culture. She has a perspective of assimilation with regard to native language instruction. Luisa was born in Mexico and arrived in the United States when she was in junior high school. She identifies herself with the Latino community and addresses the importance of using the native language in the education of Latino students with the necessity of the use of the Spanish language with pride in their lives. She actively engages in countering the negative stereotypes and attitudes affecting her students’ academic success. Sandra immediately identifies herself as Chicana with values of her primary culture, and seems very clear about the political significance underlying this term. Political activism is an important part of cultural identity for Sandra. She has frequently challenged school personnel’s attempts to subordinate the concerns of bilingual teachers for their Latino students, such as arguing for more equitable resources for the bilingual classrooms in her school compared to the quality and quantity of materials provided in the mainstream classes. Sandra stresses the Spanish language much more than a means in instruction and emphasizes the link between language and cultural identity in her students’ lives. She is also concerned with the cultural conflicts and prejudicial attitudes contributing to a lack of academic success of many Latino students. “It requires a more critical understanding of the role of language
in the construction of identity and an awareness of how linguistic ideology can serve to either contribute to or contest divisions of power that work to the detriment of subordinate groups” (p.222) Weisman recommends that teachers need to be given opportunities to examine their attitudes toward language instruction critically and to reflect how they have responded to the pressures to conform to the dominant group’s standards.

Second, the schooling experiences of Asian American students, including the curricular experiences, play a critical role in the development of their knowledge, racial and cultural identities, and relationships with others as well as their perceptions and interpretations of American society. Kiang (2004) points out that K-12 curriculum lacks significant content on Asia. High-stakes testing makes this situation worse by officially defining the curriculum what students should learn and excluding the content about Asian Americans, which affects all students and can reinforce Asian American stereotypes. “When Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) histories are not taught as part of U.S. history the implicit message is that AAPIs are not real Americans, thereby contributing to the stereotype that AAPIs are perpetual foreigners” (Lee & Kumashiro, 2005, p.16). Nieto (1992) states that as an important part of the curriculum in schools, textbooks reinforce the domination of the European Americans’ perspective and maintain stereotypes of other groups to be perceived as outsiders of the mainstream. Lee (2003) further indicates that when Asian American history or literature is taught in schools, it is usually positioned at the periphery of school curriculum, which shows that the issues of Asian American are somehow different from mainstream American concerns. Another way to teach about Asian Americans is using some superficial approaches to
multicultural education by focusing on Asian holidays and foods, which more often serves to perpetuate the foreigner stereotype.

Halagao (2004) examines the curricular experiences of Asian American students and highlights their learning in American school. Halagao explores six Filipino American College students’ learning experiences about their ethnic history and culture with Pinoy Teach, a transformative multicultural curriculum focusing on Philippine and Filipino American history and culture. These students represent diverse backgrounds of Filipino Americans: Patrick and Maria are immigrants, Debbie is a “navy brat,” and Nick, Matt, and Maria were born and raised in the United States. They grow up in different settings: predominately white suburban neighborhoods, diverse neighborhoods, or predominantly Filipino neighborhoods. The finding indicates the complex interplay among prior knowledge, ethnic identity, and a curriculum about one’s self. None of these six students learned about their ethnic history in school or at home before. They demonstrate little prior knowledge about their ethnicity beyond family stories and cultural elements (family, food, language, and social events). Pinoy Teach helps them make curricular connections about their ethnic history and culture, and articulates their experiences as oppressed minorities in the United Sates. When Pinoy Teach’s transformative narrative of history especially around the concept of imperialism, clashes with some students’ prior knowledge and colonial perceptions of Philippine history from their parents or simply ignorance, such as “Filipinos were passive and accepted colonial rule and believed Spain brought civilization to ancient Philippines” (p.469), they feel frustrated and struggle over whom to believe. Further, they all agree that Pinoy Teach pushes them to examine what their ethnic identity means to them, and generally define empowerment as “feeling
confident with oneself” (p.472), while they do not specifically contribute empowerment to learning about their ethnic history.

Goodwin et al. (1997) find in the study that twenty one Asian American teachers in New York City believe that they are a marginal minority, invisible in school, and the school curriculum is irrelevant to Asian American life experiences and to their culture. American schools and their administrators have little experience with Asian American teachers, students, and communities. Administrators may have little tolerance for differences in discipline, teaching method, and administrative style (Sanchez & Felix, 1986).

Similarly, Pang (2006) proposes that conscious or unconscious prejudicial beliefs have shaped the education of Asian Americans. One of the prevalent issues that Asian American students face is marginalization, which is “the practice of placing the needs of a population at the margins of society, therefore their needs are deemed not important” (p.71). Pang illustrates one example about Asian American students being marginalized in class participation. Many teachers focus on class participation, but they may not encourage all students to develop the skills of public speaking. Asian American girls may be unconsciously ignored or not encouraged by the teacher in classroom discussions. It may be caused by the stereotypes about women, more specifically Asian American women, as being quiet, weak, or shy. Another pervasive issue is about racism. Kiang (1998) mentions that Asian American students have faced the high level of prejudice from their peers and teachers in schools. Racism toward Asian American students is more often ignored. Pang discusses that conscious and unconscious prejudice leads to other essential barriers to equity. Much discussion regarding race and racism uses a Black and
White paradigm, while it often excludes the participation of Asian American and Pacific Islanders in historical and contemporary periods. It is crucial that Asian Americans are represented in class discussions and guest presentations concerning equity.

Gordon (1994) points out that for minority students’ education experiences, the schools lack in adequate academic preparation and poor counseling for them as well as adequate preparation on the part of teachers to work with students from diverse backgrounds, which results in students dropping out or being pushed out of the system. Also, Su (1997) conducts one study with minority teacher candidates enrolling during the 1993-1994 academic year for a teacher certificate/Master’s degree program in the Graduate School of Education at a public university in California. Su finds that one third of participants, including Asian American, Hispanic, African American, and Native American, especially those perceiving their early school experiences as particularly negative because of their racial status and language difficulties, have a strong awareness of the unequal educational opportunities for the poor and minority students and the existing irrelevant curriculum and instruction for minority students, as well as the need to reform schools and society.

Regarding the issues of race and inequalities on minority students’ education in American schools, Walker (2000) provides an account of the segregated African American education during 1935 to 1969, and the concerted efforts between African American schools, parents, and communities to challenge social injustice and racial discrimination on their students’ education in practice. In the situation of overt racism, segregated elementary and high school for African American students were created and sustained. African American schools, parents, and communities tried to provide the
education for their students under an externally restrictive environment. For example, there were a number of continued challenges to the African American community in finding ways to provide high school education for many students of high school age, persisting to focus on classical training instead of an industrial curriculum mandated by the Northern philanthropists (Anderson, 1988), and concerning about inequality in the distribution of resources, teacher training, availability, and job demands that created problems in the early years. In the study, Walker finds that the segregated schools in the South have been marked with certain characteristics. First, exemplary teachers were increasingly well trained and created their own culture of teaching. They had high expectations on student success and demanding teaching style that assumed their students would be and must be taught the curriculum available at white schools and motivated to believe they could achieve. Second, the curriculum and extracurricular activities were used to reinforce the aspirations that students could grow up to “be somebody” (P.267). Whenever possible, the schools attempted to offer the same curriculum to African American students as at white schools. An extracurricular activity program was also provided to complement the academic curriculum, including clubs, all-school events, and special observances. Third, parents supported and were involved in both financial needs and cultural programs of schools. They also served as “advocates” to position themselves between the needs of the school community and the power of the white school board and speak for the school. Fourth, the leadership of school principals implemented the vision that parents and teachers held about how to uplift the race. The principals were the chief instructional leaders of schools, served as the role model for students and teachers, and worked as the liaison with the white community. Finally, Walker mentions that the
school was as extension of the community, where school and community members interacted in many settings of this closed environment, and school and community values reflected the beliefs of each other, which minimized difficulties and conflict in role, language, values, and behaviors.

Foster (1993) examines the relationship between exemplary African American teachers’ backgrounds and their educational philosophies in one study. These teachers include thirteen women and four men, range in age from 45-85, and have teaching experience from 17-66 years. Eight are secondary teachers, eight are elementary teachers, and one is junior high school teacher. They work in eleven states. Foster finds that these teachers growing up in segregated communities have strong kinship, connectedness, and solidarity within the communities among family, school, and church. They are aware of numerous instances of racism, both subtle and not so subtle, within school settings and in the larger society, and how changes in society militate against easy success for African American students. They claim the education for African American students gives them competence in community and culture. They also cultivate their beliefs and values into classroom activities, which are at the heart of African American communities, including the relationships marked by social equality, egalitarianism, and a mutuality stemming from a group.

Third, when Asian American students bring diverse family histories, value orientations, and experiences in American schools that are institutionalized with white middle-class values and identities, their heterogeneous identities have encountered challenges constructed in schools. It influences what they learn and how they learn in classrooms. On the one hand, Asian American students define themselves in relation to
their identities within historical, political, institutional contexts that define and give status to certain communities. On the other hand, they are defined and might find themselves challenged by teachers and other students, and negotiate their identities of race, ethnicity, nationality, language, gender, class, and religion to respond to teachers and other students in school and classroom contexts. Asian American students’ perception of themselves and being perceived in educational settings has been influenced by the prejudicial beliefs and stereotypes on Asian Americans in the U.S. society.

The term model minority was first created in the 1960s, referring to Asian American success. Scholars have challenged its validity and cautioned that the model minority image is “a fictitious, unproven or illusory thing that circulates in contemporary society, the false representation and erroneous beliefs” (Min, 2003, p.192), which often silences those Asian American who are underachieving, struggling with language and cultural adaptation, and experiencing difficulty in communicating with schools. Li (2009) points out that with the increasing diversity and gaps in educational attainment across and within Asian ethnic groups, model minority has been more used for recent East Asian immigrants including Chinese, Japanese, and Korean who have achieved higher levels of education and economic success than those from Southeast Asia such as Lao, Cambodian, Hmong, and Vietnamese refugees and immigrants. The effects of the model minority representation on the lives of Asians and their relationships with non-Asians in the United States have been critically analyzed. The model minority construct seeks to racialize Asian Americans as a homogeneous group who has assimilated well into American mainstream society, and has been used as a measuring tool for other minority
groups’ behavior that furthers white privilege and serves the white agenda to control and divide minority groups (Lee, 1996; Lei, 1998).

The stereotypical image of model minority has placed much pressure on Asian American students’ academic achievement by informing the way in which others perceive Asian American students and Asian American youth see themselves in schools. Lee (1996) finds that the students at both high- and low-achieving levels at Academic High school experience huge anxiety over their capability to attain the standards of model minority. Some low-achieving students are ashamed about and hide their academic struggles and difficulties from teachers and peers, while many high-achieving students are worried about their not being good enough in academics. On the contrary, some Asian American students at Academic High try to completely resist the stereotype of model minority and exhibit hypermasculinity to reject the nerd image of model minority. They often think that to show masculinity, they must resist school. As a result one of the students has succeeded in not being perceived as a nerd at the expense of making his academics a low priority, graduating at the bottom of his class.

Asian Americans have been viewed by mainstream U.S. society with suspicion, as indelibly foreign, exotic, unknowable and potentially treacherous, math and science geeks, numbers of people rather than people, followers and not leaders, and physically frail but devious and sneaky (Liu, 2001). The immigration of Asian Americans to the United States has been a history of more than 150 years, yet they are often perceived as outsiders. Tuan (1998) points out that third-, fourth-, and even fifth-generation Asian Americans find that they are not viewed as real Americans while European Americans are accepted as authentic Americans soon after they arrive in the United States. “While
white ethnics must actively assert their ethnic uniqueness if they wish this to feature prominently in their interactions with others, Asian ethnics are assumed to be foreign unless proven otherwise” (p.137). Many third- or higher- generation Chinese Americans feel marginalized, excluded, and not completely accepted by mainstream America regardless of their high educational achievement, socioeconomic background, high level of acculturation, and how long they or their families have resided in the United States. Though they can choose what part of their Asian culture that they want to retain or practice in their private lives, in public lives because of their visible racial characteristics, they are expected to be highly ethnic - speak Chinese language, eat Chinese food, know and practice Chinese traditional cultures etc. Many feel that white Americans perceive them as outsiders or foreigners. A Los Angeles Filipino interviewed by Bonus (2000) comments that “many people think of us as foreigners or, sometimes, even strangers and visitors because they find it very hard to place us. We get mistaken for Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Thai. We’re Asians, but we’re different Asians too. Some of them think we’re black or Hispanic or even [American] Indians” (p.51).

Asian American students are strongly influenced by the stereotype of being perpetual foreigners in schools. The image of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners influences the way that teachers and non-Asian American students perceive Asian American students in schools. Lee (1996) finds in her research that teachers usually refer to Asian American students as “Asian”, not as “Asian American” or “American”. Their language implies an assumption that the categories Asian and American are mutually exclusive even though teachers may not leave Asian American out from the category American on purpose. For non-Asian American students, at the moment of interracial
conflict with Asian American students, the foreigner stereotype can emerge in their behaviors treating Asian American “go back to where they came from” or use fake Asian accents to mock them. Due to the powerful impact of the perpetual foreigner stereotype exerting in schools, many Asian American students have internalized the notion that they are not authentic Americans, view white people as the only real Americans, and regard this foreignness making them inferior to the real white Americans. They may reject and downplay the qualities that they understand are associated with being Asian, such as their names, languages, and physical characteristics. Lee and Vaught (2003) cite one student’s quote when she explains that popular culture has influenced her thoughts on the standards of beauty, “watching MTV affected the way I acted very much. I think I wanted to be more Americanized. I changed my hair color. I got colored contact lenses.” The stereotypical image of perpetual foreigner also affects Asian American students’ participation in classes. Some students with Asian accents do not want to speak in class for fear that their non-Asian peers will mock the way they talk. Even the students without accent of speaking English are often quiet in class because they have internalized the notion that their experiences are not valid.

Rong and Preissle (1997) further discuss about racial discrimination on Asian American in U.S. history and contemporary society. Due to the history of mistreatment to the Asian community such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Oriental Exclusion Act of 1924, and the internment of Japanese American during World War II these policies have had long-term psychological effects on younger Asians and recent Asian immigrants (Huang & Ying, 1989), whereby Asians perceive the discrimination as different from other groups who have suffered. “It combines racial prejudice, a form of
bigotry that may be rare in an immigrant’s country of origin, with xenophobia toward migrants, some of whom have experienced sufficient success to be viewed as ethnic crossovers; overeducation with underemployment is the pattern, not the exception” (p.280-281). Min (2006) further points out that in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the September 11, 2001, the same as Arabs and Muslims, south Asians have become targets of physical violence, prejudice, and discrimination by both the U.S. government and the general public partly because a large population of south Asians are Muslims and they share physical characteristics with Arabs. It is reported that there was an increase of hate crimes against Muslims and people who are believed to be Muslims between 2000 and 2001, which include “hate speeches; vandalism; arson; assaults on individuals; harassments; incidents of prejudice in public schools, inside subways, and on the street; threatening phone calls; and murder” (p.99).

The stereotypes on Asian Americans are presented in Goodwin et al.’s (2006) study, which examines in what ways Asian American teachers feel that they are perceived by faculty in the teacher education program, other preservice students, cooperating and supervising teachers, and children in the field-placement classrooms. Goodwin et al. find that these twelve Asian American teachers feel that they are implicitly categorized in four ways: “incapable”, “approachable”, “as the other”, and “as universal oriental”. First, the Asian American teachers in this study express that often white parents, especially middle- to upper-middle-class families have lack of confidence in their capabilities as teachers and feel that they need to prove themselves, while they do not feel that students exhibit this perception. These perceptions are sometimes related to the issue of language, Asian Americans are perceived as not speaking English well
enough to teach. Second, parents of color, especially Asian American parents, seem to perceive these teachers as more capable and certainly approachable. They demonstrate a greater comfort with the Asian American teachers regardless of language and feel more connected to schools. Third, otherness is demonstrated through diverse ways of perceptions and behaviors that heighten these teachers’ feeling of invisibility, isolation, and difference. It is expressed in name-calling and racist comments. Otherness is apparent in the caricatures and exotic images of Asian Americans by their students and their colleagues, “China for them might mean kung fu or Connie Chung” (p.109). Stereotypical images of Asian Americans characterized as quiet, non-English speaking, and science oriented, are also expressed. Finally, these Asian American teachers feel that they are perceived in the ways of universal oriental, meaning “the ways in which Asians have been defined by others and named by others and are often seen as interchangeable units, members of a single, monolithic, and therefore, faceless group” (p.109). For some of these teachers, it means that their Asian identity is put aside as extraneous by non-Asians around them. There are also some situations in which non-Asians perceive the different Asian ethnicities as interchangeable and assume that they belong to a group when in fact they do not.

As for the influences of prejudicial beliefs on Asian American education, Pang (2006) analyzes the four major reasons that Asian Americans are marginalized. Because of these four factors, many people do not understand the important issues that Asian Americans are facing such as immigration, language, identity, assimilation, racism, mental health etc. First, even though Asian Americans account for 4% of the national population, many people do not know that it does not provide an accurate understanding:
the number of Asian Americans is different depending on regions. For example, they made up 9% of the student population in Boston public schools in 2005 (Boston Public Schools, 2005), while in the district of Seattle schools, Asian Americans including Pacific Islanders comprised 23.1% of the student population in 2003, equal to the number of African American adolescents comprising 22.5% of the district (Seattle Public Schools, 2003). Second, Asian Americans have different and sometimes contradictory cultural values and behaviors with those of mainstream society. Some Asian American families value harmonious relationships among people and teach their children to be collaborative and deferential toward teachers. Third, the Asian American community is not politically powerful and its voice is not often heard. Although there are individual organizations such as the Organization for Chinese Americans, Asian Americans have not developed a strong pan-ethnic voice. Finally, Asian Americans are often seen as foreigners and not full members of this country because of their physical differences from mainstream citizens. Consequently, some Chinese American and Filipino American students are still viewed as aliens though they may be fifth or sixth generation Americans.

McKay and Wong (1996) conducted a two-year qualitative study on English language development of four Chinese immigrant adolescents through seventh and eighth grades in a suburban school in California in the early 1990s. Michael Lee, Jeremy Chang, and Jessica Ho are from Taiwan, and Brad Wang is from mainland China. They all recently arrive in the United States with minimal English and are enrolled in the ESL classes at their school. McKay and Wong identify four different discourses where these students are situated: colonialist/racialized discourses on immigrants, model-minority discourse, Chinese cultural nationalist discourses, social and academic school discourses,
and gender discourses. These discourses interact with each other. They help to shape the investment that the students make toward English learning and influence the students’ identities and their negotiations of multiple, dynamic, and sometimes contradictory identities. In the findings, McKay and Wong relate these discourses and identities to the students’ exercise of agency in terms of their positioning in power relationships in both the school and U.S. society. One example is about Michael Lee. Model-minority discourse is a strong presence in Michael’s life due to his highly educated background and parental involvement with high expectations. Michael’s proficiency in sports is suitable to the gender expectations of American school subculture and helps him gain friends from different racial and ethnic backgrounds although it is contradictory to the model-minority discourse. It seems that this positive social identity makes Michael focus on aural/oral skills in his investment in learning English. He does not emphasize the acquisition of written English maybe because colonialist/racialized discourses on immigrants and social school discourse place a premium on spoken English as an indicator of functionality in American society. Among the four student participants, Michael is the most active in employing the coping strategy of resistance (Leki, 1995, p.250) to counteract his weak positioning as an ESL student. For instance, he does not write on the recommended topics of family or school at the first language assessment, while he is the only one to choose to write about his interests such as sports or pets. Michael sometimes situates himself in more powerful positions in certain discourses. For example, Chinese cultural nationalist discourse puts him in a superior position when Michael shows his advanced “cultural literacy” in Chinese to his teacher who could not understand and only his Chinese friends could. So, Michael has gained enough agency
and satisfaction from his multiple social identities as an athlete and popular friend to both Chinese and non-Chinese. He does not feel obligated to develop further his identity as a scholar and to meet his parents and teachers requirement by improving his skills of academic writing.

**Asian American Students in Social Studies Education**

Social studies curriculum and school culture have privileged the perspectives and experiences of European Americans and marginalized the perspectives and experiences of people of color including Asian Americans in U.S. society. Social studies educators need to realize the ways in which students from diverse backgrounds may interact with the curriculum and be aware of the unintentional consequences of their choice of content (Barton & McCully, 2004). In further, it is important for different racial and ethnic groups’ historical interactions with one another to be examined in curriculum, so that students can understand that the history of the country came through a sequence of interactive experiences of struggle and triumph among various groups (Tyack, 2003). There are few studies that have focused on Asian American students’ learning experiences in social studies and their perception and interpretation on social studies curriculum.

First, Asian American students, their families, and their life experiences relative to their identities play a critical role in shaping their historical understanding and knowledge. Asian American students’ learning in social studies is also influenced by differences between the teachers’ and students’ historical perspectives, and interactions among the teacher, texts, and students in classroom. “Teaching and learning are richly complex activities that involve, among other things, the prior knowledge and experience
A full page of text is not provided, but the text begins with:

teachers and students bring to class, the instructional representations of school subjects, the structural regularities of the classroom and school settings, as well as larger issues of race, class, and gender” (Grant, 2001, p81).

Duff (2001) states that ESL students in social studies classes are often disadvantaged in “lacking the linguistic, cultural and geographical knowledge to interpret oral/written texts; missing earlier social studies courses; the familiar content missed from the North American curriculum; expected to view historical events and controversies from multiple perspectives, often reflecting a critical awareness of social justice issues and the differing experiences, viewpoints, voices, and representations of historical figures or groups” (p.109). Duff examines the school experiences of Asian immigrant ESL students in two tenth grade social studies classes in a Canadian school with a high concentration of Asian-background ESL students. The findings show that the everyday social studies curriculum is Eurocentric and Anglo-American, and has variety of requirements on language and literacy, orality and narrativity, group projects and other activities, current events discussions, sociocultural issues and (pop) culture. The students appear to be marginal participants in discussions and are at times amused, puzzled, and alienated by the talk around them. The students hardly relate to aspects of their own heritage cultures even when they are encouraged to do so in social studies class. However, in ESL class they make presentations about themselves and their interests, including representations of their complex, multicultural lives and identities. In addition, some students experience occasional discrimination at school, feeling that ‘some racial things’ happen to them such as mistreatment and mockery by local mainstream students, who attribute to their non-standard grammar or pronunciation. Duff suggests that both ESL
and content teachers need to find more effective ways to accommodate diverse groups of students and provide the necessary scaffolding to ensure equitable access to the curriculum for all students to learn and succeed in school.

According to the impact of family and school on the students’ historical understanding and knowledge, Seixas (1993) employs participant observations and two in-depth interviews with each of the six 11th-grade student participants from diverse backgrounds in a large, urban, multicultural school in Canada, in order to explore these students’ construction of historical knowledge and their perceptions of the disjunctions between school and family as sources of historical knowledge. The students’ patterns of historical understanding are analyzed with three elements: historical significance; historical evidence and authority; and, historical agency, empathy and moral judgment. Seixas finds that family experiences and other sources of information outside school strongly influence the way of students’ historical understanding. Most students recognize that secondary interpretations and media reports are portrayed by the position of the authors. The students are less able to articulate a way of analyzing primary sources and willing to accept the testimony of eyewitnesses uncritically. Apparently the students’ social studies classes have not been able to integrate the insights from their family experiences into their formal historical study. For example, Pedro’s historical thinking is embedded more in his family’s immigration experience than in the school subject. He is able to draw from diverse references and integrate the historical material from social studies, Portuguese school, and family experience. Karen, born in Hong Kong and having been in Canada as a visa student for one year, is more interested in learning Chinese history, but finds that it is difficult to make any connections between the Canadian
Students’ historical perspectives are also rooted in historically and culturally constituted racialized identities (Cronon, 1992; Epstein, 1993; Holt, 1995). Epstein (1998) proposes that students’ perspectives on racial groups’ experiences in U.S. history not only provide the ways for constructing connections among past experiences, contemporary circumstances, and future possibilities, but also shape the ways for evaluating historical sources and integrating new knowledge into current framework. In the study, Epstein examines the historical perspectives that the two groups of African American and European American students bring to historical inquiry in one teacher’s 11th-grade history classes. The findings demonstrate that African American students and European American students construct different explanations of significant actors, events, and themes in U.S. history, and conflicting beliefs about the credibility of secondary historical sources. The differences in African American and European American students’ historical understandings come from race-related differences in their lived experiences and their family members, “reflecting more substantive differences in the two groups’ perspectives on racial groups’ experiences in U.S. history and contemporary society” (p.407). Also, the socio-cultural contexts where the students have been raised influence their perspectives on U.S. history and the credibility of secondary sources.
significantly. For example, African American historical figures constitute 75% of the African American students’ selections, and European American figures for 82% of the European-American students’ selections. Considering the credibility of secondary historical sources, family members are presented by African American students as the most credible sources, then teacher and TV, movies, and videos. In comparison, the textbook is presented by European American students as the most credible sources, then the teacher and library books. Epstein discusses that the European American students’ perspectives on U.S. history are congruent with those they have learned about at school. Rooted in their own and family members’ experiences in a society that extend to them taken-for-granted rights and privileges, European American students’ perspectives demonstrate dominant narrative themes about the expansion of democratic rights and rule to great numbers of Americans. The African American students’ perspectives are shaped by their own and family members’ experiences many of which are marked by racial discrimination or oppression. They are also framed by another set of assumptions “the centrality of the historical experiences related to African Americans’ struggles for equality, white people’s or the government’s responsibility for racial oppression, and the contradiction between the ideal and the reality of the inalienability of individual rights historically and in contemporary society” (p.418). The historical accounts at school are perceived by African American students as ‘white people’s history’. Finally, Epstein points out the limitations of current history curriculum in American public schools, and suggests a curriculum framework which takes into account different racial and/or ethnic groups’ historical perspectives and experiences in the study.

Second, considering that the school curriculum marginalizes Asian Americans
and other minority groups, the perspectives, experiences, and contributions of different racial and ethnic groups should be incorporated in the social studies curriculum. Scholars point out that more inclusive representations of Asian Americans considerably promote Asian American students’ learning and development of ethnic and cultural identities. Dilg (2003) uses culturally-appropriate educational materials to improve students’ engagement and learning when teaching in a multicultural classroom. She finds that the students frequently look for the issues in class materials that they can identity to make connections to who they are and who they want to become. “For many students, the most powerful connections with material arise through finding that a work reflects in some way experiences tied to their own history; the history of their family, or the history of their culture” (p.57).

Gay (1978) recommends that the social studies curriculum should examine the issues and concepts including culture, ethnicity, identity, roles and functions of ethnic groups in U.S. history and culture, ethnic stereotypes and racism, ethnic group contributions, and the acculturation/assimilation of ethnic individuals and groups. Lee (2003) suggests some changes of school curricular to disrupt the stereotypes on Asian Americans. For example, students could read autobiographies and fictions authored by Asian Americans in literature class to investigate which stereotypes are confirmed or challenged in the stories. The long and complicated history of Asian Americans in the United States can be taught in class with the examination on historical roots of the perpetual foreigner and model minority stereotypes and about the political uses of these stereotypes.
Whereas few schools have curricula integrated with Asian American issues, for example history, culture, and art, and students need be prepared for participating in a democratic society as well, Pang (2006) proposes several content areas such as social studies and language arts that could be used for the integration of more accurate and comprehensive information related to Asian Americans. In social studies textbooks, historical information often portrays Asian American people as marginal participants and primarily focuses on the three topics in the discussion of Asian American: “(1) Chinese immigrants and their role in the gold rush; (2) Chinese immigrants and their role in the building of the transcontinental railroad; and (3) the internment of Japanese Americans” (p.74). Teachers could have more information related to the participation of Asian Americans in the building of the United States in the textbooks. For example, in discussions of the building of the railroad, students could learn about Chinese immigrant leaders in the Chinese labor strike in 1867. Literature, creative writing, English, art, and art history might also be naturally integrated with Asian American experiences and culture. Teachers could investigate and add the works of artists, novelists, and poets to the school curriculum. The novels by Asian American writers provide students with an understanding of the multicultural experiences of immigration and colonization to conflicts in adjustment and acculturation. Teachers could also use a unit of civil rights role models to provide information for all students to know that there are numerous Asian Americans having resisted racism and continually fought against oppression, and inquire on the most important experiences in the life of the leaders and how these experiences influence their actions.
Whereas many social studies teachers lack to help students learn about and analyze the role that race and racism have played in the United States, Howard (2004) describes findings from a study in a middle school U.S. history classroom that is centered on students’ interpretations of race and race relations in the United States. Ten students including two Asian Americans, two whites, three African Americans, and three Latinos are interviewed. It shows that students view this particular class helpful in understanding race, and subsequently race relations, which were invisible in their social studies classes before. Students’ discussion around race, discrimination, and prejudice seems to convey a belief that the silence of race often causes a certain mystery about the concept, and this silence might have reinforced certain racial misconceptions and beliefs. Also, these students view the social studies as subject matter dealing with historical events, issues, and concepts, but not as a place where race and race-related issues are addressed. Social studies class has failed to become a place for critical dialogues about race. Finally, these students comment that in their school with a racially balanced student population, students’ relations across racial and ethnic boundaries are cool at best, and most teachers pay little attention to racial divisions in school that seems to foster greater tension among the students. This class focusing on race and race-related issues gives students a good opportunity in the improvement of intergroup relations. Almost all of the students of color feel the necessity to further examine the meaning of race, if intergroup relations are to improve. Howard (2004) discusses that the students seem to feel disconnected from their teachers with respect to important aspects of how they identify themselves. In students’ views, their teachers are not concerned with some of the issues that students face with regard to race and to differences in general.
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Education based on the mainstream American society culture has marginalized minority cultures and their perspectives and experiences in the curriculum. In recent years some educators have paid close attention to culturally relevant pedagogy. Gay (2000) defines culturally relevant teaching as

“We use the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches to and through the strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming. It is comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory.” (p.29)

Further, Ladson-Billings (1994) proposed the meaning of culturally relevant pedagogy as:

A pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These cultural referents are not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right.

(p.18)

Culturally relevant pedagogy helps minority students to be able to maintain their own social and cultural identities, and go beyond the negative effects of the dominant culture. It also contributes the students from different socio-cultural backgrounds not being denigrated, but accepted and respected for their own, bridging the gap between their school experience and home culture, and improving their learning.

Culturally relevant pedagogy requires teachers to change their thoughts and attitudes, and take actions. Teachers can support students of color at a disadvantageous
position and help them achieve academic success. They can encourage minority students to bring their home culture in school and return their achievements to community, to make connections between their community, national, and global identities. Ladson-Billings (1994) finds that culturally relevant teachers firstly see themselves as an artist and teaching as an art. Second, they see themselves as part of the community, teaching as giving back to the community. They encourage students to do the same. Third, they believe that all students can succeed. Fourth, culturally relevant teachers perceive students’ diverse backgrounds as strengths and help them make connections between their community, national, and global identities. Finally, they see teaching as “pulling knowledge out” of students. They believe that students bring their knowledge to school, employ different methods to explore the knowledge, and help students to use that for their academic success.

Regarding to Rodriguez et al. (2004), they implement culturally relevant teaching practices in a university outreach program to promote the culturally diverse tenth-grade students’ engagement and competence in mathematics and science and develop their socio-cultural identity. The outreach program is guided by socio-cultural theory and further informed by constructs based on critical theory in everyday practices. The program’s staff develops and implements academic curricula, multicultural activities, family events, and other extracurricular activities, to contribute to minority students’ identity development and academic competence. In the outreach program, students coming from ethnic minority communities feel being empowered. They increase their confidence and participation in the learning experience, share the cultural richness and diversity, present the status equalization, and develop the academic and personal growth.
Students also see that elements of mainstream culture and their own cultures create a new platform from which to move toward participation and involvement in school and society.

Culturally relevant pedagogy benefits students with diverse backgrounds from three aspects: academic achievement, cultural competence, and socio-political consciousness (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). First, it helps students achieve academic success. Ladson-Billings (1994) examines the activities of four classrooms in the basic skill areas of reading and math, three in which culturally relevant teaching is practiced and one in which it is not. The result shows that all of three culturally relevant teachers have some essential qualities that are absent from the non-culturally relevant teacher’s practices even though these three culturally relevant teachers have their own different teaching styles. In the classrooms where culturally relevant teaching is practiced, the students have developed a greater commitment to learning, demonstrated competence, and made a higher academic achievement.

Second, culturally relevant pedagogy encourages cultural competence and promotes students to build up their positive social and cultural identities. Caring to students is an important component in culturally relevant teachers’ practices in classrooms, where cultural competence is encouraged. Gay (2000) defines that caring is a concern for person and performance; caring is action provoking; caring prompts effort and achievement; caring is multidimensional responsiveness. This kind of caring is one of the major qualities of culturally relevant pedagogy for ethnically and culturally diverse students. Students are cared for their “psychoemotional well-being and academic success; personal morality and social actions; obligations and celebrations; communality and individuality; and unique cultural connections and universal human bonds” (Gay, 2000,
p.46). In caring-centered classrooms, students are honored for their humanity, held in high esteem, expected for high performance, and helped to fulfill their expectations.

Caring students in classrooms, culturally relevant teachers facilitate cultural competence and encourage students to build up positive social and cultural identities. Cultural competence is referred as an ability to recognize differences, an ability and attitude to appreciate students’ diverse backgrounds, cultural experiences and knowledge as learning resource of diversity learning, and a communication and language ability among different cultures (Gay, 2000). In the classrooms where culturally relevant pedagogy is practiced, ethnically and culturally diverse students have opportunities to maintain their own social and cultural identities to go beyond the negative effects of the dominant culture. Cultural competence also promotes students to achieve academic success. Erickson (1987) cites that the result of one set of studies at the Kamehameha Early Education Project in Hawaii conducted by Au and Mason in 1981, shows that compared to one way of teaching reading which the students use mainstream Anglo patterns for turn taking, overlapping talk enhances the school achievement of minority students. One explanation is that the cultural adaptation allows students to feel competent in their conversations in a familiar way and may decrease cultural shock in the classroom setting. The school’s accepting students’ ways of acting in the classroom interactions, which positively regarded in their community, may be perceived by these students as a kind of affirmation of themselves and their community by the school. The combination of caring and cultural competence is a powerful ideological and practical support for ethnically and culturally diverse students in classrooms, which benefits them from being
valued for their different cultural backgrounds and positively constructing their own social and cultural identities.

Finally, culturally relevant pedagogy provides an opportunity for the development of students’ socio-political consciousness. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (1999) believes that culturally relevant pedagogy can be viewed as “politically relevant teaching”. Politically relevant teachers pay attention to their students’ cultural norms, values, and practices, but more focus on the political realities and aspiration of students of color. In this sense, students are not only motivated to achieve academic success, but also to develop their sense of social justice in classrooms, where politically relevant teachers incorporate their professional training, culture identity, and personal and political commitments in their practices and thinking as educators. Gay (2000) indicates that culturally relevant teaching is significant for taking actions and transforming the society through students’ gradual growth as social agency. Culturally relevant teaching resists the traditional educational practices with respect to ethnic students of color, and recovers the veil of presumed absolute authority from conceptions of scholarly truth typically taught in schools. It facilitates students to find their own voices, engage in multiple cultural perspectives, and become more active in their knowing, thinking and learning.

Summary

In this chapter, my literature review has highlighted Asian American students’ backgrounds, identities, and experiences in schools with a critical examination on historical, economical, political, and institutional forces that affect how Asian American students are positioned in American society. The increasing diversity in both American educational settings and society has brought forth the challenges to curriculum
organization and classroom pedagogy in schools. All students need to be exposed to the variety of experiences, practices, and worldviews that can be found in a multicultural society. It is essential for the diversification of the curriculum and instruction to represent the knowledge and experiences of minority communities, especially for marginalized ethnic and racial groups, which will promote democratic free thinking and increase both students’ and teachers’ knowledge and positive interaction among different culture groups.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this study, I investigated how the identities of Asian American students interact with their learning in the social studies curriculum in American schools. The study aimed to understand (1) How they identify themselves within school settings; (2) How they perceive and interpret their social studies instruction; and (3) In what ways their identities influence their learning in social studies and in what ways the social studies instruction influences their identities. I found naturalistic paradigm was suitable to this study. My use of naturalistic inquiry was also influenced by theoretical perspectives about identity as socially constructed and negotiated to inform my research questions and interpret the experiences of Asian American students in two American high schools. This chapter describes rationale for the naturalistic inquiry paradigm, the research participants, methods used for data collection and analysis, the trustworthiness of the study, ethical considerations, writing up process, and the limitations of the study.

Rationale for the Naturalistic Paradigm

I conducted this study within a naturalistic paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to understand how the identities of Asian American students influence their learning in social studies in the Midwestern school settings. “A paradigm is a world view, a general perspective, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world” (Lincoln & Guba,
Researchers consider that paradigm is a primary belief system that guides the investigation into the problem. Research paradigms involve the ontological, epistemological, and methodological aspects (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The ontological aspect presents researchers’ beliefs about the nature of reality being investigated. Naturalistic researchers believe that there are multiple realities and the realities are constructed by people who experience specific events in the given contexts. In my study, I used naturalistic paradigm to examine the Asian American students’ identities that have been constructed and negotiated through different social practices within different social contexts, as well as their diverse learning experiences in the social studies curriculum in two American high schools. The naturalistic paradigm allowed me to investigate the complexities and realities of the students’ school and life experiences from multiple perspectives by working with different student and teacher participants.

The epistemological aspect makes inquiry into the relationship between the knower and the known. Naturalistic researchers believe that researchers and research participants are inseparable and the in-depth interaction between researchers and research participants is necessary to understand the complexity of the phenomenon being studied from the perspective of the research participants who experience them. In my study, I used the naturalistic paradigm to understand the Asian American students’ background, identities, and life experiences; how they make sense of the social studies content and pedagogy; and the relationship between their identities and social studies learning from their points of view through my classroom observations and interviews with the students during three months. Our interactions allowed me not only to gain access to the social studies classrooms and the students’ social environment in school, but also to build close
relationships with the students and teachers. For example, the students felt comfortable to share their personal stories, feelings, emotions, and even troublesome school experiences with me in our formal interviews. It provided the opportunity for me to know more about the students so that I could have a better understanding of the complicated phenomenon under research.

The use of naturalistic paradigm influences the methodology of my study from its purpose to the presentation. I employed the elements of naturalistic inquiry suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), including natural setting, the human as instrument, utilization of tacit knowledge, qualitative methods, purposeful sampling, inductive data analysis, emergent design, and negotiated outcomes in the study. I discuss each element in detail on how the study is compatible to the naturalistic inquiry paradigm.

**Natural Setting**

According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), naturalistic inquiry should be implemented in a natural setting because “phenomena of study, whatever they may be – physical, chemical, biological, social, psychological – take their meaning as much from their contexts as they do from themselves” (p.189). Reality constructions cannot be separated from the context in which they are experienced and phenomenon cannot be understood in isolation from their contexts. Any observations conducted are inevitably dependent upon time and context. The naturalistic researcher cannot ignore the setting because it has been controlled carefully and should consider all factors and influences in that context. The researcher should also become so much a part of the context for minimizing the degree of disturbance in the setting.
During my classroom observation, I observed the Asian American students at the back of the classroom. At the beginning of my study, I noticed that the students especially at Jefferson High School did not feel comfortable about my attendance in the classroom and sometimes looked back at me. Gradually the students started to talk more and interact with others as if I was not there. I thought that they might be used to my presence and got familiar with me when I spent more time with them in schools. Outside of the classroom areas, I observed the students’ behaviors and interactions with their peers and teachers. My observation on the students in their natural settings allowed me to gain a better understanding of their experiences in the social contexts that had shaped those experiences. For example, when I started my research at Jefferson High School, I paid attention to the fact that the student participants were around their racially, ethnically and culturally diverse friends, such as Kanan sitting with and talking to the White, African American, and Asian American students during lunch time. Such interactions were confirmed with my observation inside and outside of classrooms during the three month study. Later, the students shared with me that their school was very diverse and a lot of students came from different cultural backgrounds. They had Caucasian friends, African American friends, and Asian American friends at school.

Although the teachers welcomed my observation in their classrooms, I felt that they were aware of my presence there during the first one or two weeks. But then they seemed not to pay attention to me. I had become part of the classroom for the next two and half months. I was able to observe their teaching practices in their natural environment. Before the classes, they usually shared their lesson plans with me and talked to me about which classes in the following week to be better for observation. For
example, Mrs. Wills at Franklin High School suggested to me, “Next Tuesday morning you need to come.”

**The Human as Instrument**

The naturalistic researcher uses the self or other humans as the primary instruments for gathering data, opposed to paper-and-pencil or brass instruments (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The human-as-instrument can sense and respond to the variety of realities that are encountered, understand the meaning of the differential interaction with respondents and objects, and identify and take into account the resulting biases resulted from the values and interaction with local values to some degree.

During the study, I used my abilities, thoughts, and senses to collect data in interviews and classroom observation regarding the Asian American students’ identities and their learning experiences in the social studies curriculum at Jefferson High School and Franklin High School. For example, sitting at the back of the classroom and not interfering teachers’ instruction, I was able to observe fully the classroom setting, what teachers taught, how they taught, and the Asian American students’ interactions with their teachers and other students in social studies classrooms. Without using any equipment such as tape recorder or video camera, I took field notes on what I saw, felt, and thought. After classes, I asked the students and teachers follow-up questions generated from my observation notes in order to further probe the students’ perceptions of the social studies instruction and teachers’ thoughts and insights as well. As the study progressed, I found that my ability in the human as instrument was growing. When becoming more familiar with the school sites and the research participants, I had also acquired a better understanding of the differential interactions among students and

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teachers. Table 3.1 below is an example of my observation notes taken in Mr. Smith’s class on February 24, 2010.
Date: Feb. 24, 2010  
Time: 8:00-10:00am  
Teacher: Mr. Smith  
Course: World Studies  
Total Students in Class: 20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Observer Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The pull-down projector screen is set up near the white board at the front of the classroom. There is a Mac laptop on the table close to the screen. A podium is in the right corner of the room. Students are seated in groups at five round tables in the classroom. Pushpa sits with two white girls and one African American girl while Nicole is with three white boys and one white girl close to the windows. Each of the students has a Mac laptop to work on.</td>
<td>I sit in the back corner of the classroom and am able to see the interactions among the teacher and all the students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00am [welcome]</td>
<td>Students do not pay attention to my attendance in the classroom any more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:05am [teacher briefly introduces Design a Sustainable World (DSW) research project to students and shows several iMovie examples that were made by the students before]</td>
<td>Pushpa and Nicole are chatting with their peers, laughing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>Students are excited in watching iMovies and engage in the discussion with the teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:20am [teacher reads through the document Mastery_4 – Our Globalizing World Unit Review 2010”, which is shown on the projector screen]</td>
<td>lecturing - direction of the DSW research project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher: The course has been updated. In the end, you guys have to deliver research-based lecture and visual presentation. You have the documents, research/analysis chart – annotated bibliography. We will set it up today. Don’t worry. Today we are doing project building. By the end of today, you will submit your research proposal. It is due today.</td>
<td>Students are carefully going through the document with the teacher.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: An example of an observation note.
Tomorrow and Friday we will be doing conference, Foundation two in class. On Friday we are going to do a quiz. The only thing you are going to do is to take it. I want to see what it is, the way you are to build up steps. This will give you insights. On Monday you will have project proposal approved by end of the period. On Tuesday and Wednesday we’ll have more to build up. On Wednesday your first rough draft will be due. It’s very important by the end of that day. By Thursday and Friday you will have peer review. We will be in this room for presentations.

Again, this is Foundation: Foundation one is the project proposal; Foundation two, student conferences; Foundation three, quiz on content of globalization; Foundation four, final project plan; and Foundation five, rough draft. If you turn in your stuff on time, you will present in the class.

8:32am
[one student comes into the classroom]
All of the stuff must be in time. You do more on research, does it hurt your project? No. You are going to do it anyway. You have ten sources.
[teacher writes the required sources on the white board and explains about it]
I am pretty impressive to this. It is the way to help you to do better for this project. I know in the end I put you in the position of success. The more stuff you turn in on time, you have more to go. There are no late assignments requiring extra work.
[teacher shows the option to make up previous late assignments]

At the end it comes to the essential questions and goals. When you guys are going to do presentation, you need have these questions in mind.
[teacher reads through essential question and goals in Unit Four]
This is your presentation.

Student: How do you choose your topics, like World Millennium Goals?

Pushpa: After we submitting our proposal today, could we do it ---?

Sure.

[teacher talks about necessary requirements to earn Mastery – project proposal, typed and prepared lecture for three minutes, visual exhibition for five minutes, and research/analysis chart and annotated bibliography]

[teacher talks about 3-minute persuasive lecture portion of the project and 5-minute audio/visual presentation]

Then 5 minutes, you go into more details. IMovie is the best. --- In all options, photographs and images should be relevant and appropriate. Make it readable for the audience.

Here is the research requirement for your project. Total ten resources. You use eight in your presentations.

[teacher goes through the research requirement for presentation and the websites for research]

Ref-Works. This is awesome. It does so many things for you.

[teacher explains other websites shown on the screen]

All of the places you could go for your research. If you find good sites, then send to me and Mr. Bowman. If it’s good, we will send to everybody.

[teacher goes through Mastery #4 and asks students to take turn to read each section under Mastery]

---

[teacher explains essential understanding]

That’s the full description of the project. Last year when the students did it, there was no globalization before that. Imagine how they freaked out.

Pay attention to Pushpa’s question, yet her voice is too low to be heard.

What is mastery system?

use of tech

Teacher restates the requirement of the research project.

use of tech

students are quiet and concentrated on the lesson

Lecturing – Mastery #4

Students are reading each part when teacher calls their names.

(continued)
If you blow off this project, I had no choice but removing you from government class. You can do some correction. It will drop your grades. It’s ok. I think everyone in this class can do it. You have better and clearer information. You are a great group of students. Even for some lower performance students last year, they did good on this project.

Let’s go to the Rough Draft. This is another big thing. I need you to turn it in by next Wednesday. The majority part of this project needs to be done by next Wednesday.

[teacher explains the major parts in the Rough Draft]

[students ask some questions about the project]

The Project Proposal. I am showing you step by step. Now we are looking at the first step. The first step, put your name, then put the goal.

Pushpa: This is so hard.

The target. Your group, regarding women, focus on what?

Pushpa: Education

What are you going to focus on? For example, if the target is poverty, what part of poverty are you going to focus on?

Final project due date, project summary, project delivery.

[teacher talks about timeline of the project]

Like painting a room. This is how to break down this stuff. Give yourself a goal. That’s how we are going to build up this project. What is the smallest and the most simple we can go?

Any questions relate to the whole class? We have 40 minutes left in the class.

[teacher asks students to start to work on the project]

9:20am

[students go to teacher one by one, and talk about their projects]
### Table 3.1: Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less worried, or more worried?</td>
<td>I am fine. More worried.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you follow the targets, you would find more information. If you stray out, it will be harder. You can do whatever you want. If you pick up extra target, you would do more.</td>
<td>Nicole and Pushpa are quiet in the classroom. They do not speak much but just sometimes talk with their peers at the same table.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[teacher walks around and answers one student group’s questions]</td>
<td>student-centered project based on students’ research interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facts? The facts you could share. The best facts you should share. You should be sharing, collaborating. The analysis is yours, assessment is yours. Talk to each other. Please share with each other. The proposal is due at the midnight. The better choices you make, the more freedom you would have and power to control in your life. The whole point is that you may have enough for next week. People can help you. Would you want the audience interaction? Yes, it would be great if you can do it. What’s the project summary? The project summary is the next weeks what I am going to do, like this.</td>
<td>collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can sit in groups. You might decide who would do what? Think about ten facts, you can share that. Help each other. Work together. If you are climbing a mountain, then work together.</td>
<td>authentic learning experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00am Class is over.</td>
<td>Follow-up questions to the teacher: What’s your goal of this research project? If/How have Asian American students been included in or their cultural background connected to this lesson? Follow-up questions to the students: What’s the topic of your DSW project? How do you feel about this project? How is the group working for your project? What benefits or challenges you have had from this project?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Utilization of Tacit Knowledge

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue the use of tacit (intuitive, felt) knowledge in addition to propositional knowledge (knowledge expressible in language form) in the naturalistic study “because often the nuances of the multiple realities can be appreciated only in this way; because much of the interaction between investigator and respondent or object occurs at this level; and because tacit knowledge mirrors more fairly and accurately the value patterns of the investigator” (p.40). Tacit knowledge is also the base that the human instrument builds many of the insights and hypotheses on, which will eventually develop in propositional form.

As a Chinese/Asian woman studying in the graduate program of Social Studies and Global Education at an American university, my identity, cultural background, and experiences helped me to examine and understand how the Asian American students identified themselves, how they perceived and interpreted the social studies instruction, and the relationships between their identities and learning in social studies. My Asian cultural background and experiences with American culture allowed me to be aware of the Asian American students’ constructed and negotiated identities within different social contexts such as families, schools, and communities. For example, I could understand that the parents of the Asian American students place high value on their children’s education, which has significantly influenced these students’ identities construction – being a scholar/student at school. My own learning experience at the American university also helped me to be aware of the students’ perceptions of Asian stereotypes and their appreciation of being able to bring their special cultural knowledge and experiences into the classroom. Recognizing that Chinese people have been portrayed in distorted and
stereotypical images in the Western society’s media and curriculum, I could directly relate to Chien-fu’s feelings and his actions to resist and clarify the misinformation that describes Chinese people as crazy victims of opium in the textbook. Kanan also addresses the impact of stereotypes that have hindered people to learn about the world: “Just the stereotypes, like media because most of people just watch the news and then they make their own judgments without really understanding and knowing anything. And so it’s totally a bad thing.” Finally, knowing that the historical knowledge and experiences of Asian Americans has largely been omitted in the school curriculum, which makes it irrelevant to Asian American students’ life experiences and to their cultural background, I could understand Kanan’s perception of the Euro-centric American history course and his excitement in bringing his own cultural knowledge and experiences into the classroom.

**Qualitative Methods**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that the naturalistic inquirer uses qualitative methods because such methods are more adaptable to dealing with multiple realities and “the many mutually shaping influences and value patterns that may be encountered” (p.40), and expose more directly the nature of the transaction between researcher and respondent. Qualitative methods come more easily to the human instrument, which tend toward interviewing, observing, analyzing documents and records, taking account of nonverbal communication, and interpreting inadvertent unobtrusive measures.

During my study, I used the qualitative methods of interviews and observations to investigate the Asian American students’ identities and their learning experiences in social studies classrooms. First, I interviewed each of the students four times to understand their background, identities, interpretation of the social studies content and
pedagogy. I interviewed each teacher three times to know their background, beliefs about teaching and learning, goals, and perceptions of their social studies instruction relevant to the study. Each interview lasted approximately twenty minutes. Second, I observed the relevant social studies classes once or twice each week to observe how the students interacted and responded to instruction.

**Purposeful Sampling**

I employed purposeful sampling in this qualitative study. “All sampling is done with some purpose in mind” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.199). Patton (1990) proposes that qualitative inquiry generally focuses more on fewer, purposefully selected respondents, even single cases, in more depth, rather than a large member with little depth. “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p.169). To gain a deeper understanding of the Asian American students’ identities and their learning experiences in the social studies curriculum in two American high schools, purposeful sampling allowed me to locate the information-rich student participants and try to interpret to a certain degree of depth and richness in this study.

Among different strategies for purposeful sampling, I used snowball or chain sampling as the sampling method for the study. It is an approach for locating information-rich key informants, “obtaining knowledge of potential cases from people who know people who meet research interests” (Glesne, 1999, p.29). In this study, snowball sampling involved asking the social studies teachers to refer possible Asian American student participants to me. In order to get to the students who met the research
criteria, I asked the social studies teachers whether they knew some Asian American students who might be interested in my study.

First, I found Nicole, Annie, Pushpa and Kanan through Mr. Smith (these four students’ social studies teacher) at Jefferson High School. Nicole was born and grew up in the United States. Her father is white/European American while her mother is of Chinese heritage and came from Malaysia to pursue a college degree in the United States. When she was three years old, Annie came from the Philippines with her parents who determined to seek better economic and educational opportunities in the United States. Pushpa was born and grew up in the United States. Her parents originally came from India to pursue higher education in the United States. When Kanan was two-and-half-years old, his family came to the United States because his father obtained a job here. Then I found Jun, Qiang, Yung-ching and Chien-fu through Mrs. Wills (these four students’ social studies teacher) at Franklin High School. Jun, Qiang, Yung-ching and Chien-fu were all born and grew up in the United States. Jun and Qiang’s parents all originally came from mainland China to pursue higher education in the United States. Yung-ching and Chien-fu’s parents were from Taiwan when they decided to pursue higher education at American universities. Having the students from different Asian American cultural backgrounds allowed me to examine the complexities of the Asian American students’ life and school experiences, which help to reveal their identities, values, beliefs, and perspectives related to my study. When Asian American students bring diverse family cultural backgrounds, value orientations, customs, and experiences into American schools that are institutionalized with white middle class values and
identities, their heterogeneous identities have also encountered challenges constructed in schools.

**Inductive Data Analysis**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define inductive data analysis as a process for making sense of field data. The sources of data include interviews, observations, documents, unobtrusive measures, or any other qualitative or quantitative information pools. In naturalistic inquiry, “data accumulated in the field must be analyzed *inductively* (that is, from specific, raw units of information to subsuming categories of information) in order to define local working hypotheses or questions that can be followed up” (p.203).

As a naturalistic inquirer, I employed inductive data analysis to code and categorize all of the data. As soon as the data were collected, I began to code the written text of the transcribed interview and observation line by line, and identify concepts from different events in the data. When the relevant concepts were constantly identified and compared for similarities or differences, I grouped them into categories. A constant comparative method was implemented to analyze the data for constantly and repeatedly categorizing, comparing, and testing the data. The categories were further explored into greater depth of understanding of these categories and their interaction through subsequent interviews and observations. When this process went on, there were five major categories emerging, such as Students’ Self Identifications in Schools, Family Practices, Students’ Negotiation of Their Identities, Students’ Perceptions on Social Studies, and the Relationship between Students’ Identities and Their Learning in Social Studies. In this way, I could develop meaningful findings through the generated categories from all the collected data regarding the research questions in the study.
Emergent Design

Naturalistic inquiry supports emergent design which allows findings to emerge from the data rather than being developed in advance since the various factors such as the context of the research site and the interaction between the researcher and participants influence the outcomes of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It does not mean that having emergent design, the researcher goes to the research site and begins data collection without any plan. Rather, the flexible nature of the emergent design helps the researcher to collect more relevant data and approximate the ways in which the study is conducted to the context of the research site.

During the study, I changed my decisions about the methods for data collection. For example, for the time and date of my classroom observations and interviews with the students and teachers, it was flexible and dependent upon the participants’ needs and suggestions on the research sites. Sometimes after class it was difficult to follow up the students’ perspectives on what they had learned in the social studies class because they had to run to another class or go for some events. So I changed to ask the follow-up questions generated from my classroom observation notes during our formal interviews within the next one or two days, which had been scheduled earlier. I found that in this way the students could give me more thorough and reflective responses to my questions regarding their learning experiences in the social studies classroom.

Negotiated Outcomes

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that naturalistic inquirer negotiates meanings and interpretations with research participants because the researcher aims to reconstruct participants’ constructions of reality. Inquiry outcomes depend on the nature and quality
of the interaction between the investigator and the participants, characterized with negotiations about the meaning of data. The participants can better interpret the complex mutual interactions and best understand the influence of local values. Negotiation of outcomes is also necessary for trustworthiness by incorporating the voices of research participants and discussing the findings of the study with the participants. I used member checking, one of the techniques to increase trustworthiness, to discuss the findings with the participants and obtain verification of the findings from them (see details of member checking in Member Checking section). It allowed me to consistently obtain the feedback from the student and teacher participants on my collected data and initial findings during my research. I had been benefited from being challenged on my assumptions, correcting errors, and acquiring accurate understanding and interpretation of the information collected in the field. In member checking, I was able to keep improving my data and preliminary findings, increase trustworthiness, and was responsible for the stakeholders in my study.

**Research Design**

**Participant Selection**

I employed purposeful sampling in this qualitative study. “Purposive sampling is based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most” (Merriam, 1988, p.48). According to Patton (1990), quantitative research emphasizes the samples that are larger and randomly selected. However, qualitative inquiry generally focuses more on fewer, purposefully selected respondents, even single cases, in more depth, rather than a large member with little depth. “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting
information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p.169). In my study, purposeful sampling provided an opportunity for me to locate the information-rich Asian American student participants to gain a deeper understanding of their identities and learning experience in the social studies curriculum in American schools.

There are many different strategies for purposeful sampling. I used snowball or chain sampling as the sampling method for the study. It is an approach for locating information-rich key informants, “obtaining knowledge of potential cases from people who know people who meet research interests” (Glesne, 1999, p.29). In the study, snowball sampling involved asking the social studies teachers to recommend possible Asian American student participants to me.

I developed the selection criteria plan for the student and teacher participants at two high schools in a Midwestern city. Eight Asian American students in these schools were selected in the study.

Criteria for the selection of student participants include:

(1) Students who come from diverse Asian American backgrounds (i.e. they could be immigrants or descendants of immigrants from East Asia, South Asia or Southeast Asia);

(2) Students who are taking social studies;

(3) Students who gain the informed consent of their parents to participate in the study;

(4) Students willing to participate in the study.

Two teachers in these schools were selected in the study.

Criteria for the selection of teacher participants include:
(1) Teachers who are teaching social studies to the students selected for the study;
(2) Teachers willing to participate in the study.

The selection criteria for the students and teachers allowed me to identify and locate the information-rich cases in my study. Since the identities of Asian American students and their learning experiences in the social studies curriculum are the goal of my study, the Asian American students with different cultural backgrounds allowed me to investigate the diversity and complexity of the students’ identities, values, norms, and life and school experiences under study. The students and teachers’ willingness to participate in the study is also essential for my research.

**Gaining Access**

Gaining access is a process of the researcher’s gaining consent to research such as observations, interviews, and documentary collection in order to complete the purposes of the research (Glesne, 1999). Gaining access to the research sites is important for the qualitative researcher because the kinds of access a researcher gets play a role in the kinds of knowledge one is able to discover (Glesne, 1999). To gain access to the research sites, I started with getting approval from the Human Subject Review Board of my education institution. It took one month to complete because my research participants were children and I had to go through a full review at the Human Subject Review Board. When I got the permission from Office of Responsible Research Practices (ORRP), I went through the application for entering potential school districts. It took another month to get approval from the school districts. Then I started data collection on the sites of Jefferson High School in February and Franklin High School in March.
In locating potential Midwestern school districts with certain amounts of Asian American students enrolled, I primarily relied on the guidance of my advisor. After I received approval for my research access to the two school sites of Jefferson High School and Franklin High School, I tried to locate the social studies teacher, Mr. Smith at Jefferson High School and Mrs. Wills at Franklin High School. I asked Mr. Smith and Mrs. Wills whether they had some Asian American students in their classrooms who might be interested in my study and whether they were interested in participating in my study. I explained the details of my study verbally and in writing to them. After several days, each of them recommended me four students in his/her social studies classrooms who showed their interest in participating in the study and agreed to be part of the study. The teachers were also willing to participate in the study.

I followed the procedure that ORRP required to obtain consent from the students and their parents, and the teacher to protect the research participants’ rights and identities. I explained the purpose, details, and procedures of my study in writing to the students. I also wrote to the parents of the students about the research information in the letters approved by ORRP and sent them along with the copies of the research proposal to the parents. I assured the students that if their parents had questions or need talk to me about the study, I would be willing to meet their parents. After one or two weeks, the parents of these eight students gave me their permissions for their children to participate in my study. Table 3.2 below shows Asian American students’ demographics in the study. Table 3.3 below shows teachers’ information in the study. Table 3.4 below shows student-teacher location in the study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Immigration Status</th>
<th>Parents Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson High School</td>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Born in U.S.</td>
<td>Father: Administrator  Mother: Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Philippines</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Born in the Philippines; has lived in U.S. for 13 years.</td>
<td>Father: Engineer  Mother: Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kanan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Born in India; has lived in U.S. for 13 years.</td>
<td>Father: Engineer  Mother: Stay at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pushpa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Born in U.S.</td>
<td>Father: Engineer  Mother: Substitute Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin High School</td>
<td>Jun</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>Born in U.S.</td>
<td>Father: Medical Doctor  Mother: Musician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Qiang</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>Born in U.S.</td>
<td>Father: Researcher  Mother: Instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yung-ching</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>Born in U.S.</td>
<td>Father: Scientist  Mother: Stay at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chien-fu</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>Born in U.S.</td>
<td>Father: Architect  Mother: Stay at home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: Asian American students’ demographics in the study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Number of Asian American students in classroom during the time of the study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson High School</td>
<td>Mr. Smith</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin High School</td>
<td>Mrs. Wills</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22 years</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3: Teachers’ information in the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Teacher Name</th>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson High School</td>
<td>Mr. Smith</td>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>World Studies; American Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kanan</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pushpa</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin High School</td>
<td>Mrs. Wills</td>
<td>Jun</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>AP American Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Qiang</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yung-ching</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chien-fu</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4: Student-teacher location in the study.
Research Sites

I conducted my study in a mid-size Midwestern city. In the study, I selected Jefferson High School and Franklin High School as the research sites that had potential Asian American student population. The detailed information of these two school sites will be presented in Chapter 4.

Methods for Data Collection

Interviews

My study aimed to examine the relationship between Asian American students’ identities and their learning experiences in the social studies curriculum. I used interviews as one of the research methods for my data collection in this study to investigate the participants’ identities, experiences, and perspectives in their social studies learning. Interviews offer the advantages of focusing on the specific experience and perceptions of individuals engaged in different relationships and contexts in the area of my research interest. Their real-life examples provide illustrative evidence. McCarthey and Moje (2002) propose an idea of identities as performed or lived stories – “we live our identities in a sort of narrative, and that many people are searching for ways to construct or represent identities and stories that allow them to belong” (p.232). Different individual experiences, values, beliefs, and feelings could be better understood and interpreted through personal narratives (Chambers, 2003). The data of life story or personal experience narrative can be generated from interviews. “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 2006, p.9). Manen (1990) suggests that the interviews serve two specific purposes: “(1) it may be used as a means for exploring
and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon, and (2) the interview may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience” (p.66).

In my data collection, each of the students was interviewed for four times. The students were asked to share their background, identity, what they learned in the social studies, their interpretation of content, and explore their work, interests, and motivation. Each teacher was interviewed for three times in order to understand their background, beliefs about teaching and learning, goals, and perceptions of their social studies instruction relevant to the study. Each interview lasted approximately twenty minutes. Interviews were semi-structured to make sure to cover particular areas but leave room to follow feedback idiosyncratically, for exploring more particular meanings with research participants, and face-to-face with open-ended questions. Some open-ended questions generate semi-structured interviews, which has the interviewer to capture unexpected issues and information (Barbour & Schostak, 2005). Partlett and Hamilton (1972) mention that the discovery of apparent contradictions makes face-to-face interviewing valuable. It welcomes the unfamiliar utterances and encourages sensitivity to context. With permission from research participants, I recorded all of the interviews on audiotape, transcribed and converted them into Word document format, then sent the copies of my transcribed interviews to my research participants for member checking purposes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To tape conversations with research participants who share their personal life stories such as stories, experiences, incidents, etc., is also helpful to collect accounts of their personal experiences.
I prepared the questions for each interview section (Appendix D for sample interview questions). The interview questions were to probe for answers to understand the Asian American students’ identities and their learning experiences in social studies related to the research questions in my study. The teacher participants commented on the questions that they were good. The student participants thought that they were understandable. However, most of the students at Franklin High School felt hard to answer the questions regarding the relationship between their identity and social studies learning, such as “how have your identity, values, and beliefs affected your learning in the social studies curriculum and school experiences” and “has your learning in the social studies influenced your own or other people’s perception of yourself? If yes, please explain” because they had not reflected on that concept previously.

For the first round interview questions, I asked the student and teacher participants to talk about their backgrounds. Based on the information I obtained from the first interview and classroom observations, I went further with the questions on the topics of the Asian American students’ identities, their social studies learning experiences, and the impact of the students’ identities on their learning in social studies in the second round interview. For example, I asked the students about how they identified themselves within school settings, what it was like being an Asian American student at school, how their identity, values, and beliefs affected their learning in the social studies curriculum and school experiences, and what they studied in social studies as well as their perceptions on the advantages and disadvantages of the social studies instruction. I asked the teachers about what was special about Asian students in his/her classes, how it had made a difference in the instruction, how important it was for Asian American students to
learn to critically reflect their beliefs, values, and identities in their learning in social studies, and how human diversity and the world in the social studies curriculum had been taught. Based on the interviews of the first two rounds and my classroom observations, I asked the participants to reflect on the Asian American students’ experiences in the social studies curriculum and American schools and how that had influenced on their identities. I also followed up with some questions that were not clear during the previous interviews, such as whether or how they had learned and practiced their own ethnic Asian culture at home and communities. These follow-up questions were connected to the major interview questions with the students regarding their cultural conflicts and identity negotiation during the third round interview. Finally, during the fourth round interview with the student participants, I tried to explore their life experiences after school, such as their friends, interests, motivations, extracurricular activities, and social events that they attended.

As mentioned before, the interviews were semi-structured, generated by some open-ended questions to learn and understand the issues from the participants. It allowed my participants to be the experts and inform me about the Asian American students’ identities and experiences in learning social studies in American schools. During the interviews, I focused on what the student and teacher participants wanted to tell me instead what I wanted to know from them. For example, when I talked to the student participants about the issues of Asian stereotypes and social injustice on Asian American students in American schools, the students at both Jefferson High School and Franklin High School shared their life stories about Asian American stereotypes from their perspectives and experiences. Most of the students stated that their schools did not have
racism against Asian American students which they had seen in their previous schooling. They thought that race and race-related issues were primarily dependent upon the contexts of school or community. With these open-ended questions in the semi-structured interviews, I also compared the students’ different responses to the same topic. For instance, at Jefferson High School, Nicole resisted American students’ race jokes on Asian students. Annie pointed out to people that she was smart not because she was an Asian, but because she worked hard. To Kanan, Asian stereotypes were not negative and really that bad. At Franklin High School, Qiang and Yung-ching thought that Asian stereotypes did not affect them much. Chien-fu also considered that it could be very stressful for younger students because stereotypes did not allow Asian American students to have as many flaws as they probably did.

I also used open-ended questions in the semi-structured interviews with the teacher participants. For example, I wanted to learn how the Asian American students were perceived by their social studies teachers. Mr. Smith talked to me about the students’ motivation, diligence, and possession of higher level of critical thinking skills. He also shared how his Asian American students had brought their own knowledge and experiences from their ethnic Asian culture into the social studies class. Mr. Smith further stated that he had focused on the areas in the social studies curriculum to connect to his students with diverse cultural backgrounds in his classroom because he wanted to make all of his students feel included and welcome. It allowed me to obtain more relevant information on teachers’ beliefs, values, perspectives, and practices in teaching social studies.
These open-ended interview questions facilitated an understanding of my research questions. My questions asked to the participants during the interviews were about their background, identities, life experiences, and perceptions on the social studies instruction, as a means of gathering data concerning how the students conceptualize their identities and its impact on their actual learning in social studies in American schools relevant to the study. The connections between their life stories in which their identities are shaped and their learning in social studies as students are based on the cumulative effects of their life experiences. So, I seek an understanding of this interaction through attempting to capture some sense of their life experiences and meanings that they attach to those questions.

I conducted the interviews at the time and places that were the most convenient to the student and teacher participants. There were some interviews with the students in conference room in the early morning, some during lunch break, or some after school. The interviews with the teachers were usually after school or during the periods that they did not have classes. During the whole process of my data collection, I felt that it was difficult to schedule time with the student participants at Jefferson High School because they were all busy with their schoolwork, preparation for the exams and extracurricular activities. Although there were some problems of arranging time for the interviews with the students at Jefferson High School, they provided me with opportunities to conduct four rounds of interviews with them throughout the study. For the student participants at Franklin High School, my interview time with each of them was shorter because as seniors, they had been working so hard to prepare for their AP exams during the period of my study there. Table 3.5 below shows the formal interview dates and times with the
eight student participants in the study. Table 3.6 below shows the formal interview dates and times with the two teacher participants in the study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Student Participants</th>
<th>Interview Dates</th>
<th>Interview Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson High School</td>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>February 9, 2010</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>March 2, 2010</td>
<td>16 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>March 31, 2010</td>
<td>18 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>April 13, 2010</td>
<td>16 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4 times</td>
<td>70 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pushpa</td>
<td>February 18, 2010</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>March 5, 2010</td>
<td>12 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>March 31, 2010</td>
<td>14 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>April 7, 2010</td>
<td>14 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4 times</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>February 9, 2010</td>
<td>18 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>March 5, 2010</td>
<td>16 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>April 1, 2010</td>
<td>14 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>April 8, 2010</td>
<td>14 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4 times</td>
<td>62 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kanan</td>
<td>February 11, 2010</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>March 5, 2010</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>April 9, 2010</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5: The dates and times of formal interviews with the eight student participants in the study.

(continued)
Table 3.5: Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Franklin High School</td>
<td>April 15, 2010</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4 times</td>
<td>65 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun</td>
<td>March 23, 2010</td>
<td>6 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April 7, 2010</td>
<td>8 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April 14, 2010</td>
<td>8 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April 21, 2010</td>
<td>8 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4 times</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qiang</td>
<td>March 23, 2010</td>
<td>6 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April 7, 2010</td>
<td>8 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April 14, 2010</td>
<td>8 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April 21, 2010</td>
<td>7 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>29 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yung-ching</td>
<td>March 23, 2010</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April 7, 2010</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April 14, 2010</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April 21, 2010</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4 times</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chien-fu</td>
<td>March 23, 2010</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April 14, 2010</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
Table 3.5: Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>April 21, 2010</th>
<th>10 minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April 21, 2010</td>
<td>17 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4 times</td>
<td>47 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>Teacher Participants</td>
<td>Interview Dates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson High School</td>
<td>Mr. Smith</td>
<td>February 9, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>March 1, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>April 7, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin High School</td>
<td>Mrs. Wills</td>
<td>March 23, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>April 7, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>April 13, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3 times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.6: The dates and times of the formal interviews with the two social studies teachers in the study.

Before I conducted each round interview with the participants, I asked their agreement to record all of our conversations on a tape recorder. At the beginning of the first round interview, the participants felt a little bit confused when I asked their consent to use the tape recorder. However, once the interviews started, they ignored the tape recorder and shared their opinions on the interview questions without restraint. Using the tape recorder allowed me to obtain almost what the participants said during the interviews, and helped me to focus more on the process of interview such as questions and answers to collect rich data within the limited time period. I also wrote down some
key points what the participants talked about on the notebook and asked them follow-up questions to explore the meaning behind that.

After each round interview with the participants, I transcribed it word by word from the tape recording and converted into Word document format as soon as possible, usually within one to three days. Table 3.7 below is an example of the part of interview transcript with Nicole at Jefferson High School.
Date: Feb. 9, 2010
Time: 9:30 am
Place: Conference room in Jefferson High School
Interviewee: Nicole

R: Please describe your typical school day here.

N: It’s not really boring because I am very pattern. I have my ways and I go through their schedule. I’ll be at school around seven. School starts until eight, so I’ll be here either hanging around with my friends and talking to them or studying. Typically I don’t study until I have the test coming up. Because for me as a freshman I might have studied in the morning if there was a test. But then I go to the first period history class. There is like lecture and we love the activity. I probably won’t remember it. But I try to. And I go down and work afterwards. So I have that. And then the second period I go to chemistry. And between chemistry and history, my friends are coming up and I go to talk to them a little bit. And then I go to the chemistry. We typically have time to do both. I do that or study or do homework. We have lectures, lab, and tests, and quizzes. We have a lot of tests and quizzes in the class. But after that we have one short, oh no, it’s been the time of a day, sometimes we have advisory. And in advisory we are basically prepared for college stuff, service learning and it is fun. I really enjoy it. And we have lunch. I have friends from different groups. I eat my lunch box and walk around, “ok, what’s up?” And after that it’s always in rush. I know it’s bad. I am always late for that period, rush into geometry. Oh, what kind of Asian stereotype. No, I am suck at math. No, I am still using my fingers. So I go to math. With me, the math just does not go well. And I have no other choices, but to do it. What I am doing at the end of the day now, I have to walk to my mom’s office and I sit in the cafeteria and do schoolwork.

R: This morning when I came in, there was a student saying to me “wow, a shining Chinese face”. What does that mean?

N: Yea, they have a problem where we, a lot of guys here like “Asian women” and then they freak out. And you are just like “no, don’t do it to us”. Like my sister, she is not really my sister, but I consider her because I grew up with her. She was supposed to come and get me on Wednesday and take me out. I was kind of scared of her coming here because my friends would say “oh, Asian”. And I said “oh, no”.

R: You talk about some students here are like “Asian women”. What is the meaning of that?

Table 3.7: An excerpt from an interview transcript.
N: Because a lot of guys say that Asian women are really pretty and really smart. But it’s really funny. Because when I first came in, before they had Asian, we are like half Asian and then they have black and Asian, like African American Asian, and like those kinds of things. But I guess I was the first to be a lot Asian-oriented. But I really love to be Asian. I don’t do all of the stereotypes to the Asian stuff, and not really until this year. I don’t even look at what they usually speak. I listen to some Thai. But this year I am just driving myself into foreign music. I listen to French, German, African, yea, I listen to a lot of music.

R: What is Asian stereotype?

N: You mean in the U.S.? Like, typically like you are smart, you can do everything, you can do it, hard working, nerdy. Or, if you are a girl, like really into fashion and stuff, like Hello Kitty stuff, like basically they view Asian very alike Japanese, or you are one of the Kitty nerdy Asian. And, I am like, ―ok, you don’t do that‖. Like my friends, we have a term like we have referred a lot, ―oh, we are mentally Asian‖. I mean we study a lot, but we have our spare time. I said “yes, ok, Hello Kitty”. But I am not sure I like Hello Kitty. I like Mickey Mouse better. They also have stereotype on having accents or whatever. It kind of bothers me, ―you don’t do that around, okay?‖ And then when I come to study, a lot of kids I talked to are like “oh it’s good to study, but you probably have life outside of the school”. I like “well, I don’t really bother it now”. I mean I understand the whole joy of being a kid, a teenager whatever. But you can do that and your schoolwork at the same time. A lot of Asian students do that. They are like “here you’ve been ridiculous. You are the kids you can play about your homework”. I said “ha, you should actually try to do it sometimes because some kids they do half of it, and then do like “I am bored and go to something else”. I can’t do that because if I do that, I don’t have time for anything else. Like I go home, I have to help my brother.

R: It’s not Asian stereotype, but I can tell that you are a smart student.

N: Yea, I am smart. My mom always yells at me “did you get on the top of that? You need work a little harder”. “Ok, sorry”. Because my mom, when she came here, my uncle paid for her to go to college. So education is very important. I went over to Malaysia and I got to see my cousins how their schools were. And I am more appreciative for what I have in this school. So I was just like “ok, well, I can at least try”. Because I do pretty well over here. I don’t have to work extremely hard, but I do have to work hard enough so I can improve that I am capable. So I just need to stay on the top of that. Like when I started to leave that, my mom reminded me, she’s like “remember your cousins”. I said “ok”.

(Continued)
Table 3.7: Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R: Has your mom really had a higher expectation on your schoolwork?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N: It’s not as high as she used to be. And now I am in high school. She understands what I am going to make achievement, which is going to be harder. Before if I got like an A minus, I got a lot of troubles. And then my mom used to always say, it’s funny “no cell phone, no anything, and doing your Ph.D.” I am like, “oh, Ph.D.” Before I did not know what I wanted to do. And now I want to go to the neuroscience so that does not require a lot of schooling. So I just try to get into the habit of going to make my scores up. But it gets easier when more you do it. It’s like part of the practice you are doing whatever.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the study progressed, I had changed some data collection process, especially the time of asking the student participants follow-up questions after my classroom observation. At the beginning of my study, I tried to get hold of the students to ask for their perceptions of the social studies instruction. It turned out to be frustrating sometimes as they need run for another class session and refused to answer my questions at that moment. So I changed to get the students’ responses during the formal interview or other available time. As a result, I was able to obtain some enriched, reflective, and insightful data from the students when they were given more flexible schedule. For example, in response to my follow-up questions on Mr. Smith’s use of movie Baraka and Friedman's lecture The World is Flat in his teaching about globalization in the classroom, Nicole had reflected upon her bicultural identity and shared her personal feelings and emotions:

The film Baraka was unnerving and slightly scary to me. I realized that though some culture is being preserved, a lot of it is being lost. And being of two cultures, I understand the culture blends. I also was mildly creeped out by the thing with the chickens, and how much it’s like what our world is being made into. The composition of the film was very good, and I
could appreciate the artistic sense of it as well as the purpose behind it.

However, *The World is Flat* was interesting. The concepts make sense but it was just boring to hear about because I already understood a lot of the underlying causes for the leveling of the economic playing field. Because of my background, I know that the competition is difficult and that I need to fight for it. However, I did not realize that American jobs no longer exist anymore --- so I need to step up my game.

Kanan also showed his surprise after watching *Baraka* and *The World is Flat*, and further offered his own insightful thoughts on the impact of globalization on human being’s daily life in today’s society. He explained:

> Both these pieces of work have astonished me and have made me realize that the world we live in today is much different than what we have been learning about in the past few months in history. People, especially the next generation, have to realize that due to these new methods of collaboration, the world has entered a global competition where everyone has an equal opportunity.

**Observation**

The goal of my study was to investigate the Asian American students’ identities, their perception and interpretation of the social studies instruction, and the relationship between their identities and their social studies learning. I used the qualitative research method of observation to gain knowledge of the student participants’ experiences through understanding what is meaningful to them in actions and events within school and classrooms settings. This knowledge is also the result of interpretations of their actions and events in the given situation. A set of beliefs, values, and learning experiences in the social studies curriculum might be shaped by and accommodated to the individual’s identity.

Observation entails being present in a given situation and making a record of one’s impressions of what takes place. Because the primary research instrument is the
self, consciously gathering sensory data through sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch, it is necessary and important to be sensitive to the researcher’s “self”, open to nuances of meaning and interpretation, and carefully reflect, scrutinize, and analyze after the event (Jones & Somekh, 2005). Being present in observation on the students’ learning experiences demands the researcher’s reflections on this being present and the implications for the observation. “The insight into the essence of a phenomenon involves a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of the meaning of the lived experience” (Manen, 1990, p.77).

In my study, I observed the four Asian American student participants in Mr. Smith’s two different social studies classrooms at Jefferson High School from the beginning of February to the end of April, and the four Asian American student participants in Mrs. Wills’ one social studies classroom at Franklin High School from the mid of March to the end of April. During the period of my classroom observations, I observed three courses: Mrs. Wills’ AP American Government at 12th grade and Mr. Smith’s World Studies and American Government at 10th grade. For the student participants at Franklin High School, each week I observed each student on their relevant social studies class twice. For the student participants at Jefferson High School, I observed each student once or twice in their social studies classroom.

Before observing the class, I asked the teacher participants to suggest me which class should be observed and let them know about my presence in their classrooms in advance. Before class, the teachers gave me their unit plans, syllabus, lesson plans, and relevant course materials, and talked to me about what they would teach in the class. I usually went to the classroom several minutes earlier and waited for the class to start in
the rear of the classroom, which allowed me to observe the complete picture of teaching and learning, including the classroom environment, student seating arrangements, teacher’s instruction, students’ interactions with others and their actions. I also observed those courses in different settings to gain a better understanding of the students’ learning experiences in the social studies classroom. For example, when Mr. Smith taught the unit of globalization in the world studies course, I observed his class in a variety of instructional methodologies, such as interactive lectures, students’ individual or group work on the research project of Design a Sustainable World (DSW), and their DSW project exhibition etc. My classroom observations in two high schools allowed me to compare the teachers’ instructional methods, how they worked with the Asian American students, the students’ learning experiences in social studies, and their perceptions on the instruction. Table 3.8 below is the summary of number of class periods that I observed in two high schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Social Studies Teachers</th>
<th>Observed Courses</th>
<th>Class Periods Observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson High School</td>
<td>Mr. Smith</td>
<td>World Studies, American Government</td>
<td>19 (various periods, 120 minutes per class)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin High School</td>
<td>Mrs. Wills</td>
<td>AP American Government</td>
<td>8 (the 1st period: 7:30am – 8:15am, 45 minutes per class)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.8: Summary of number of class periods observed.
In order to understand the complexity of the Asian American students’ learning experience in the social studies curriculum at two high schools, during my classroom observations I paid attention to the content topics under study, the teachers’ instructional methods, whether/how the teachers engaged the Asian American students in social studies learning, and how the students interacted and responded to the teachers’ instruction. At Jefferson High School I observed that Mr. Smith tried to make the curriculum relevant and active to the students and employed a variety of teaching strategies to increase his students’ participation in the classroom. First, besides interactive lectures, Mr. Smith used individual or group work, reflective activities, dramatic inquiry, research projects, and presentations to engage the students in learning. He also integrated technology into his daily teaching, such as the internet, computers, videos, and movies. Each student had a Mac laptop to work on in the classroom. Sometimes he asked the students to open certain websites or watch some YouTube on their computers in order to discuss more information related to the subject under study. I found that my four Asian American student participants seemed quieter than others in the classroom and Mr. Smith sometimes called their names to ask for their thoughts on certain topics. However, in the students’ small group activities such as the Design a Sustainable World (DSW) research project in the unit of globalization and reflection activity of World Cafe in the unit of Constitution, I observed that these Asian American students were active and talkative with their peers. In their oral presentations on the DSW projects or in the Modern Constitutional Convention, Nicole, Pushpa, Kanan and Annie all looked confident and professional, and they spoke fluently and proficiently.
Second, Mr. Smith attempted to make the curriculum relevant to his Asian American students’ own cultural background. For example, in the unit of globalization in the world studies class, the students were assigned to work on an inquiry-based authentic research project, Design a Sustainable World (DSW) to address one of the selected four World Health Organization’s Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). They needed to learn about issues, obstacles and problems of achieving the MDG, current solutions and organizations about the MDG, and find a solution or propose a plan to the MDG. The DSW project included project proposal, report, audio/visual presentation, research/analysis chart, and annotated bibliography. This lesson was designed to “incorporate the background of students and allow them to use their knowledge as cultural experts” (quoted from the interview with Mr. Smith). Mr. Smith explained: “That’s the project where students, especially students of Asian heritage can bring their own experiences and knowledge. They can look at whatever they want to.” During my classroom observation, the students spent almost two weeks of classroom time working on their research project either individually or cooperatively with those who have the same MDG. Mr. Smith helped to refine their research ideas and facilitated their project learning. I observed that sometimes Annie and Kanan walked over to other tables and asked their peers for some relevant resources and information on the research projects. Nicole and Pushpa had engaged in active discussion with others at the same table. Finally, the outcomes of these students’ DSW research projects had demonstrated their attention paid to the issues and problems in Asian developing countries and connection to their own cultural knowledge and experiences. Their positive comments on this lesson and Mr. Smith’s teaching methods would be detailed later in Chapter 6.
At Franklin High School Mrs. Wills focused more on teaching content knowledge and preparing students for the AP American government tests. I observed that she used interactive lecture, encouraged dialogue with students, employed technology such as video and overhead projector, and assigned students to work on research projects. She tried to involve her students in discussing certain content topics by telling her personal stories and making connection to students’ experiences. To Mrs. Wills, having Asian American students in her classroom had not made a difference in her instruction even though she appreciated cultural diversity and her Asian American students’ own ethnic heritage. During my classroom observation, I did not see her efforts to make the curriculum relevant to her Asian American students’ own cultural background in her teaching. For the Asian American student participants, Yung-ching seemed quiet while Jun, Qiang and Chien-fu had actively participated in classroom discussion. Their perceptions of the government class and Mrs. Wills’ teaching methods will be presented in Chapter 6.

I also observed the students’ interaction with other people outside of the classrooms, like in the hallway during break and lunch time. For example, I paid attention that at Franklin High School the students mostly hanged around with their Asian and white peers while at Jefferson High School the students were with a more diverse group of friends. Kanan sat with and talked to his white, African American, and Asian American friends during lunch time. Sometimes in the early morning before the school starts, Nicole chatted with her white friends when she waited for the transportation to go to the local university for her Chinese class. During lunch break, she walked around and tried to get to her friends from different groups to talk a little bit.
During my classroom observations, I attempted to be invisible by sitting at the back corner of the classrooms and not interrupting the teachers’ instruction and classroom activities. So my presence would not affect the teachers’ practices of teaching and the students’ interaction and response to the instruction in the classrooms. Sometimes, the teachers invited me to participate in the classroom activities. For example, at Franklin High School Mrs. Wills asked me to share about my experience when they discussed the academic life at university. At Jefferson High School when the students worked on their Design a Sustainable World project in groups, Mr. Smith asked me to join them and provide some resources for the project. Being involved in classroom activities and interacting with the students and teachers in the classroom, I was able to make connection to the participants in their teaching and learning process and further develop rapport and trust with them. It also facilitated my data collection in the field.

I took field notes on my classroom observations to record what was said by students and teachers during instruction and prepared transcripts of each class that also included students and teachers’ actions, the use of instructional materials, and the physical arrangement of the room. The interpretive nature of the task also required my reflection of the participants’ experiences by maintaining a certain orientation of reflectivity while guarding against the more manipulative attitude that a reflective attitude tended to insert in a social situation and relation. Table 3.9 below is an example of my observation notes taken in Mrs. Wills’ class on April 14, 2010.
### Setting

A poster “Learn from the past, live in the present, plan for the future” is attached to the wall on top of the blackboard. The pull-down projector screen is set up near the blackboard at the front of the classroom. A TV is hanged in the front right corner of the room. The teacher’s table is located in the back right corner of the room. Students are seated in rows-and-columns with an aisle in the middle of the classroom so that the two sides are facing each other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observer Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I sit in the back corner of the classroom and am able to see the whole picture in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students do not care about my attendance any more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight Asian students, almost half of the student population in class.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AP exam review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content – Economics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Observer Comments

I sit in the back corner of the classroom and am able to see the whole picture in the classroom.

Students do not care about my attendance any more.

Eight Asian students, almost half of the student population in class.

### Content – Economics

Table 3.9: An example of an observation note.

(continued)
it. How could I do it? I need you to know these couple of terms. This is fiscal policy, monetary policy. This is how to do the budget. Now we build it into our schedule to talk about. Also we have this very serious economic problem, which has been two years now. It’s going to be the topic on the test.

The word you know is majoritarian politics? So health care does not impact me at all, but my tax would go up. How does that impact me? What’s going to happen for the health care cost? Because less people will go to ER, emergency room will treat them if they don’t have health care. The doctor will charge more. That’s about the health care in long term.

Another example is the New Deal, social security, defense, arms control ---

Who makes economic policy for President? The Council of Economic Advisors. There are 12 people in the Council of Economic Advisors. They are college Professors. They are supposed advising President. They are not government employee. They are supposed to be the brightest. They are in specialty.

The Office of Management Budget, the head of OMB is Peter Orszag.

Who is the Treasury Secretary? Tim Geithner. Who is the Chairman of the Federal Reserve, Ben Bernanke. Let’s talk about the Fed. When was it created?

What is the Federal Reserve Board for? Control growth of money supply. What does it mean?

Students: Making money.

Right. Is it costing so much debt? Why we just print more money?

Inflation.

What’s the value of the money?

Goes down.
Table 3.9: Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The price of the good?</th>
<th>Goes up.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What we called that?</td>
<td>Inflation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And it’s the responsibility of the Fed to control credit, what’s the interest rate?</td>
<td>There are different interest rates. What kind of interest rates people have?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Houses, mortgage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Credit card.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Car.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student loan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are interest rates for all of those. They are different. The Fed every three months determines what the interest rate that bank borrows from the Federate Reserve.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[teacher explains the flowchart of interest rate among different levels of banks on the screen]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So it’s the Fed’s job to regulate money supply and interest rate. What do they achieve? This is called monetary policy, price stability, controlling inflation, interest rate, economic growth. The unemployment is still 9%, very high. During 3-5% unemployment is very good. Depression is 28%. Companies have to learn to do the small number of employees. Who has the pressure on changing this? Ben Bernanke.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All right, Congress. Basically the role of Congress plays to make economic policy and approve Federal budget by October 1st. You definitely know these two terms and know the differences between monetary policy and fiscal policy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[students write on their notes]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We will have an activity tomorrow, and you need the calculus.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now, budget deficit and national debt. Two buzzwords you have to know, deficit and debt. How many of you have credit cards?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher uses chart to explain interest rate among banks.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher restates the two important terms – monetary policy and fiscal policy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher brings in another two terms – deficit and debt. The students work on their notes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.9: Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:05am</td>
<td>Teacher makes connection to students’ life experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:15am</td>
<td>I feel this class focuses on preparing student for getting ready to the AP exam. It is test-oriented. The teacher explains some important economic concepts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[3 students raise their hands]  
Do you pay it off every month?  
Yes.  
If you don’t pay it off each month, the accumulative balance on your card is debt. The deficit is for the United States government.  
[teacher passes the tests back to students]  
[teacher and students talk about China as the biggest debt owner of the United States]  
8:05am  
Ok, tests.  
[teacher talks about the tests]  
I need these back.  
[students turn the tests back to teacher]  
8:15am  
Class is over.  

Follow-up question to the teacher:  
What’s your goal of this lesson?  
What are some critical issues in this class?  

Follow-up questions to the students:  
How do you think the ways that your teacher has helped you to learn those economic concepts in this class? Is there anything that you think can be improved in this lesson?
My classroom observations generated questions for the students. The interview questions grew out of the observation notes and most frequently asked to the students for their explanation about their particular interactions and responses to instruction in the classrooms. They were asked after class if possible. It provided the opportunity for me to gain unique insights into the behavior and activities of those I observed and an understanding of the meaning behind what happened in the settings. For example, Mr. Smith and his colleague Mr. Bowman together facilitated a dramatic inquiry of the Modern Constitutional Convention on the issues of health care and gun control from the Constitutional perspectives for federalist and anti-federalist in the course of American government. Table 3.10 below is an excerpt from my observation notes taken in Mr. Smith and Mr. Bowman’s class on April 14, 2010.
Date: Apr. 12, 2010  
Time: 12:30-2:30pm  
Teachers: Mr. Smith and Mr. Bowman  
Course: American Government  
Total Students in Class: 30

### Setting

12:30pm  
[welcome]  
[teacher gives the direction of the Modern Constitutional Convention and assigns different roles of federalist and anti-federalist to students on the issues of health care and gun control]  
Teacher: There are three federalist perspective and three anti-federalist perspectives for each section.  
[teacher goes through the document *Modern Constitutional Convention* with students]  
The evaluation is very simple. You must speak at least once. When you speak for the first time in each section, you must present your background, your Constitutional perspective either for federalist or for anti-federalist, your personal stories, and your specific recommendation on a possible Constitutional amendment. Finally be respectful, think about it as a Socratic Seminar. It’s a group of citizens coming together. We are going to invite others to speak, ask questions, and challenge the ideas not people. I want people to engage, challenge each other’s points of view. This is a training to be critical thinking.

Are you guys ready to step in?  
Students: Yes.

[teacher continues to explain and reads through the section of the Procedure for the Convention in the document]  
The convention will be divided into two major sections that will last approximately 35 minutes.

### Observer Comments

Nicole in this class.  
simulation activity  
topic on health care and gun control  
Teacher talks about the evaluation of Modern Constitutional Convention.  
critical thinking skills  
procedure of Modern Constitutional Convention

Table 3.10: An excerpt from an observation note.  

(continued)
Table 3.10: Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure of the Convention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>each. The first section focuses on possible Constitutional amendment on issue of Health Care. The second focuses on possible Constitutional amendment on issues of Guns. Each section will be broken down by the following schedule.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction by Governor to the Constitutional Issue at stake, five minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Six Individuals previously selected by the Governor will present a 90-second summary of their background, Constitutional perspective (federalist or anti-federalist), any personal stories of people affected by this issue, and their position on a potential amendment to the Constitution. Of the first six opening speakers, three will have a more federalist and three will have a more anti-federalist viewpoint. Ten minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Open floor debate: The Governor will serve as the moderator of the convention, but the floor (the convention) will be open to any and all viewpoints. All opinions will be welcomed until it is clear to the Governor that those opinions are personal attacks rather than challenging ideas. It is important that when delegates speak, they relate the same information as the Opening Speakers: A. Your Background; B. Constitutional Arguments; C. Personal stories of those affected on the issue: D. Recommendations. Fifteen minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Specific recommendations: The Governor will insist that delegates provide their specific recommendations on these issues to take to national legislators. This is the key work of this Convention. If there should be a Constitutional amendment, than provide specifics on what should be done. If no amendment should be created, then provide the reasons why to keep the status quo. Five minutes with an optional five minutes at the Governor’s discretion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I am assuming that we provide these resources. We should have a very productive convention.
Delegates, are there any questions about this Convention? [teacher shows students the places of federalist and anti-federalist in Mr. Bowman’s room] [students move to Mr. Bowman’s class]

1:00pm
We will begin our first section, health care, health care system at national control, national regulated, or more influenced by the state and local government. Welcome all the viewpoints. I concern that you would certainly be in the Constitutional arguments and the founding document.

[one student in the role of Governor presents]
We will have an opening speaker, in more federalist view. Mr. Richardson, would you like to stand up and give your viewpoint on the health care?
[the student stands up and presents his own perspective on the issue of health care at the national control level]

I want you Governors to write down the recommendation for the Convention.
[another student stands up and presents his viewpoint at the local control level]
[Nicole reports in a federalist’s role] ---
[one student presents his story being as a constructive worker to demonstrate his viewpoint at the national control level]

What would be your recommendation?
Keep health care available to everyone. It’s charged too much for everybody. It should be made available to everyone.
Do you want the government run or mixed? Should it be public option?
Yes, I believe.
[another student stands up and presents his perspective at the local control level]
Can you give us a little bit insight on the

| Mr. Smith’s students move to another classroom and work with Mr. Bowman’s students together in this activity. |
| Section on health care |
| Students look a little bit nervous. |
| 1st step: Intro by Governor |
| Students play in different roles. |
| 2nd step: Opening speakers |
| Teachers facilitate the process of this activity. |
| Nicole performs well, looks confident and professional. She speaks clearly and fluently, but fast. |

(continued)
Table 3.10: Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constitution? More anti-federalist perspective?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[the student talks about his position using the Constitution]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So I open the forum for any citizens to express what you want. Please provide the example, for the delegates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[teacher shares the stories from different people in the state on the issue of health care]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[one student stands up and talks about how his family has been influenced by the health care policy]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have questions posted by the Convention here. What’s your plan to help him with this family? If you are anti-federalist, please give him suggestions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[students respond to his situation]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to invite the rest of the class if you want to switch your seats to show that you have changed your thoughts and standpoints.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[some students changed their seats]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why did you change your side?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[students explains their thoughts]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for your input. We have to make a decision. There are some limitations as a society. We have six recommendations but we keep two, your favorite two as the top choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[teacher reads the options on health care and asks students to raise their hands for different choices]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[students and teachers finally decide to take three top choices]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[teachers and students move to the next section of gun control]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I very much thank you for your contribution. This is much higher level of CIVITAS education. I appreciate what you’ve done today. Drop your roles of delegates and how many of you have changed your opinions?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3rd step: Open floor debate

Teachers first make some examples.

Teachers facilitate the inquiry process.

I think that there are really some very good questions that teachers are trying to get students to explore in-depth based on what they have learned and to make connections to people’s daily life. Students are thinking hard. Great question!

4th step: Specific recommendation

The section on health care is successfully run by both students and teachers. It is such a wonderful learning experience!

Section of gun control

CIVITAS

Reflection

(continued)
Table 3.10: Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[about ten students stand up and give their reasons that they have changed their own points of view on health care and gun control]</th>
<th>Follow-up questions to students: How do you feel about the Modern Constitutional Convention in your class this afternoon? How do you feel about your roles at the standpoint of federalist and anti-federalist on the issues of health care and guns?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:30pm Class is over.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to my classroom observation notes, I followed up with the students about their perceptions on the Modern Constitutional Convention and their roles of federalist or anti-federalist in the activity. Nicole felt that the Convention was too short, but it was a great opportunity for students to figure out how the system worked and how they could make their voice heard. They respectfully heard each other’s sides and made convincing arguments. Regarding her roles on health care and gun control in the debates, Nicole stated that she was still pretty anti-federalist about health care even though she was assigned by Mr. Smith to play the role of federalist. However, on gun control she was going to be more federalist after class because of some of the arguments that her classmates made. Kanan thought that the Modern Constitutional Convention was actually very fun. It was really interesting to know about different perspectives. He also pointed out that on the issue of health care it should not be completely run by government or completely privatized. It should be in the middle “because if you gave too much to each side, one of them makes mistake, then they are going to get blame very badly.” Kanan’s
class finally came up with the conclusion that the private industry should run it while the government should keep tracking on that.

**Data Analysis**

I used inductive data analysis in a process of self-reflexivity. When I started collecting data, I began to analyze the data daily. A constant comparative method was implemented in my data analysis. This method involves an inductive data analysis whereby theory evolved from data collected (Merriam, 1998). The main goal of this method is to constantly and repeatedly compare data from interviews and observations. Following this method, I coded all of the data collected from interviews and observations, constantly compared, and sought out relationships and differences between the data. Then I was able to see categories and themes emergent from the data.

Specifically, when starting data collection, I read and coded the transcripts from the first round interviews with the student and teacher participants to gain an overview for their background, life experiences, identities, values, and belief. It was tied with my initial analysis on other newly collected data from my classroom observation. Then when more data were collected, I read and coded the transcripts from the interviews with each participant and classroom observation notes. I also constantly compared the data and looked for the relationship between data, such as the similarities and differences between the participants’ interviews, the similarities and differences among participants’ opinions or ideas on the same questions, and the comparison of perceptions between students and teachers on certain topics. For example, I found several important codes in my data of the first round interviews with the participants and my initial classroom observation notes. They were “PVE - parents’ value on education”, “PHE - parents’ high expectation on
their children’s academic achievement”, “SECL - students’ ethnic cultural learning”,
“SSP - students’ self perceptions”, “SR – stereotypes and racism”, and “SPSS - students’
perceptions of social studies instruction” etc.. Then I read and coded the transcripts from
the following interviews with each of the participants and classroom observation notes,
and kept rereading, analyzing, and comparing the new data with the old one to find major
categories and generate themes to effectively represent my data. I found that some codes
repeatedly emerged from my data and formed categories such as “Scholar/Student
Identity”. As this process went on, there were three major categories emerging, including
“Students’ Identities”, “Students’ Perceptions of Social Studies”, and “Interactions
between Students’ Identities and Social Studies Learning”. These categories were
generated from preliminary categories to reflect the sum of the collected data. I re-read,
recoded, and re-categorized the data by examining and comparing them constantly to
develop meaningful findings on understanding the identities of the Asian American
students and their learning in the social studies curriculum in two American high schools.
Table 3.11 below is an example of my list of codes on students’ identities.
Students’ Identities  
- February 26, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Coded Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>Self Perceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP</td>
<td>Being Perceived by Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- stereotypes and racism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI</td>
<td>Family Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- parents’ value on education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- parents’ high expectation on their children’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>academic performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ethnic cultural learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- connection to Asian countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Negotiated Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- resistant strategy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.11: An example of a list of codes.

(Continued)
Table 3.11: Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Coded Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DSI</strong></td>
<td>Different Self Identifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SSI</strong></td>
<td>Scholar/Student Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- SI</td>
<td>- self identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- BP</td>
<td>- being perceived by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- VE</td>
<td>- value on education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- VIS</td>
<td>- various interest in school subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- PVE</td>
<td>- parents’ value on education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- PHE</td>
<td>- parents’ high expectation on their children’s academic performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RECI</strong></td>
<td>Racial/Ethnic and Cultural Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- SI</td>
<td>- self images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- SR</td>
<td>- stereotypes and racism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- ECL</td>
<td>- ethnic cultural learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- CAC</td>
<td>- connection to Asian countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NI</strong></td>
<td>Negotiated Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- RS</td>
<td>- resistant strategy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
Table 3.11: Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Coded Elements</th>
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<td>DSI</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- SI self identification</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- BP being perceived by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- VE value on education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- VIS various interest in school subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- PVE parents’ value on education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- PHE parents’ high expectation on their children’s academic performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- SCHE school and community’s high expectation on students’ academic achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECI</td>
<td>Racial/Ethnic and Cultural Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- SI self images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- SR stereotypes and racism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ECL ethnic cultural learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- CAC connection to Asian countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>Cultural Conflicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Y yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- N no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NI</td>
<td>Negotiated Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- AS assimilating strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- RS resistant strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- SS straddling strategy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As my data analysis progressed, some categories had been changed in my list of codes. For example, “ethnic culture learning” under the category of “Racial/Ethnic and Cultural Identity” was previously considered as one of the sub-categories under “Family Influence”. However, I had changed my mind after the second round interviews with the students. Having gained a better understanding of the student participants’ life experiences, identities, values, and beliefs, I added a new major category of “Racial/Ethnic and Cultural Identity” to my list of codes on students’ identities and moved “ethnic cultural learning” along with the other two sub-categories “stereotypes and racism” and “connection to Asian countries” under it as the table 3.11 shows above.

At the same time, I started memo writing along with my first analytic sessions and continued it through the writing phase, to help scrutinize the limits of my preconceived notions, clarify creative leaps made in linking, merging or splitting categories, and record emerging theoretical reflections, and my thoughts, interpretations and directions to self as the researcher. It kept the process of the analysis transparent and maintained a self-reflexive stance. Overall, my data analysis occurred through all phases of the study. I continually transcribed and coded the texts, and tested their depth and interaction. It gave me an opportunity to develop hypothesis in the field and test them with the student and teacher participants, to make sure that the description and interpretation of the phenomena was accurately represented from the perspective of the participants. Table 3.12 below is an example of data analysis on an excerpt from interview transcript with Chien-fu at Franklin High School. Table 3.12 below is an example of data analysis on my observation notes taken in Mr. Smith’ class on March 30, 2010.
Date: Apr. 21, 2010  
Time: 8:30 am  
Place: Office of Social Studies Department at Franklin High School  
Interviewee: Chien-fu

R: How do you identify yourself?

C: Well, I guess I have a lot of identifications. I am a band geek because I am quite in the marching band. So that’s the first thing. I consider myself a musician as well. That’s cos I play too many instruments. I consider myself a scholar when I am working hard, but really not always. I want to be able to say I am a writer, and that’s one of the things that I want to pursue in my life. But I haven’t gone to the point where I can say, I can express my ideas effectively through written words to be called a writer. So that’s like something I want to achieve in the future. And I think college is helping me a lot with that. I identify myself as a person who is talking too much. I am a Buddhist. But I guess I don’t identify myself like that always cos it’s more like, I feel like if I just say I am a Buddhist, then it sort of closes me off to other ideas. But I still want to be open up to other ideas. So it’s like my main base is a Buddhist. But if there is something interesting that sort of makes sense, I will take that idea as well. And then I mainly just see myself as a gamer, a skater, and a slacker just this year though. Yea, slacker is definitely on there too. It just means that I don’t work as hard as I should, like the teacher gives me twenty homework questions, and I only do five of them. And I show up and I am like ‘here are the five homework questions, who know about the rest of those. I didn’t do it.’ Sort of thing.

R: What is it like being an Asian American student here?

C: Well, I guess we touched on this couple of minutes ago. It’s better than most places because there is no social prestige here, like to be spent off in other places. Basically you can find a lot more. But the community here is nicely built. So there is not much of that. There is always that thing where they expect you to achieve higher degrees of work. I guess that it’s the only thing that I can think about that being an Asian has an impact on my life here. Yea, but other than that I feel pretty white here. Yea.

Table 3.12: An example of data analysis on an excerpt from interview transcript.  
(Continued)
could identify myself as a white if I didn’t look so Asian (laughing).

R: How have your identity, value, and beliefs affected your learning in the social studies curriculum?

C: Well, my beliefs come a lot from social studies, especially government cos it’s like, government is like controversial topics where everyone has his own way of thinking like how it should be run. Sometimes I feel like I am a socialist. Sometimes I think I am a communist. But then I am like we should share everything, you know. But then I am like, wait, it never works. So back to reality, let’s speak with democracy until something that works out. So my beliefs come a lot from social studies.

My identity, not as much as for social studies. I guess whenever we touch on anything with Asian Americans, I can relate more. That’s the only thing with my identity. But for school experiences in general, I don’t think my identity has much to play in it unless you consider talking too much is my identity. And in that case I have a lot to do with my school experience cos I guess the more I talked, the more people opened up to me so then the more I learned from them, which is nice.

And my values, I guess values are always there in my life. So it’s like no matter who I am, I still hold my values.

R: Have you related your racial/ethnic identity to your learning in social studies?

C: I think when you learn things you can’t believe it’s absolutely true. When you learn things, you also have to question why they put it there. If that’s not really true, why did they put it in there? So in the case of like I know, I was working on this book [Modern World History], and there is a chapter on European westernization on Asian people, especially China, and how they do this whole thing, and how Chinese people were crazy victims of opium. That was one of those things that is like, oh, I find that my grandparents were not victims of opium. So it’s sort of like ‘wow, hold on, why did they put like all Chinese people, you
know?’ But then so I looked into that. And it’s like, one of the things is like because I am an Asian, I would question that. If I were white, if I were black, I would just read it and like ‘okay, let’s keep going.’ Because this is related to my ethnicity, I feel that those words have more meaning. So the same thing the words like when they say Chinese people invented paper, that’s just a simple statement, but it brings more prides to me than it would for someone who is not Chinese. So having a certain ethnic culture put you in a more involved state when your social studies class is involved in that culture. So when we did the China section, I was really into it. But when we did the French, oh, actually I was really into the French too cos I love the French bread. But for the Spanish and American wars, I didn’t really pay attention to that just cos it didn’t concern me, like it did not have an impact on my life right now. It probably will in the future, but it didn’t at that moment, and it wasn’t related to my ethnicity. So I have less focus on that.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship between identity and learning in social studies – racial/ethnic identity</th>
<th>Content – invention of paper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content – China section</td>
<td>Content – French section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content – Spanish and American Wars</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Date:** Mar. 30, 2010  
**Time:** 8:00-9:45am  
**Teacher:** Mr. Smith  
**Course:** American Government  
**Total Students in Class:** 17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 8:00am| *[teacher shows the handout “The Economics of CIVITAS: Making Good Choices” on the projector screen]*  
[teacher talks about quiz next day and some school events] | Content – the economics of CIVITAS: making good choices  
Method – use of tech  
Assessment – quiz  
Method – relate to students experience |
| 8:10am| **Teacher:** When you come back home, what do you choose to do?  
**Students:** Eat  
Walk my dog  
Take a shower  
I choose to play guitar.  
Run outside to play volleyball.  
I do. I worked out this morning. I would say to play volleyball if I have a choice. Why do you think that this class is about economics?  
We choose what our happiness is, to make decisions.  
Limited time, money  
Your actions affect other people.  
Who is that choice for?  
You  
*I like to do things for you guys cos at the end I want to feel better. I choose to do that cos I feel better for I am doing a good job. If you run away, I could not have a satisfaction of teacher. Let’s go through this document. It’s on the lesson called ‘Crash Course in Micro/Macro Economics’*[  
[teacher shows this document on the screen and orders lunch for students] | Method – relate to teacher experience  
Method – using document  
Content – Micro/Macro Economics  
Method – use of tech |
| 8:25am| Let’s go through this document. It’s about an hour. We are trying to get discussion as much as possible. Mr. Frey, can you read this document, intro?  
[the student reads]  
*What does it mean for people as rational decision makers?* | Content – rational decision-making |

Table 3.13: An example of data analysis on an observation note.
Most of people go out and make rational decisions.

[teacher asks another student to read “Three things about economics that you MUST KNOW NOW”]

How individual responds? *Micro is pretty small. Macro is economic skills at nations. We can look at each individual. What would be individual economic choice?*

- Buying a car
- *What would be economic choices?*
- Health care, defense budget

*Somebody, Miss Hoskin, what do you spend money on?*

*How much is it?*

- $299

*If it goes $350, will you buy it?*

- *Probably*

*At $299 you get happiness, but not 4 dollars. Tell me on the 4 dollars give you happiness.*

- *Lunch, meal*

*What 4 dollars she values more?*

- *Meal*

Let’s get some more terms. I will go around this room.

[teacher asks one student to read “Basic Terms You Should Know”]

We are all buyers.

*What’s opportunity cost? If you choose to do one thing with a resource, you may not do another.*

[teacher shares his personal experience on not being a government employee while choosing to become a teacher]

*What’s next one?*

- [a student reads the definition of specialization]

*Specialization. What’s the example?*

*Orange juice. If our state has a lot of resources, can we grow as the biggest orange juice factory in the country? Comparing to Florida, can we be as cheap as theirs?*

- [another student reads the definition of competition]

- [teacher makes an example for competition]

*What is the history that American posed tariff?*

*During the Depression, the Smoot-Hawley Tariff. American*
government tried to protect us. When American government protected, what happened?
Trade stopped.
It hurt.
Is standard of living all about money?
No
Family, Mental health, health care, food, clothes, water, cars, transportation ---.
We start on the second page. On the Macro skills, what are the three fundamental economic questions?
What will we make (produce)?
How will we make it?
Who will get it?
We have three different economic systems.
[teacher talks about this section]
[teacher talks about “Emphasizing the Principles of Economics”]
I will read questions and you put your answers in the box.
Individuals act rationally to maximize gain. What does this mean in your own words?
[students type their answers on the computer]
[teacher pulls up the screen, draws a demand-supply curve on the white board, and explains the demand and supply curves]
[teacher talks about cost/benefit/marginal thinking and makes an example of the food]
It’s called the law of diminishing returns. That means you need think about what happens each time after you do something.
[teacher writes “law of diminishing returns” on the white board and explains this concept by using some examples related to students and his own experiences]
---

Opportunity cost, all cost is not free in terms of time, energy, whatever. Tell me what you were giving up and made a choice what you made. What does it mean in your own words?
I want to you to look at this on the screen.
[teacher shows “Flow of Economic Activity between Business and Consumer” on the screen]
Is this Macro or Micro?
Macro

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>standard of living</td>
<td>use of tech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>three fundamental</td>
<td>principles of economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>different economic</td>
<td>–make connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>systems</td>
<td>–relate to student experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>principles of economics</td>
<td>–relate to teacher experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–demand-supply curve</td>
<td>–use of tech</td>
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<tr>
<td>–cost/benefit/marginal</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>thinking</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>–law of diminishing</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>returns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–opportunity cost</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Method –use of tech</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–flow of economic activity between business and consumer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.13: Continued.

[teacher explains the Paycheck on the screen and makes an example of his paycheck, what is paid for and what is the net income]
I do want to go over this last part of the Value of Education. [teacher asks one student to read this part]
If in your community, what’s great about Jefferson? It’s a pre-college high school, going to college easier. That’s benefit because eventually we are big money makers. [teacher asks another student to read “College Majors That Boost Your Paycheck”]
[teacher talks about the part of the Top 10 Professionals] What’s the good option of education? Get more options [teacher makes an example of his teaching experience]
The only way of you getting more options is to get more education.

9:12am [teacher talks about skits and divides students into groups] I will come around to decide which one you are. [teacher walks to each group for their group terms and situation] It’s about 1 minute skit. I am going to give you 8 minutes to pull together. Everybody in your group has to participate. [teacher shows the clock on the screen, walks to each student and talks about their group skits]

9:25am Ok, the goal is when you watch it, tell what the economic principle is and why. [the first group starts play and teacher repeats “first night, second night and third night”] [students are laughing] What’s economic principle? Marginal thinking Let’s give them applause. Which group would like to do next? [another group starts to play] Opportunity cost It is opportunity cost. [third group begins the activity]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content – paycheck</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Method – relate to teacher experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content – the value of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method – making connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content – professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method – relate to teacher experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Method – skits, group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills – cooperative learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Method – use of tech</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content – economic principle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method – skits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content – marginal thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content – opportunity cost</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
Table 3.13: Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the economic principle?</th>
<th>Content –rational decision-making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rational decision-making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[teacher explains it]</td>
<td>Method –relate to student experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[another group starts to play]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[teacher asks one student about his paycheck]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you feel about that?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sucks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>I cannot get all of my money. Some of it goes to government, like fireplace, local government.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s difference between Republican and Democratic governments? What Republican believes? What size do they want?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Democratic government believes? Example?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>[another group starts to play activity]</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What’s economic principle?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic cycle</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>[The last group begins the activity]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s economic principle?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Trade, supply and demand. The supply is low and demand is high, price is?</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>High</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s the example of the supply is high and demand is low, the price is cheap.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Macdonald</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Christmas sales</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Are there any concepts still tricky in your mind?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[one student asks about the law of diminishing returns and teacher explains about it]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[teacher reminds students about the can structure project, quiz and school event]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:45am</td>
<td>Assessment -quiz</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class is over.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Trustworthiness

As Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest, trustworthiness is about judging the quality and rigor of a qualitative inquiry. It includes four criteria for researchers to accomplish trustworthiness – credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability by using different techniques in qualitative research. I used prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, member checking, and thick description to establish the trustworthiness of my study. Thick description is the key to transferability of findings. It means collecting data in considerable depth and complexity, so findings can be illustrated by detailed examples to take the reader through the realities of the different student participants in order to understand how they make sense of their life experiences in my study. Having already discussed my study’s reliance on the collection of thick and rich data, here I focus on those other important elements to establish the trustworthiness of my study.

Prolonged Engagement and Persistent Observation

Prolonged engagement means “the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the ‘culture,’ testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents, and building trust” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.301). Prolonged engagement allows researchers to identify and examine the multiple factors and complexities involved in conducting research and to reduce the risk of distortion or selectivity of data collection. This prolonged experience on the sites gave me an opportunity to better understand the student and teacher participants in the context of the study and to make them feel more comfortable in disclosing information. I spent three months collecting data in the field, learning the culture of the schools, establishing
rapport with the students and teachers, and identifying multiple and critical factors in the study. I was on each of the sites at least twice a week conducting frequent observations and interviews with the students and teachers. Besides the formal interviews with the participants, I had informal conversations with them to become familiar with the teachers and build rapport and trust.

Persistent observation allows researchers to “identify those characteristics and elements in the setting that are most relevant to the question being pursued and focus on them in detail” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.304) Persistent observation allowed me to gain complicated understandings of different student and teacher participants over time and helped identify salient issues and concerns in the study. When spending three months in the field, I observed the teachers’ instructional activities and if/how they engaged the students in learning and increased their participation in the classrooms. Especially I paid attention to students’ interactions with teachers and other students in and outside of the classrooms, examining their experiences and reactions to instruction.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation increases the credibility of the research data. Triangulation involves using different methods, sources, analyst, and theory to validate emerging findings (Patton, 1990). In my study, triangulation of data was established through methods including semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, and sources such as interview transcripts, field notes, and relevant documents. I triangulated across and within methods to examine the meaning and to compare the information behind the interviews and observations that I collected in my research. For example, in the interview, Mrs. Wills explained that her teaching philosophy was to make the students think and make
them ask questions rather than memorizing information. I triangulated Mrs. Wills’ statement by observing her trying to involve the students in discussion on certain topics under study. I was also able to triangulate that with the interviews from her students. They perceived that the social studies class was fun, active, and in discussion which they had been enjoying. I could see the same approach in Mrs. Wills’ teaching within different methods of data collection. It promoted trustworthiness of the study.

Triangulation also allowed me to collect multiple sources of data and look for contradictions and relationships. I triangulated the students’ individual stories with each other, with their teachers’ perceptions of the students, and with the published documentation. For example, concerning Asian stereotype, Qiang and Yung-ching at Franklin High School thought that it did not affect them much, while Jun and Chien-fu shared about their struggles in having to negotiate their identity to become smart. Their social studies teacher, Mrs. Wills indicated that the students’ major challenge at school was to overcome the stereotype that they carried. I also triangulated with Asian American model minority discourse in the literature. In this way, it allowed me to be able to explore the issue in-depth and draw the findings from multiple sources to establish trustworthiness for the study.

**Member Checking**

Member checking ensures that researchers represent participants and their perspectives accurately (Glesne, 1999). Member checking allowed me to continuously seek out the student and teacher participants’ feedback on the collected data and preliminary findings in my study. It also created the opportunity to place the students and teachers in a collaborative role to get meaningful findings for stake-holders. Throughout
the study, I used formal and informal member checking methods with the student and teacher participants. For informal member checks, I gave copies of interview transcripts to all the participants and classroom observation notes to the teachers quickly after collecting the data, and asked them to read and edit as necessary. For formal member checks, at mid-study and the end of the data collection, I shared categories and preliminary findings with the student and teacher participants, and asked for their feedback on the interpretation and findings derived from the data. In both formal and informal member checking, the participants often suggested small changes that did not influence much on the findings.

In member checking, I had been benefited from consistently getting the feedback from the students and teachers on my collected data and initial data analysis, which gave me a better understanding of their identities, life and school experiences under study and facilitated the progress of my research. I was also able to be responsible for the stakeholders in the study through modifying information and representing my data accurately and effectively from the perspectives of the research participants. Especially, the teachers read carefully on my transcripts of interviews with them and wanted some of their languages to be revised as that might affect their self images. In this way, member checks further developed collaboration and rapport with the participants and increased the trustworthiness of the study.

**Ethical Concerns**

Ethical concerns in my study are foremost with the obligation to protect my participants. They include consent to the field, confidentiality in the process of conducting the research, and the confidentiality of participants in reporting. I explained in
detail about the purpose of the study, procedures, and how I was going to use the data to the student and teacher participants at the beginning of the study, and gained their permission to access the field. Pseudonyms were used for the protection of the research participants and the confidentiality of the site. The data including interview transcripts, tapes, and observation notes were kept in a securely locked place once the data collection was started. Tapes will be destroyed one year after the study is completed. Transcripts of tapes and observation notes will be kept for three years after the study ends as required by federal regulations. I am the only person who has access to the data.

I am also concerned with ethical issues of representation in my study. It requires the examination and scrutiny on my interviews, observations, and data analysis to avoid replicating unhelpful processes of ‘othering’. I developed a more collaborative relationship with participants and incorporated their comments on the research transcripts and analysis into the work to make the process of the research more transparent. According to Subedi (2007), a more ethical approach to qualitative research needs to be more open and accountable to how the researcher accesses racial and ethnic research spaces, gathers data, and writes about the findings. Considering the participants belong to different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, I engaged in ethical research practices by recognizing participants’ ways of being, and attempted to be more self-reflexive and self-critical on the fieldwork to scrutinize the limits of my preconceived notions. I tried to recognize the complex ethical nature when I was in the field and the ways in which I responded that might influence my relationship with participants. I also paid attention about what to share and what not to share without compromising the ethics of research. As Jacobs-Huey (2002) suggests, a more ethical approach to help ought to examine the
complexities of negotiating reciprocity, including defining “what the ‘betterment of the community’ means and to whom” (p.798). These raised ethical questions regarding my representation of data presented in the study.

Writing Up Process

According to Manen (1990), writing is not merely a final step in the research process, but it is the object of the research process. Writing is closely placed into the research activity and reflection, to make some aspect of our lived world, our lived experience, reflectively understandable. My writing aims to inform the reader of the process and findings of the study, accurately represent the perspectives from the students grounded in the data, and make the reader “see” the deeper significance or meaning structures of the lived experience it describes. Erickson (1986) proposes that the main purpose of writing is “to convince the audience that an adequate evidentiary warrant exists for assertions made, that patterns of generalization within data set are indeed as the researcher claims they are” (p.149). I frequently used quotes from the interviews and field notes, and provided descriptions, narrative vignettes, and commentary to substantiate claims.

In order to explore Asian American students’ identities and their learning in the social studies curriculum, I decided to provide background information for each individual student from the thick and rich data collected from the interviews and field notes. Then I compared each individual to look for similarities or differences among the students’ identities and learning experiences in the social studies curriculum. A constant comparative analysis was employed to generate the key categories and findings. Finally, I organized my writing under major findings to present what I had learned accurately with
adequate evidence.

My theoretical perspectives about identity as socially constructed and negotiated also played a role in my writing. I focused on how expectations and practices in families, communities, and schools have contributed to the Asian American students' identities construction, how the students negotiated with their dynamic, multiple, and sometimes contradictory identities to cope with challenges and opportunities in American schools, how these students perceive and interpret the social studies instruction, and the relationships between the students’ identities and their social studies learning experiences. It helped me to understand the students’ identities construction and negotiation with the issues of race, gender, language, and social class situated in different social contexts.

**Limitations of the Study**

There were a very small number of participants. Eight Asian American students in two high schools in a Midwestern city do not represent the heterogeneous Asian American groups in the United States. More students from many places would provide more complex perspectives and experiences. The limited time for conducting this study was another issue. Longer period of time on the research sites would have provided more depth. As a non-native English speaker and international student from China, I realized that my findings might be limited by my lack of experience in American schools, my language skills, and my cultural background. Yet my background, identity, and experiences had contributed to a better understanding and interpretation of Asian American students’ identities and their learning in the social studies curriculum in the study. It allowed me to be aware of the students’ constructed and negotiated identities within different social contexts such as families, schools, and communities, and their
perceptions of the social studies curriculum related to their complex and multiple identities.

**Summary**

I developed a naturalistic inquiry study to understand the relationship between Asian American students’ identities and their learning in the social studies curriculum in American schools. I used the snowball or chain sampling to select the student and teacher participants. I employed interviews and observations as the methods for data collection. I also used constant comparative method for data analysis. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), I implemented five techniques: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, member checking, and thick description to improve the trustworthiness of the study. Figure 3.1 below is timetable of the study.
Figure 3.1: Timetable of the study.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

I conducted research on eight Asian American students at two high schools, Jefferson High School and Franklin High School in a Midwest city, in order to identify their perceptions of identity and to analyze how these perceptions affect and are affected by their learning in the social studies curriculum. All of the names have been modified to protect the confidentiality of the research participants. In this chapter I present the background information of the school sites first and then profile the teachers’ identity, beliefs, values, and teaching experiences.

The Midwest Context

It needs to be given attention that my study was undertaken in the Midwest context, which is not the same with other regions in the U.S. in demographics and racial/ethnic context. Compared to the West Coast or the East Coast, the Midwest does not have a critical mass of Asian American population and is historically less diverse in race and ethnicity. Lee (2009) points out even though Asian Americans have lived, worked, and built communities in the Midwest since the late nineteenth century, their histories and experiences have been doubly invisible. “Like other Asian Americans, they
have been largely omitted from standard narratives of American history. But they are absent in most scholarship on Asian American history as well” (p. 256). This double invisibility has generated frustration for Asian Americans living in the Midwest. Lee quotes the explanation from the Rice Paper Collective of the Madison Asian Union (1974): “Our invisibility is so total Asian Americans are not thought to exist in this ‘vast banana wasteland’.” A “vast banana wasteland” refers to the Midwest that Asian Americans have left to “search for their roots” in the concentrated Asian ethnic communities along the coasts. The Midwest lacks mechanisms of identity and community formation that exist in large concentrated Asian Americans context on the coasts. It is the region where the race and race-related issues are primarily considered as black and white, “Asian Americans are invisible—neither honorary Whites nor viewed as a racial minority” (Lee, 2009, p.253).

Juang, Nguyen and Lin (2006) further address the development of the individual’s ethnic identity is related to three characteristics of the context, including the density of the ethnic group, the degree of institutional completeness, and the power and status of the ethnic group. First, the size of the ethnic population in the community is important to the development of one’s ethnic identity. Living in a large ethnically concentrated context could strengthen one’s ethnic identity. Compared to the concentrated context of the West Coast or the East Coast, the Midwest context has lower density of Asian American populations and less diversity in race and ethnicity. Second, institutional completeness means “whether the churches, schools, media, and other institutions in the community context mutually reinforce each other in their cultural messages to ethnic group members” (p. 546). In the context characterized by high institutional completeness, there
are more positive role models available and younger members of the ethnic group are more likely to grow up with a positive ethnic identity. Asian Americans living in the dispersed context of the Midwest have less institutional support in the form of churches, language schools, and ethnic enclaves such as Chinatown and Japantown to help maintain their own ethnic culture. Third, group power and status refers to “whether the ethnic group is politically and institutionally visible in the community” (p. 546). Tajfel and Turner (1986) point out that the individual’s self identification with his/her ethnic group that has a higher social status may lead to higher self-esteem. Asian Americans’ political power and status is much less pronounced in the Midwest context than that in the concentrated context, where they occupy many positions such as members on the Board of Supervisors, commanders, and school teachers and principals.

**Background of Jefferson High School**

Jefferson High School is located in the community of Richmond in a Midwestern city. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), there are over 1,350,000 residents in Richmond. The racial make up of the community was 76% white, 18% African American, 3% Asian, 2% Hispanic, and 1% other races. The median income per household in the community was $46,000 and the median income per family was $56,000. About 10% of families and 14% of the population were below the poverty level, including 17% of those under age 18 and 10% of those over 65. The community of Richmond, particularly its metropolitan area, has been an attraction for presidential and congressional politics during its history. Richmond is one of the brightest places in the state as it is the headquarters of several large multinational corporations and some educational institutions. Richmond has an urban core, member communities of a city, and some quite rural areas.
Jefferson High School is a newly established, small, and intellectually vibrant public school open to 9th through 12th graders that draws from across about 15 school districts. Students who attend Jefferson High School would be enrolled in their home district while remaining a part of the public school systems in Richmond. Jefferson High School focuses on the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) in the curriculum. According to the school’s website, the school claims to use a holistic approach to develop the talents of the whole student through experiential learning, service learning and family and community support. It promotes a community that advocates democracy, diversity and ethical leadership. Its mission is to prepare students for an interconnected world through a relevant and academically rigorous curriculum within a safe and trusting environment.

As an early college high school, Jefferson offers two-phase instruction, including “Core Prep” - preparation and exploration, and “College Access” - internships and access to college. According to the school’s website, freshman and sophomore students at Jefferson High School take a “Core Prep” curriculum which prepares them for the competency in core content areas such as mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts, and meets the state graduation requirement. Once students have demonstrated their mastery of the core curriculum, they take the curriculum of College Access, which means students do most of their learning outside of school walls within the Richmond community. For example, based on their personal interest, students may choose a curriculum that focuses on math and science, in which they can work with engineers in the field and take relevant courses in engineering at the local universities. Learning from the “Core Prep” and “College Access” curricular, students at Jefferson
High School are given the opportunity for developing their academic knowledge, practical experience, attitudes, and skills to become capable and competent citizens in a global economy.

During the time of the study, 350 students attended grades 9-12. The student demographics at Jefferson High School were 60% white, 25% African American, 6% Asian, 5% Hispanic, and 4% of other races. At the time of the study there were 21 Asian students in the school. Figure 4.1 below shows racial distribution of the community of Richmond. Figure 4.2 below shows racial distribution of Jefferson High School in Richmond.
Figure 4.1: Racial distribution of the Richmond Community.

Figure 4.2: Racial distribution of Jefferson High School in Richmond.
**Background of Franklin High School**

Franklin High School is located in a suburb community of Lexington. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), there were about 65,000 residents in Lexington. The racial make up of the community was 82% white, 12% Asian, 3% African American, 2% Hispanic, and 1% of other races. The median income per household in the city was $125,000 and the median income per family was $140,000. There were about 1% of families and 2% of the population below the poverty line, including 2% of those under age 18 and 3% of those at age 65 or over. The economy of Lexington is prosperous as the world headquarters of many multinational corporations.

Franklin High School is a newly established public school open to 9th through 12th graders in the community of Lexington. It is rated as “One of America’s Best Schools” by U.S. News and World Report and awarded as a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education. It also becomes an International Baccalaureate (IB) world school, which aims to “develop internationally minded people who, recognizing their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world” (IB Learner Profile Booklet, 2008, p.5). According to the school’s website, school leaders believe that all students can and must learn at high levels of achievement, and the school should provide a safe, positive and challenging learning environment that results in this high level of performance and promotes students’ intellectual, mental, social and physical development.

During the time of the study, there were approximately 2,200 students in grades 9-12 at Franklin High School. Students were 88% white, 10% Asian, 1% Hispanic, and 1% African American. At the time of the study there were approximately 220 Asian
students in the school. Figure 4.3 below shows racial distribution of the suburb community of Lexington. Figure 4.4 below shows racial distribution of Franklin High School in Lexington.
Figure 4.3: Racial distribution of the Lexington Community.

Figure 4.4: Racial distribution of Franklin High School in Lexington.
Social Studies Teachers

Mr. Smith at Jefferson High School and Mrs. Wills at Franklin High School participated in my study. In this section, I present the teachers’ identities, beliefs, values, and teaching experiences first, and then their insights on their Asian American students. Mr. Smith and Mrs. Wills have provided their both similar and different perceptions of their Asian American students at schools, based on their long-term observations and school experiences with them. My findings further indicate that the teachers’ perspectives on the Asian American students are aligned with their belief in social studies teaching and their teaching decision-making towards a diverse student population in classrooms, which will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Mr. Smith

Mr. Smith is a white American social studies teacher about 30 years of age at Jefferson High School. He has been teaching for two full years at Jefferson while before that he had taught at multiple places and always enjoyed teaching. He has two undergraduate degrees: one is in Criminology/Criminal Justice, which is the study of why people commit crime and the criminal justice system, and the other in Spanish. He also has his Master’s degree in Social Studies and Global Education. As a previous U.S. Government employee whose job responsibilities spanned to the American departments overseas, he had considerable international experiences in different countries. For Spanish, Mr. Smith had substituted as a Spanish teacher and worked as a Spanish tutor before being at Jefferson High School. However, he prefers to be a social studies teacher because he likes the dialogue with his students, and in social studies he can study and explore the world with his students.
Mr. Smith discusses that his teaching philosophy is about choice: “It is a lot about opportunity, choice, consequence, and then more opportunities.” Learning should be a process. At a high school level, it is still a learning experience and students are still developmental. Whereas in most educational situations there is so much high-stakes testing that more often limits to one chance, he wants to provide students many opportunities so they “have options, make choices, have results for these choices (the consequences), but then go back and have more opportunities.” He further explains:

I hold accountable them for their choices whether it’s a good choice or bad choice. But for the bad choices I always try to give them another good opportunity. Ok, you made a bad choice, and now you realize you made a bad choice and you suffer the consequences of that. But now here is another good choice. You want them to make a new decision. Here it is.

Mr. Smith believes that the purpose of social studies is to develop students’ critical thinking skills and that is what social studies teachers have to offer. He explains:

History is good for that because we can analyze and evaluate what’s happened before for the purpose of applying it to our present and future. I always tell them we would never study anything in history that we cannot use. And a lot of what we study in history is people. It’s all about understanding people and human nature, human society. We are just using historical facts to achieve that goal.

He describes himself as a social studies teacher in an American high school who is to create both knowledgeable and capable American and world citizens. To him, students have to have dual identity, to be effective American citizens and able to see themselves as the world citizens who belong to a larger world system becoming more interconnected. He wants them to think win-win when students come into the world, to think about “what is good for the United States as well as what is good for the rest of the world, and what is good for the rest of the world should be good for the United States.”
In his classroom besides lectures, Mr. Smith employed a variety of teaching strategies to engage his students in learning, such as group work, reflective activities, research projects, and presentations. For example, he assigned students to work on a research project of Design a Sustainable World with the focus on one of the Millennium Development Goals proposed by the World Health Organizations. He invited guest speakers from different parts of the world to talk to the students about their experiences. He facilitated simulation and dramatic inquiry on certain topics under study such as industrialism, the issues of health care and gun control from the federalist and anti-federalist perspectives in his class. He uses internet, computers, videos, and movies in his classroom.

During the time of my study, Nicole, Annie, Kanan and Pushpa were the four out of eight Asian students in Mr. Smith’s world studies and American government classes. Mr. Smith believes that it is important to have diversity in the curriculum when he has diversity in his student population. He discusses that for Asian American students as a minority, there is a need to validate and embrace their cultural identity in the classroom. He wants them to be able to not only see themselves who have a lot of similarities with the mainstream Americans, but also see their unique and special backgrounds, so that they can celebrate both cultural identities. Mr. Smith broadens the curriculum to connect with Asian American students’ cultural and life experiences, values the first-hand knowledge and experiences that they have brought in from their own cultural backgrounds, and appreciates their contribution to the diversity of his social studies class. He gives an example:
When we get to the topics of conversation, especially in the last unit, they can bring expertise. They can bring some first-hand knowledge. It may not be a lot. But it’s special and it’s unique when they can bring anything that is first hand and speak with authority.

Mr. Smith believes that it also benefits his mainstream students by being exposed to the different worldviews and cultures. Further, he likes to teach about stereotypes in classroom and shows his sensitivity to other cultures when teaching about them. He explains that his teaching for diversity and equity has been significantly influenced by his parents who educated him to have a very rounded view of the world, and to his extensive overseas traveling experiences in Europe, the Mediterranean, Israel, Africa, South America, and Central Asia etc.

Mr. Smith points out that his four Asian American students, Nicole, Annie, Pushpa and Kanan are all high academic achievers at school. They are all great students: very motivated, very diligent, and possessing probably higher levels of critical thinking skills. He describes that the biggest difference is diligence for these students: “doing day to day stuff. Obviously that’s the skill that has been reinforced about doing daily work, taking notes, meeting deadlines, turning in quality work.” From Mr. Smith’s observation, these Asian American students appear proud of positive stereotypes that Asian American students are good students, smart, and naturally gifted. Compared to other more traditional high schools, he thinks that it is more acceptable and easier for Asian American students to be smarter at Jefferson High School. As for the major challenges that his Asian American students would encounter, he has a concern that as a minority group in the United States, they might completely be assimilated into the mainstream
American society, or almost become outcasts for being who they are and retaining their cultural properties.

**Mrs. Wills**

Mrs. Wills is a white American social studies teacher in her mid 40s at Franklin High School. She has twenty-two years of teaching experience in different schools. Her undergraduate degrees are in history and secondary education, and her Master’s degree is in education administration. She thinks that her specialty is American History and American Government, yet she also taught World History, Geography, and other social studies courses. She had held the responsibility as a Chair of the Social Studies Department for fifteen years in the school where she worked before.

Mrs. Wills shows her great enthusiasm in teaching social studies, and states that her teaching philosophy is to make students feel curious, think, and ask questions. She does not believe in memorization of historical events and facts, while focusing on preparing students in their knowledge, capability, and skills to be successful when they go to college in the future. She always has high expectations of her students and wants to provide many opportunities for them to achieve success in their academics. She explains:

> I believe pretty strongly that the students who were not successful on the test or paper, and did not get it right the first time, need another opportunity to get it right the second time. And if they didn’t get it right the second time, we need to really look at why they didn’t get it right ---

In social studies, Mrs. Wills describes that there has been much emphasis on the point that the United States is a melting pot and everybody has contributed to its cultural diversity. She further makes an example of her teaching AP American studies for understanding and appreciating cultural diversity. In the unit of immigration students
studied and explored the significant cultural impact on the immigrant groups to the United States. They were divided into ten different immigrant groups, and created their own museum, music, culture, food, important people, invention, laws, discrimination, and how that had changed for all of the different societies. Compared to the course of AP American Studies, Mrs. Wills focuses less on incorporating diverse cultures in her AP American government class due to its very different context. Yet she still brings the issues of patriotism, September 11th, immigration laws, and immigration quotas in this class. Besides the appreciation of cultural diversity, Mrs. Wills is also aware of the need to teach about the mainstream Americans’ historical and current prejudice against people who are different from themselves.

Mrs. Wills indicates that her AP American government course aims to get senior high school students ready for the AP test, and she mostly teaches about the content topics. Besides lectures, she assigns students to work on research projects, use technology such as the internet and videos, and invites guest speakers in her teaching. She also encourages dialogue with students, and facilitates their discussion, debates, and multiple perspectives in her classroom.

During the time of my study, Jun, Qiang, Yung-ching and Chien-fu are the four out of ten Asian students in Mrs. Wills’ AP American government class. As their home room teacher, Mrs. Wills has known these students for four years since they were freshmen at Franklin High School. She also taught them AP American studies class. She thinks that Jun, Qiang, Yung-ching and Chien-fu are very strong in their academics at school. They are bright, hard working, and possess different strengths and personalities. They place a higher priority on being scholars in education and value education. She
observes that Asian students are quieter when they come into a new school than the white students. There is also a big difference in their physical behavior and participation until they get comfortable in class. She describes: “when they get comfortable, they get verbal. And when they are not comfortable, they look at me and they pay attention.” Mrs. Wills also observes that these students are participating in their own cultures and trying to balance their bicultural identities. She appreciates that they value their own cultural norms and practice their own cultures. Occasionally she brings her Asian American students’ knowledge, perspectives, and experiences in classroom. She makes an example:

Sometimes we are talking about Pearl Harbor and perceptions of dropping atomic bombs in history class. Sometimes we talk to Japanese kids about what you learn about it, and what your parents learn about it.

With regard to the Asian American students’ not willing to reflect upon their racial and ethnic identity, Mrs. Wills does not feel surprised at it, and considers that they probably just want to be judged on how well they have performed, which is great. She explains:

I can go on the worse and what we do in this country is to categorize people. Just let people be [who they are]. Give them opportunity regardless who they are, and they will take advantage of that opportunity. -- And let them go from there. So good for them. Good for the kids.

She thinks that another reason might be the community culture at school: “We put strong emphasis here in Franklin, I mean the idea of family, the Franklin community, the Franklin family. We take care of each other, the teachers take care of each other, and the kids take care of each other.”

Referring to the race and race-related issues for these Asian American students at school, Mrs. Wills does not see that they are treated differently by other people. However,
she has witnessed how people treated her Muslim student in a different way. She describes:

The other day one student in the hallway turned to him [the Muslim student] and said ‘nice beard, dude.’ I grabbed that kid, moved him to the wall, and said ‘you do not insult that student in that way.’ So I’ve seen that, but I have not seen anything with Asian. That might be because we are all growing up here, and they have all been to elementary school here. There is a large Asian population as a part of our community. It’s no big deal. But I did see that the other day. It’s clearly inappropriate. And it just ticked me off, ‘you do not speak to that child that way.’ So it is unacceptable.

Mrs. Wills further sheds some insight on the major challenges in these students’ school experiences that they have to overcome the stereotype of Asian Americans as a model minority. She explains:

I think that their major challenges are overcoming that stereotype. And I think one of the challenges that they have to overcome is that the stereotype comes with them, and then they are perceived to be better because they think that they are better than everyone else.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduce the Midwest context in which my study was conducted in order to investigate Asian American students’ identities and their learning experiences in social studies curriculum. I provide the background information of my two school sites, Jefferson High School and Franklin High School. I also describe the social studies teacher participants’ identity, beliefs, values, and teaching experiences. They have demonstrated their similar or various perceptions of their Asian American students at schools along with the challenges that Asian Americans encounter. The teachers’ perspectives on Asian Americans are further aligned with their belief on and practice in teaching diversity and equity in the curriculum.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

STUDENTS’ IDENTITIES

The study aimed to examine Asian American students’ perceptions of identity and how these perceptions affected and were affected by their learning in the social studies curriculum at Jefferson High School and Franklin High School. In this chapter, first I provide the portrait of each student participant on his/her background information and self identification. Then I present and discuss my major findings on Asian American students’ identities generated from my data analysis.

Portraits of Asian American Students

In this section, I profile Asian American students’ family backgrounds. A variety of the students’ self-perceptions is also delineated as below in order to acquire a better understanding of who they are and what is important to them in their life and school experiences. During the time of my study Nicole, Annie, Kanan and Pushpa were sophomores at Jefferson High School while Jun, Qiang, Yung-ching and Chien-fu were seniors at Franklin High School. These students all come from middle or upper-middle class family backgrounds. Of the eight students, two are first-generation immigrants, meaning “they were born elsewhere and immigrated with their parents to the United
States at a young age” (Goodwin, 2003, p.5); six are the children of immigrants and are members of second-generation. At schools these students are all considered as high academic achievers and very strong in their school work. They have been learning their ethnic language, culture or religion at home and in the community, and traveled with their parents to their home Asian countries. Even though most students understand their home language and speak some, only Qiang is identified as proficient in his home language.

Nicole

Nicole is a 16-year-old girl in the 10th grade at Jefferson High School. She is the eldest daughter in her family. Nicole’s father, white/European American, works as an administrator in a company while her mother, Asian American, is a business manager at a university in Richmond. Nicole’s mother is of Chinese heritage and came from Malaysia to pursue a college degree in the United States. Nicole was born and grew up in Richmond. She has a younger brother, Jack, who is ten years old. The family is Christian and participates in various activities in the English service at Richmond Chinese Christian Church. Nicole understands Chinese and speaks some Mandarin and Cantonese. When she visited Malaysia and other South-Eastern Asian countries with her mother a few years ago, she experienced culture shock by the differences in those countries compared to the United States, “oh, not America.” Eventually she became very excited about her cross-cultural experiences in Asian countries.

Nicole views herself as the “Creative Artsy Asian child.” She is a poet, writer, artist, singer and Christian. She explains:

I like to write because some things I feel that cannot be said aloud look better as words. I also like to write to retain memories of things I’ve created in my brain. It’s kind of like how I draw and then I take pictures of
it so that I can look back at my things and remember what I was thinking at the time. I like reading, browsing pictures, and writing online, to gain inspiration for my own art and writings. I like to sing because whenever I used to listen to music, I would love the challenge of hitting the high notes. I still enjoy that challenge.

Nicole also sees herself as an “Asianly white child whose nationality is confused.” She states:

I relate with most of the groups at school. And I am just kind of that strange child who’s kind of Asian but not quite, like I kind of go back and forth in behaviors from like acting stereotypically white and stereotypically Asian.

She further explains “stereotypically white and stereotypically Asian” as:

It’s the things that I know my father and his family do, the things my mother and her family do, and the things I see around the church or like when I hang out with my white friends. And that’s where I find the stereotype. And there are talking about all these jokes on the internet, what’s the stereotype, and you learn from those too.

Regarding her relationship with other people, Nicole thinks herself as a comforter and healer because she likes to be there to support her friends and help people. But she is also reliant on other people to help her with the things that she struggles with, such as math.

**Annie**

Annie is a 16-year-old girl in the 10th grade at Jefferson High School. She is the eldest daughter in her family. When she was three years old, her parents came from the Philippines to the United States to seek better economic and educational opportunities. Annie’s family firstly settled down in the city of Jackson in the Midwest and then moved to Richmond after the mother obtained a job working as a nurse at a local hospital. Annie’s father is an engineer at a university in Richmond and she has a younger sister, Dalisay who is eight years old. Annie has great admiration for her mother and regards her
as the role model because of her mother’s educational aspiration and achievement in the Philippines and the United States, as well as her capability of making a successful transition to the American society. Her family is Roman Catholic. Annie understands some Tagalog but cannot speak, read or write it well. She has been to the Philippines with her family a few times and enjoyed learning more about her home culture and country.

Annie identifies herself mainly as a scholar and as an Asian American student. She talks about her interest in and great efforts that have been made to her academics: “I like, I really like academics. So I work on academics. --- I have a lot of school work to do.” As a volunteer, she has been volunteering at multiple places such as Asian Festival in the community of Richmond, the Freshman Interviews at Jefferson High School and other community services. At the Richmond Asian Festival she helps with different activities at the Filipino booth and sometimes brings her friends there to show them about Filipino culture and have fun together. Freshman Interviews are the events organized by the school for the new freshmen students to be able to meet with other people at school and get the advice on their future study and school life. Annie also leads a school club to raise fund to support research at Richmond Children’s Hospital on children’s diseases. She does not perceive herself as a very good dancer, but she likes dancing and plans to take some dance classes in the future.

Kanan

Kanan is a 16-year-old boy in the 10th grade at Jefferson High School. Kanan is the eldest son in his family. Kanan’s father is a Senior Field Engineer for a foreign company while his mother stays at home taking care of the family, especially Kanan’s young sister, Aasha who is eight years old. Kanan was born in India. When Kanan was
two-and-half-years old, the family came to the United States because his father obtained a job here. Since then Kanan has visited India every four years. The family is Hindu. Kanan speaks some Telugu, a dialect in southern India and sometimes switches back and forth with English when talking to his family at home. He usually visits India and spends three months with his family there every four years. Now he is looking forward to going back there this summer again. Kanan does not think that there are many differences between India and the United States since India is becoming more industrialized and developed. Even though the lifestyle of people in India is somehow different, it was not hard for him to adapt to India when he was there.

Kanan thinks that his identity is a mixture of many things. For example, he does a lot of academics, “homework is something that I need to do, and tests and stuff like that. There are the units that I need to study a little bit for the college test like ACT and SAT.” He plays sports, like tennis. He also plays the violin in the school orchestra. Kanan does not like to identify himself racially and ethnically. He thinks that it is not a big difference, “It’s you bonded with everyone else. For identifying myself with something different, I don’t really have that anything to speak about that.”

**Pushpa**

Pushpa is a 16-year-old girl in the 10th grade at Jefferson High School. She is the youngest daughter in her family. Her father originally came from India to pursue higher education in the United States and later on got married and brought her mother from India to Richmond in the Midwest. Pushpa was born and grew up in Richmond. She has one older brother, Rajan who is 17 years old and is in the 11th grade at Jefferson High School. Her father works as an engineer while her mother is a substitute teacher and tutor.
at the same school that Pushpa and her brother attend. Her family is Hindu but they seldom go to the temple due to its long distance from their home. She speaks some Hindi and Punjabi, reads a little bit of Hindi but is not able to write it well. She visits India with her family every three or four years and appreciates having this chance to learn more about her culture.

Pushpa identifies herself as an everyday student and works hard on her school work. She wants to consistently make progress, keep her grades up, and do her best in her studies. She looks up to the students who are very dedicated to their studies and place much passion in their work. Pushpa lists her brother and one of her friends as examples: “He [Pushpa’s brother] never leaves any work incomplete. He always works to his best ability. And I really admire him. I have one friend who has taken college courses already, and he is only a sophomore. So I am like truly jealous. I know I need work hard and then try to get there.” Pushpa is also a musician, dancer, and athlete. She plays drums in the band and piano as well. She enjoys dancing and has learned different kinds of dances such as Bollywood dance, Pangda (Punjabi dance) and clogging in her spare time. At Jefferson High School besides participating in the Freshman Interview to meet with new students and tell them about the school, her personal experiences and opportunities there, Pushpa attended the school dance event to raise money for Richmond Children’s Hospital. She danced for six hours. At another similar event organized by a local university in Richmond, Pushpa danced for nine hours (with some breaks). She described, “It was very fun and there were a lot of activities and games. So I like this kind of thing.” At elementary and high schools Pushpa and her brother had played soccer for their school
teams. Now sometimes they go back to their home high school to play soccer since Jefferson High School does not offer sports.

**Jun**

Jun is an 18-year-old boy in the 12th grade at Franklin High School. He is the eldest son in his family. His father came from Southern China while his mother was from Northeastern China. They pursued higher education in the United States and eventually settled down in the Midwestern community of Lexington. Jun was born and grew up in Lexington. He has one younger brother, Gang who is 15 years old. His mother is a pianist while his father works as a medical doctor at a university in Lexington. His father sometimes goes back to China to teach at a medical school. Jun speaks some Chinese while having very limited ability in reading and writing Chinese. He is learning Spanish at school as well. In his childhood Jun went back to China with his family almost every summer, but since the 8th grade he has not been back due to his heavy study load.

Jun identifies himself mostly as a scholar. He states, “I put academics first so I am a scholar. I am a student first.” As a senior at high school he is especially endeavoring to prepare for his AP tests. Jun also views himself as an athlete and musician. He plays the violin in the school band. He likes running track and playing tennis with his friends. Jun regards running track as one of the social events that he enjoys, “We run --- and then we talk like six hours. So that’s really fun social event.” Jun describes his friends really athletic and really crazy, “They do everything, and they come up with the most random, like completely out of the blue things to do. My friends are not really awkward at all. They are like anti-awkward. So we can basically do anything. It’s fun.” He does not see
himself through the lens of race and religion, and states, “I am just part of the big group, I guess.”

Qiang

Qiang is an 18-year-old boy at the 12th grade in Franklin High School. He is the eldest son in his family. His parents originally came from the south of China to pursue their higher education in the United States. Qiang was born in southern United States and moved to the Midwestern community of Lexington with his family when he was little. He has one younger sister, Lin who is 16 years old. His father works in the Department of Education while his mother teaches Chinese at a local college. Qiang has a high level of proficiency in Mandarin Chinese language. Last summer he taught Chinese to non-native Chinese speakers at the camp sponsored by a local university. He has been to China three or four times with his family and always enjoys his experiences there.

Qiang identifies himself as a scholar and explains, “Academics is my top priority, always my top priority.” He also sees himself as a musician, playing the piano and sometimes he goes to musical concerts. He is not exactly a gamer even though he does play video games. Relating to racial, ethnic or religious identity, Qiang does not identify himself in that way.

Yung-ching

Yung-ching is an 18-year-old boy in the 12th grade at Franklin High School. He is the eldest son in his family. Yung-ching was born and grew up in Lexington. His parents originally moved from Taiwan to Lexington to pursue a higher education. Yung-ching has one younger brother, Chih who is 17 years old, and one younger sister, Chih-Hsien who is 15 years old. His father is a scientist working at a local university while his
mother stays at home taking care of the family. Yung-ching understands Chinese and speaks some Mandarin and Cantonese. He has visited Taiwan a few times with his family, which is really fun for him.

Yung-ching identifies himself as a scholar and spends most time in preparing for his AP tests. He explains, “I pretty much do schoolwork so I am a scholar.” He is also a musician, playing the piano and cello. He does not identify himself racially, ethnically, or religiously.

**Chien-fu**

Chien-fu is an 18-year-old boy in the 12th grade at Franklin High School. He is the eldest son in his family. Chien-fu’s father works as an IT architect for the State while his mother stays at home taking care of the family. Chien-fu was born and grew up in Lexington. His parents came from Taiwan in the mid of 1980s when they wanted to pursue a higher education in the United States. Chien-fu has a younger sister, Chin who is fourteen years old. The family identifies themselves as Buddhists and frequently attends different activities in Tzu Chi, one of the Buddhist organizations. Chien-fu speaks some Chinese, and mixes both English and Chinese together when talking to his family at home. He also learned Spanish four years at school. Chien-fu has frequently visited Taiwan and mainland China with his family and spent enjoyable time with his cousins there.

Chien-fu has a lot of self identifications. He is a “band geek” first, then a musician, scholar, writer, talker, Buddhist, gamer, skater and slacker. He participates in the marching band and plays many instruments. He views himself as a scholar when he works hard, which does not always happen. He also sees himself as a writer even though
he has not attained the level at which he can express his ideas effectively. Writing is one of the things that he wants to pursue and achieve in his life in the future. He identifies himself as a talker, that is, a person who talks too much. He is also a Buddhist: “my family is mainly Buddhist. I mean I am still sort of confused who I am. But I think I am Buddhist. It works for me.” Regarding his learning and practice in Buddhism, Chien-fu thinks that his mother has a significant influence on him. However, he does not always see himself as a Buddhist. He explains:

It’s more like, I feel like if I just say I am a Buddhist, then it sort of closes me off to other ideas. But I still want to be open up to other ideas. So it’s like my main base is a Buddhist. But if there is something interesting that sort of makes sense, I will take that idea as well.

Chien-fu volunteers at Tzu Chi once a week. He goes out in the community and helps out with local events. He also volunteers at the nursing home and homeless shelter. He describes his volunteering experience “Super fun.” Chien-fu views himself as a skater and gamer. In his spare time he sometimes just sits by himself outside although he is often around his friends. If there is nothing else to do, he keeps himself busy playing video games for six hours at a time. He also thinks that this year he is a slacker:

It just means that I don’t work as hard as I should, like the teacher gives me twenty homework questions, and I only do five of them. And I show up and I am like ‘here are the five homework questions, who know about the rest of those. I didn’t do it.’ Sort of thing.

As for his racial and ethnic identity, Chien-fu shares that he is always posed on a higher expectation on his schoolwork because of being an Asian American student at school. It is the only impact on his life that makes him think about himself as Asian; otherwise, he sees himself as a white. He says, “I feel pretty white here. Yea, I could identify myself as a white if I didn’t look so Asian (laughing).”
Major Findings

In this section, I present the findings on the identities of the Asian American students in my study. There are three major themes emergent from my data analysis: 1) the students have all recognized being scholar/student as a crucial part of their identity, 2) the students have expressed a variety of thoughts on their racial/ethnic and cultural identity, and 3) the students have employed different strategies to negotiate their senses of self when they encounter the challenges or opportunities in different settings. My data analysis has further revealed the complex and dynamic process of the students’ identities construction and negotiation at the intersections of race, ethnicity, culture, gender, class and language in specific social contexts. It has been greatly influenced by the features, expectations, and practices of schools, communities, and families.

Scholar/Student Identity

My Asian American student participants identify themselves as students or scholars. They are considered by their teachers as highly motivated, hardworking, and strong academically. Students’ personal narratives have demonstrated their deep value on education, which is in accordance with their immigrant parents’ values and practices at home. My findings show that Asian American immigrant parents’ strong commitment to their children’s academic achievement plays a key role in the formation and development of the students’ identities. The parents of Asian American students place great value on education and therefore have high expectations for their children. As immigrants to the United States, the parents have known and experienced how education can make a difference in their lives. At home they encourage and push their children to achieve success in their academics and consequently school becomes a major focus for their
children as well. In addition, the schools and communities’ high expectations on the Asian American students’ academic achievements have exerted a powerful impact on their constructed and negotiated scholar/student identity, which will be presented and discussed in the finding of Racial/Ethnic and Cultural Identity.

At Jefferson High School Nicole shares that her mother, who originally came from Malaysia to pursue a higher education in the United States, now works as a business manager at a university in Richmond. Nicole’s mother greatly values education and has high expectations of her daughter’s academic level. Nicole talks about her mother being tough on her grades: “My mom always yells at me ‘did you get on the top of that? You need work a little harder.’ because my mom, when she came here, my uncle paid for her to go to college. So education is very important.” Since Nicole is now at high school, her mother does not require her scores to be as high as before. Nicole explains, “She understands ---. It’s going to be harder. --- Before if I got like an A minus, I got a lot of troubles.” Nicole’s mother also tends to compare her school experience in the United States to those in her home country, and reminds her of her cousins’ hardworking at school in Malaysia when she tends to get off track in her studies. In response to that, Nicole appreciates what she has at this school compared to her cousins’ school culture and experiences and determines to try harder. She illustrates:

I went over to Malaysia and I got to see my cousins how their schools were. I am more appreciative for what I have in this school. So I was just like ‘OK, well, I can at least try because I do pretty well over here.’ I don’t have to work extremely hard. But I do have to work hard enough so I can prove that I am capable. So I just need to stay on the top of that.

Nicole’s focus on academics can also be viewed from the scenario below, where she is facing the pressure from her peers picking on her study at school. She describes:
When I come to study, a lot of kids I talk to are like ‘oh, it’s good to study. But you probably have life outside of the school.’ I am like ‘well, I don’t really bother with it now.’ I mean I understand the whole joy of being a kid, a teenager whatever. But you can do that and your schoolwork at the same time. A lot of Asian students do that. They are like ‘here you’ve been ridiculous. You are the kid. You can play about your homework.’ I said ha, you should actually try to do it sometimes’ because some kids, they do half of it, and then do like ‘I am bored’ and go to something else.

Pushpa’s father came from India to the United States to pursue a higher education and eventually settled down in Richmond with his family. Pushpa points out that at home Indian parents give priority to education. She understands the parents’ motivation behind pushing their children. She describes, “They like you to be very disciplined like sophisticated. But it’s not bad because all parents want their children to be successful. --- So, to learn something new is helping you to be successful in your later life.” She shows her appreciation of her parents’ consistent support on her academics.

Pushpa looks up to some students who have a high commitment to their education, and considers her brother and one of her friends as role models:

He [Pushpa’s brother] works so hard and puts so much passion in his work. He never leaves any work incomplete. He always works to his best ability. And I really admire him. I have one friend who has taken college courses already, and he is only a sophomore. So I am like truly jealous. I know I need to work hard and then try to get there.

Pushpa further shares that she always tries to improve her grades and so works hard at school. She is also planning to take some college-level courses such as biology and chemistry at Jefferson High School in consideration of her long-term pursuit in medical career in the near future. Jefferson High School encourages all students to have early college studies through a STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) curriculum. She talks about her study plan:
I think the chance that I get to start earlier for the college is great because I can start biology and chemistry, start my freshman courses. And by the time when I am out of the high school, I don’t have to start because in medical career you have to go for at least your Master’s. So I have that jump start to go. So that’s what I really like about Jefferson.

Kanan, who emigrated at two and a half years of age with his family from India to the United States, sheds some light on his parents’ values and belief in education as a family heritage. He explains:

One of the most things, like the highest thing that they value is academics because I mean that’s the way that has been from generation to generation throughout my family. And most of it is from original beliefs. So it always strives for the academics and put everything else back in.

Kanan appreciates his parents as the most important people who have been helping him to succeed in education and have been pushing him to strive to become better. It has never been too much pressure for him. He indicates, “It is always been the right amount.” He gives an example:

In 5th grade I was trying to achieve a medal, an honor from Bradford University for Midwest Academic Talent Search. I was not able to do it that year because it was my first time to take ACT. And it was just difficult. So slowly over the two years in 7th grade and 8th grade, they helped me prepare better and they also gave me a lot of encouragement and told me to strive for better achievement. And eventually in 8th grade, I ended up getting that medal.

Besides placing a high emphasis on his schoolwork, Kanan’s value on education has also influenced what kinds of friends he has. He is cautious and wise when making friends at school. He explains:

They have some influence on you, so I don’t want that bad influence. I don’t want bad friends who do bad things because that might influence me in the future. And so my friends are usually well behaved and they are good at school and things like that. And they are really friendly too and they have helped you a lot.
Born in the Philippines and brought to the United States with her parents at three years of age, Annie especially shows her great admiration of her mother for the educational and professional success that she has achieved in the United States. She has been highly motivated by her mother’s educational aspirations and accomplishments in her academics. She explains:

My mom is kind of like my role model just because she went to school. She had done a lot of schools in the Philippines. And when she came here, she got a job at the university. She was the first person to go back to school to get her nursing degree. I look up to her just because she kind of made a big transition to America. She did a lot of school. So I look up to her. To see what I can do, I can do a lot of different things because she got something different.

Identifying herself as a scholar at school, Annie shares that she has put great effort into her studies. She also views it as an important aspect when making friends at school. She describes: “My friends are silly when they are out of school. When they are in school, they are very serious because I am really serious at school and that’s really a big part of my school.”

At Franklin High School Jun, Qiang, Yung-ching and Chien-fu all agree that their immigrant parents place a very high value on their education and therefore these students make academics their top priority. For example, Qiang states, “My parents always put pretty high value on my education and point that out to me. I work hard. I put education as top priority. Academics is my top priority, always my top priority.” Jun shares that his parents always ask him for good grades. Therefore, he puts grades and academics first, and puts extensive effort into his schoolwork. He also comments on the affluence of the Lexington community which has resulted in high academic expectations. In addition, the
students comment on the comparison and competition made by their parents between their academic performance and that of other Asian students. Jun describes:

“They are like ‘oh, you are competing with other Asian.’ My parents don’t think that college has quota system. I don’t know. I don’t know what they think. But it’s like, do you know how it’s like, you know all the other Asian basically is a family, so they all know each other. And my parents are too. Like one kid from Norland, or like Greenville who got a perfect grade on the SAT, they are immediately like “Jun, why aren’t you doing that?” I am dead.”

Summary

These Asian American students all recognize being student or scholar as a crucial part of their identity. Their narratives further reveal the family influence as a major factor that has contributed to their scholar/student identity construction. The immigrant parents of these students have been strongly committed to their children’s academic achievement, based upon their deep value on education and personal experiences in transitioning to American society and achieving social mobility successfully. The students’ scholar/student identity is further strengthened by their underlying criteria of choosing friends and role models and their appreciation of the parents’ efforts in supporting them to achieve academic success. Yet it cannot be underestimated for the extra pressure that has been exerted on some students due to their parents’ high expectations on their academic achievement.

Racial/Ethnic and Cultural Identity

Self Images

The Asian American students demonstrated various perceptions of who they are related to race, ethnicity, and schooling. My findings indicate that some student participants do not want to recognize the racial and ethnic part of their identities. Jun,
Qiang, Yung-ching and Chien-fu at Franklin High School are not willing to identify their racial and ethnic characteristics, claiming that they are part of the big group. When they were asked to further offer their explanation and insights on that point, especially about the meaning of “part of the big group,” the students looked a little bit impatient, wanted to skip it and started another topic.

At Jefferson High School Kanan talks about his identity as a mixture of everything such as academics, sports and music, but is reluctant to reflect upon it through a racial or ethnic lens. During the interviews, when he was pushed to further think about being an Asian-American student at school, he seemed to start getting frustrated and a little bit annoyed. He insisted that it did not make a big difference. He stated, “It’s you bonded with everyone else. For identifying myself with something different, I don’t really have that.”

The other three student participants at Jefferson High School, Nicole, Annie and Pushpa, however, responded differently from Kanan by willingly affirming and validating Asian as part of their identities. For example, Nicole was born into and grew up in an interracial family. Her father is a white/European American while her mother is an immigrant from Malaysia who has Chinese heritage. At school Nicole views herself more as an Asian child and really likes her Asian identity: “I really like my Asian side because it’s different and unique. I like to be different and unique, and stand out. I always really like being Asian.” Annie obviously is proud of her family background and immigrant experience, and wants to learn more about her home culture. She states:

I just like being an Asian. I think it’s different. I like that. I was born there and grew up here, and my parents are different. I like it. I wish I was more like Filipino. I want to know more about the culture and something like
that. I really want to learn more about where I came from and how it is.

Pushpa regards Asian as part of her identity in consideration of her different home culture and religion. She appreciates her bicultural identities and further describes:

If you watched us as an outsider, you would see I am just like everybody else even though my religion and culture is different. I am just like everybody else. I don’t feel that there is a big difference. I am just a kid. So that’s one thing that I like. I can be different and I can be the same. That’s what I like.

**Stereotypes and Racism**

At Franklin high school although the students did not relate to their racial and ethnic identity and preferred to be grouped as the main student body, they admit and critique that being Asian Americans has brought a certain degree of effects on their life and school experiences. For instance, Chien-fu shared that he identified himself mostly as a white if he did not look like Asian, and the higher expectation on his academics was the only thing that made him think about being an Asian having an impact on his life at school. Besides the assimilated white core identity recognized in his comment, there needs to be attention given to the stereotype of Asian Americans as a problem-free model minority, which has greatly shaped the students’ identities and their understandings of who they are at school.

Concerning some background information and general cultural environment of Franklin High School and its community of Lexington, it can be noted that both school and community exert higher expectations on their students’ academic achievement. Jun, Qiang, Yung-ching and Chien-fu all perceive themselves as scholars who give academics priority. Indeed they are the students at a high-achieving level at Franklin High School. They especially point out that being Asian American students at school, they are expected
to be smart, to do a lot of schoolwork and to achieve high grades in their academics. Chien-fu describes, “Oh, teachers’ expectation. Because I am an Asian, they expect me to be smart. There is a lot of work that I should do. If I was a white, they are like ‘oh, you are a very smart white kid.’ Because I am an Asian, I am like normal.” Jun and Chien-fu have had similar experiences in being picked on their study by their teachers at school. Jun describes, “He got really mad at me because he was like ‘I know you. You are like the smartest student in the class, and you should have done better than this’.” Chien-fu further critiques on the challenge and pressure on Asian American students’ life resulting from the stereotype of model minority, “I guess being Asian, stereotype doesn’t allow you to have as many flaws as you probably do. So that could be pretty pressuring when you are like smaller.” However, in general the students seem to accept and favor this positive stereotypical image on Asian Americans as being smart, “better than the stereotype on Asian who is dumb.” Chien-fu claims that he would rather to be an Asian to be considered as being smart and be proud of who he is.

Another striking point according to the influence of Asian American stereotype on the students’ multiple identities construction at Franklin High School is about Jun’s affirming being an athlete at school. Jun seemed proud of himself for his strength on running track, getting the best over his opponents and further winning over the stereotype on Asian American as being weak in sports. He described, “People see me on the track and they are like ‘oh, he is Asian. So he’s not going to be that fast.’ And I am like ‘cool, I might be someone to surprise them’.”

The findings are also indicative of the factor of social class that has interplayed with race and race-related issues in the community from the students’ perspectives. Home
to the headquarters of a number of international companies and attracting new technology-oriented business, Lexington is thriving and prosperous in its economic development. As described in the background of Franklin High School, the median income for a household in the city was $125,000 and the median income for a family was $140,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Based on their parents’ incomes, Jun, Qiang, Yung-ching and Chien-fu all come from middle or upper-middle class families. They do not feel discriminated against because they are Asian. Jun, for example, does not feel he is treated differently. He explains that “it’s not like everyone simultaneously thinks, ‘oh, Asian, we are not going to talk with you.’” Chien-fu further sheds some light on the issues of social justice in the community and school relative to its economic affluence. He states, “It is better than most places because there is no social prestige here, like to be spent in other places. The community here is nicely built. So there is not much of that.”

He further elaborates:

It is pretty equal in the sense where we are alike. There is no white. There is no boundary between like which races at what level. If you are in this community, you are already at this set of level. So I guess you are treated with the respect not of who you are, but because where you are living, stuff like that. So because you are in this community, you are already equal there. So there are no much social injustices.

According to the issues of stereotypes and discrimination against Asian Americans at school, my findings show that the Asian American stereotypes have affected the students’ understandings of and identifications on being Asian American students at Jefferson High School. From the students’ perspectives, Asian stereotype is described as “typically like you are smart, you can do everything, you can do it, hard working, nerdy. Or, if you are a girl, it is like really into fashion and stuff, like Hello
Kitty stuff. Like basically they view Asians very much like Japanese, or you are one of the Kitty nerdy Asians” (quoted from the interview with Nicole). It turns out that these kinds of stereotypes have generated simple and partial generalizations of Asian Americans, while overlooking the existence of diversity and complexities. These issues arouse some defiance of disagreeable thoughts, struggles with feelings and emotions, and responses when encountered. For instance, Nicole chooses to resist the stereotypes held by American students in school. She indicates:

If you are a girl, like really into fashion and stuff, like Hello Kitty stuff, I am like, ‘ok, you don’t do that’. Like my friends, we have a term. We have referred a lot, ‘oh, we are mentally Asian.’ I mean we study a lot, but we have our spare time. I said ‘yes, ok, Hello Kitty.’ But I am not sure I like Hello Kitty. I like Mickey Mouse better. --- What kind of Asian stereotype, no, I am suck at math. No, I am still using my fingers.

Sometimes there are some jokes like ‘oh, you are a smart kid. Help me do this.’ And you are just kind of like ‘well, I don’t know how to do that.’ sometimes because you don’t know how to do that, and sometimes just because you are frustrated. Sometimes these kids come back to you in another class that they are not good at, but you are good at, and ask for your help. And you are like ‘ha, what happened to that joke you made earlier?’ So that’s how it works.

When responding to the model minority stereotype of Asian Americans, Annie clarifies and emphasizes that she is smart because she works hard, not because she is an Asian.

She describes:

A lot of people tell me that I am smart because I am an Asian. But that’s not really true. I am smart but not because I am an Asian. I know a lot of people who just tell me that I am smart because I am an Asian. But I tell them it’s not right because I worked hard. And I guess I studied hard. That’s what I feel a lot of people do, especially this school such an accelerate school where Asian people, Asian kids are smart kids. They are going to us, but that’s not really true because you are Asian.
Similarly, Pushpa tends to think this stereotype in a positive way even though she tries to distinguish the difference between being smart and doing schoolwork. She illustrates:

I don’t know. I have sort of like, instead of being smart. But I don’t know. I think everybody is smart. I think at Jefferson a lot of people are smart. They just don’t do their work. They are like super intelligent. I just do my work. So that’s why I am like smart. But yea, I guess the thing is like I am a good kid. Hahaha (laughing) --- They are teasing me all the time. They are very friendly. I love these guys.

Compared to Nicole and Annie’s attitudes and responses to the stereotypes, Kanan seems to be more tolerant and does not respond to it as the negative fact. He explains:

They always call you the ‘nerd’. It’s just like you are smart and people just make fun of you because they think that you know everything. And you don’t do anything else. But they always come to me for help ever since whenever. It’s not really the negative fact. I mean that people make fun of you, but it’s not really that bad.

As stated above, Asian American stereotypes have put an external influence more or less on the students’ perceptions of being Asian American students at Jefferson High School. This seems to be the major factor associated with the race and race-related issues at school. Nicole further offers her insights that most of the teasing of Asian American students is caused by some Americans not understanding Asian culture that focuses a lot on education. She explains:

The thing is, some Americans love Asian culture and wouldn’t make fun of it or its people. But other people think it’s ridiculous. They haven’t tried to learn it and don’t therefore understand it. A lot of people I’ve encountered thought I would be smarter than them because I’m Asian.

She thinks that this kind of issue can be handled by young Asian American adults at the high school level and in most cases it is not really that bad. Kanan does not really feel discriminated against because he is an Asian student. He explains that not many students really discriminate against others based upon race: “I mean you have other different
community, and you have other different feeling. But it’s not negatively against you. I mean there are some people, but that’s just, it’s personal. It’s not because of like race or anything.”

On the other hand, the school environment is regarded as the main thing that has contributed to social justice at Jefferson High School. Referring to the school background information, Jefferson High School is a newly established and small school with a population of 350 students attending grades 9 to 12. It provides an integrated curriculum to develop students’ abilities in the areas of critical thinking, creativity and communication. It also aims to build up a community with democracy and diversity.

Annie does not think that racial discrimination exists against Asian Americans at Jefferson High School since the school has a small population of students and a relatively open environment. At the same time, there are more Asian students at this school compared to others. In regular high schools, Asian American students definitely experience some race or race-related issues to some extent because they learn fast while not every student in high school can do that. It is also easy for them to standout if there are fewer Asian students in American school. Sometimes they get jokes or some bad words at school. Some people may not take it personally while others do get offended.

Annie states that this situation needs to be changed for Asian American students even though it doesn’t seem too bad and not a lot of these cases are happening in schools.

At school Pushpa does not think her friends treat her differently: “We are all kids, and you know we just want to have fun. We do. We are just playing together.” She does not feel discriminated against because she’s an Asian American student and attributes
that to the school environment, which does not allow discrimination against others due to appearance, gender and religion. She explains:

    I don’t think that I really face any discrimination, especially at school because in our school we are taught everyone is equal, and that you should not be discriminated against your, like your sex, your gender, or your religion, your skin color. So that’s very powerful. It is taught in this school. So I feel very good.

Compared to her school experiences, Pushpa shares her experience in being discriminated against being an Asian American after September 11, 2001 in the United States. Beyond the surface of her story, it reveals the mainstream U.S. society’s stereotype on Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners, perceiving them as outsiders and not full members of the United States even though they may be second, third or higher generation Americans.

Pushpa describes:

    I think after 9/11, because 9/11 was such a shock for American, even though we are American, they sometimes treated us a difference. It is such a huge shock. What we were mostly treated from that point like around that in 2001, it was terrible. I even saw on the news. It told us about this project, in America we have a lot of cultural festivals. So everybody shares something about his or her own culture. We enjoy everything. I think we have a lot in Jefferson. But what happened was that somebody took spray paint, crossed it out, and then wrote terrorist on the project. That was horrible. I think during such tragic events, we are discriminated against. I remember just walking around Kohls, and there was an old white lady, she was just like “you are damn foreigners. You guys can’t speak English” because I was talking to my mom in Hindi. She was getting mad because we were not speaking English. I don’t know. But I think it came as a shock.

But now in 2010, I don’t feel any discrimination. My friends are very cool with who I am. But in fact when I get other new friends, I don’t think that I really face any, especially at this school because in our school we are taught that everyone is equal and you should not discriminate against your, like your sex, your gender, or your religion, your skin color. So that’s very powerful. It is taught in this school. So I feel very good.
**Ethnic Cultural Learning and Identity Development**

My findings show that the parents of Asian American students have used a variety of ways to teach their children about their language, culture, or religion. They have taken their children to visit their home Asian countries. These students’ immersion and participation in their racial and ethnic cultures has in varying degrees determined their positive racial/ethnic and cultural identity formation and development. It also affects how they perceive themselves and how they view the mainstream American society and the world.

For example, my finding is indicative of Pushpa’s positive self identification of her bicultural identities and affirmation on Asian as part of her identities. She indicates:

I do have different culture, and I am not exactly the same with everybody else. So I have personal identity as a person being an Asian American. But if you watched us as an outsider, you would see I am just like everybody else even though my religion and culture is different. I am just like everybody else. I don’t feel that there is a big difference. I am just a kid. So that’s one thing that I like. I can be different and I can be the same. That’s what I like.

She discusses how she has benefited from her own racial/ethnic and cultural identity, and she gives an example of the entrepreneur conference that she attended in her middle school. It featured cultural diversity and aimed to promote collaboration among students coming from different backgrounds. She describes:

They picked one student from each culture to go to the conference. We all got different groups. So what happened was like all the kids from the schools, they mixed together with all other schools. You were with this group for the whole day. All you did is that you came up with the product, and then you had to come up with advertisement, and then you had the whole presentation. And everybody had to present their product. We would like to judge which product is the best and how different cultures can contribute to a common goal.
Pushpa shows her pleasure and appreciation of her family’s teaching about and engaging in their ethnic Indian culture. She can speak some Hindi and Punjabi, and read some Hindi. At home her parents actively speak their native languages and involve her in speaking the languages too. She describes with excitement:

At home we speak Indian and English because Punjabi is like sometimes you play it around, you speak each other in Punjabi. Hindi and English is the main. Mom yells at us and speaks Punjabi. Punjabi is a dialect. It’s sort of in India each state has its own language and Hindi is the national language. My mom is from Punjab so she knows Punjabi.

Sometimes she becomes confused when learning about the Indian language since it is so different from English: “In Indian language you have to remember sounds, not letters.”

Besides languages, Pushpa has learned Bujan, an Indian religious song from her mother, and different kinds of Indian dances, such as Bollywood and Pangda (Punjabi dance). In her spare time, she likes watching some Indian movies and playing Indian card games with her family, as well as always celebrating Indian holidays. She especially feels proud of her culture, Indian Bollywood coming into the United States, and American society’s acceptance of it. She states:

In fact that I think my culture that Indian Bollywood is actually coming into America, like the culture, like Indian dances, it is a big deal for India to enter into America. I don’t think that people perceive it as a bad thing. People accept it. I enjoy it. It’s our family activity too. Sometimes you can learn about your culture through movies. So I like that.

Pushpa’s family is Hindu. Because the temple is a long ways from home, they do not go there frequently. Sometimes they attend the service at the temple on their holidays, or just get together and pray with other Hindi people.

Pushpa visits India with her family every three or four years and considers it as a great opportunity to learn about her culture. She explains, “I learn about my culture when
I was there. Every time I go to India, I experience something new. So I learn about my culture. So that’s fun! (Excited)” When hanging around with her families and friends in India, Pushpa also pays attention to the similarities and differences existing between Indian and American teenagers’ lifestyles and school experiences. She describes that the teenagers in India, like those in the U.S., have fun together: “That’s all we do together, we go to movies, and eat ice cream. That’s fun.” Meanwhile, she has observed and further valued Indian teenagers’ different school experiences:

In America we just go [to school] on Monday through Friday, just do it at school, and we’re done with it. In India you go to school, then after school you have extras. You have tutors. I think you could go to school on Saturday sometimes. They are year-round school whereas we take summer off. I love summer. But I don’t know whether I could adapt to that. Indian, like school style, they also have much like, you have to learn three languages starting from kindergarten. So it’s not just like we just learn English. And then when we go to high school, we learn another language. They start with three languages, their own state language, English, and Hindi. So there are three languages they have to learn. And to some of my little kindergarten cousin, I am like ‘oh, my goodness. Wow, you’ve got something more than what I am doing in high school.’ So it’s different, but I think it’s good.

While immersed in her local culture in India, Pushpa had different viewpoints of herself and identified herself in some ways as an American while in another ways as an Indian. She describes, “In some ways I am American, I guess. I am picky about what I eat. But I go out to like Indian Chinese restaurant, a lot of fun stuff. In that way, I am Indian too.”

Nicole affirms Asian as part of her identity and views herself as an Asian child at school: “I really like my Asian side because it’s different and unique. I like to be different and unique, and stand out. I always really like being Asian.” She is closer to her Asian family and more at home with the Chinese part of her identity. She says, “When I was little, I grew up in a more Asian setting. We hung out with the people from church. So it
was all like Chinese people.” Nicole’s family identifies as Christians and participates in various activities in the English service at Richmond Chinese Christian Church.

Nicole’s mother has also tried various ways to have Nicole learn and practice their own ethnic languages and cultures. For example, she is always pushing Nicole to learn the Chinese language, “Learn it, at least you can communicate with your family.” Since Nicole’s childhood, her mother has been creating opportunities for Nicole to acquire Chinese because at home they love to speak English. She describes:

Like my mom, when it’s time for dinner, she would yell ‘fan’ or something. --- I can understand for the most part and I am going to take the part because my mom is used to talking to me in Chinese on the phone. Ha ha (laughing), I need to know what you are talking about. So we are starting to pick up on words and like put them together.

Nicole’s Malaysian cousins, when staying at her home, make her learn some Cantonese, one of the dialects in southern China. She explains:

My cousin, we used to have my uncle and a lot of my mom’s family used to be here because they come over and study at the university and they go back to Malaysia. Right now we have one cousin over here. My uncle used to be here and I used to speak Cantonese with him. Occasionally I asked “Cousin, is it to make me learn Cantonese?”

When Nicole went to Malaysia with her mother to visit her cousins, she felt that it was more like a cultural shock, “Oh, not America.” But it was also a very interesting experience to her, “It was really fun!” In Malaysia, Nicole was able to practice her Chinese language. She could communicate with her relatives in Cantonese and Mandarin.

Nicole now regards Chinese as one of her favorite subjects and is proud of herself for being good at it and going far ahead of her classmates: “I like Chinese just because I knew it before, and as we go through the course I pick up the things that I remember. I’ll be “Hey, I know that and nobody else knows.” Also after Chinese class, I always have
this really good feeling, “Oh, I did good and I am happy.” Now Nicole is taking a college-level Chinese course in a local university. In her spare time, Nicole watches Chinese soap operas with her friend Sarah. They also go to public places speaking Chinese, making up the words, and having fun. She describes:

If we don’t know how to speak words, we make it up using the words we know. And we like to compound them together to make whatever we mean. We are just like, Asian people are looking at us, ‘Ha, here is a strange child.’ But we do use a lot now. We use the words people don’t know and they don’t know what we are talking about.

Annie views herself as an Asian American student at school and validates her family’s different racial/ethnic and cultural background: “I just like being an Asian. I think it’s different. I like that. I was born there and grew up here, and my parents are different. I like it. I wish I was more like Filipino.” She further shows a desire to learn more about her ethnic Filipino culture: “I want to know more about the culture and something like that. I really want to learn more about where I came from and how it is.” Annie likes to introduce Filipino culture to her friends. Sometimes she brings some Filipino food to school, and shares with her friends about what it is and how her mother made it. At the Asian Festival, she brings her friends to the Filipino booth, shows them different cultural activities from the Philippines, and has fun with them.

Annie’s parents try to talk to her in Tagalog at home and want her to acquire the language. She can understand some of Tagalog and plans to learn more about its reading and writing. Two years ago when she went back to the Philippines with her family, she enjoyed her trip there a lot, even though there still existed a language barrier in the conversation with her cousins. When she was at a young age, Annie’s parents involved her in a Filipino class hosted by the Filipino American Society on the weekends in the
community of Richmond. She describes:

They taught us like Filipino culture, or they taught us dances, you know culture and that type of things. I went to the classes when I was younger. -- I always like dance, sometimes though I am not a good dancer.

Annie’s family is Roman Catholic and attends church services every Sunday. Annie has also actively participated in different activities in youth groups at church and enjoyed spending time with some of her old friends there.

Even though Kanan does not want to perceive himself through a racial, ethnic lens, my findings are indicative of his underlying value and recognition of his racial/ethnic Indian culture, especially in the way he constructs his dual cultural identities. Kanan shares that he has tried to combine both Indian and American cultures together, sticking to the most important values and beliefs in his Indian culture and then American culture. His example of dating reveals his adherence to his ethnic cultural values, norms and beliefs edified by his parents in the process of decision-making. He describes:

Like in my culture, my parents from their tradition, we don’t usually go dating. Dating is a tradition. Here, it’s pretty much tradition in part of American culture in the high school, college, everything like that. And so, that’s definitely one thing that I get from Indian culture.

Kanan’s parents teach him about Indian language and culture, and try to have him practice it too. For example, his parents speak their native language Telugu, the predominant language in southern India, with their children at home. He describes, “My parents speak that language; I speak as well and my sister because we interchange English and that language.” He speaks both English and Telugu with his relatives back in India when he visits India with his parents every four years. To Kanan, Telugu is much easier and faster to communicate with because of the many different accents people use.
when speaking English there. Except for people’s various life styles, he does not think that there are many differences between India and the United States. He states, “Nowadays India is also becoming more industrialized and it’s becoming more urban.” Kanan is looking forward to going back to India with his parents this summer.

Kanan also offers his insight on learning Indian culture from his family. It is not something that he can learn consciously, but just something that he is with. He explains, “If you are with it for certain amount of time, you are just used to it. And you just subconsciously learn that culture. So I think I was definitely, because I am exposed to it even though I haven’t tried to very critically see it and learn it.”

In his self identification, Chien-fu prefers to emphasize his whiteness rather than his racial and ethnic background. However, on certain occasions, especially when experiencing challenges from the mainstream American society, he has shown a strong sense of being an Asian American, identifying his Chinese racial/ethnic and cultural background. Besides his critique on the stereotype of Asian Americans as a problem-free model minority that has been discussed earlier, Chien-fu’s dedication to his social studies lesson on China provides further evidence of his value and respect of his own culture and assertion of himself as an Asian American. For example, he questioned the credibility of the *Modern World History* textbook that portrayed Chinese people as crazy victims of opium. He further explains:

That was one of those things that is like, oh, I find that my grandparents were not victims of opium. So it’s sort of like ‘wow, hold on, why did they put like all Chinese people, you know?’ But then so I looked into that. And it’s like, one of the things is like because I am an Asian, I would question that. If I were white, if I were black, I would just read it and like ‘okay, let’s keep going.’ Because this is related to my ethnicity, I feel that those words have more meaning.
He also shares his ethnic pride as a Chinese person when learning about the Chinese invention of paper: “That’s just a simple statement, but it brings more pride to me than it would for someone who is not Chinese.” On the other hand, Chien-fu did not pay much attention to the Spanish American War, and thinks that it was not related to his ethnicity and did not have an impact on his life at that moment. In addition, Chien-fu’s value of his ethnic Chinese cultural knowledge can be seen from his choice of a future career in the fields of both Chinese traditional medicine and American medicine. He wants to research more about Chinese traditional medicine since he thinks it is essential to keep diseases from happening by improving the health of the whole human body.

Chien-fu mixes both English and Chinese together when talking to his family at home, and wants to improve his skills in Chinese reading and writing when he goes to college in the future. He was sent by his parents to the local Chinese School to learn the Chinese language and culture for several years. He also learns about Chinese culture and history through his family and community. For example, since his childhood, his mother has told him a lot of interesting Chinese stories through storybooks and made the connection to the history at that historical moment. One of the examples is that his mother designed a lesson on the Silk Road by involving the story of Sun Wukong, who is known in the West as the Monkey King, the main character in the classical Chinese epic novel *Journey to the West*, authored by Cheng’en Wu. In the novel, Sun Wukong accompanies the monk Xuanzang on a journey to retrieve Buddhist sutras from India. Chien-fu describes:

She was like ‘Ok, Chien-fu, is this real? This is not. So like you know Sun Wukong, right? There is like the Silk Road.’ At that part she used to be like ‘OK, Chien-fu, we are going to do a lesson on the Silk Road.’ I am
like ‘Silk Road, what’s that?’ And so she would be like market trading, you know, like all this interconnectedness. I am like ‘cool’. So then she is like ‘I get a cool story for you now. Let’s talk about Sun Wukong.’ And then she has a picture book and then makes Sun Wukong and the Silk Road connected.

Chien-fu thinks that he learns culture more than history: “History takes more effort because it’s not applicable at that moment. But culture is so immersed.” He points out that learning culture is more apparent to him because he lives in an Asian community. For example, at a Buddhist organization Tzu Chi, Chien-fu learns the skills of making tea in Chinese traditional culture. The meaning behind making tea for parents is to be obedient and filial to them. His family identifies themselves as Buddhists and frequently attends different activities in Tzu Chi, one of the Buddhist organizations.

Chien-fu also talks about his experiences of going to Taiwan and mainland China with his parents to visit their family and relatives there. He expresses his appreciation for the big difference in the cultures by comparing the local culture in Taiwan, mainland China, and the community of Lexington in the U.S. He explains:

> Every time I go back to Taiwan, they always paid me shopping. So I guess that is my metropolitan type of family. They are not really the group type like our relatives in China are. So whenever we go, there are farm lands sort of kids. And that’s cool. But my close relatives, like my mom’s mom and my dad’s dad, they all live in Taipei, which is by downtown, like the name of the city. In Taiwan we tour the island of Taiwan sometimes. It’s a lot of things. I appreciate great cultural experience because you are just going there and they have different field from Lexington. Because Lexington is like all cars and like everything is so far away. And then you are like going to China or Taiwan, everything is so scrunched together. And you are like right next to the person you don’t know constantly. And it’s really exciting, feels good, like whole is different, the environment, and the food is cheap.

As with Chien-fu, my other three student participants at Franklin High School, Jun, Qiang and Yung-ching have all learned about Chinese language, culture, and history.
at the same Chinese School on weekends for several years, as well as at home and in the community. They have traveled to Taiwan or mainland China with their families and say “It’s really fun!” Jun and Yung-ching speak some Chinese while having limited Chinese reading and writing skills. Qiang has acquired a high level of language ability in Chinese. He taught Chinese language to the non-native Chinese speakers in the summer camp sponsored by a local university last year. Referring to learning about Chinese culture at home, Jun describes: “I don’t actually just sit there and learn it. It’s just like everyone in a very long car ride, he [Jun’s father] starts talking about Chinese idioms, and I am okay, and Chinese food. So I learned a bit about some of that.” Qiang shares that his mother sometimes talks to him about Chinese history such as the story of Three Kingdoms, written by Guanzhong Luo about a crucial historical moment of the Chinese empire more than two thousand years ago. Yet, he has not shown much interest in it.

My finding shows that Jun, Qiang and Yung-ching do not want to identify themselves as Asian Americans. Instead, they insist they are “part of the big group” in the school setting. Except for the influence of Asian American stereotypes, these students don’t seem to be closely affiliated with their racial/ethnic culture, even though they have extensive related knowledge and experiences. Their responses to the lesson on China’s development in their Modern World History class reinforce this conclusion. Jun explains his interest in this lesson: “It’s just like another learning topic because I still love that familiarity about it. It wasn’t like the sense of Asian pride. No, I like developing some new interest.” Qiang describes it as: “I didn’t feel passionate. But I guess, I think it’s something like the region because I wasn’t born and raised in China. It’s kind of distant.”
Summary

The Asian American students have demonstrated their various self-perceptions regarding race, ethnicity, and school experiences. Some of the students are not willing to relate to their racial/ethnic identity while others affirm and validate Asian as part of their identities. The expectations and practices at school, family, and community have played a significant role in the students’ racial/ethnic identity construction and negotiation, interwoven with their identities in terms of gender, language, culture, religion, and social class. All the students recognize and some critique that being perceived stereotypically as Asian Americans has brought certain effects on their identity development and school experiences. Their participation in their own ethnic cultures has in varying degrees influenced their positive racial/ethnic and cultural identity formation.

Cultural Conflicts

My findings indicate that the cultural gaps between Asian American students and their immigrant parents have resulted in some conflicts within the families. The immigrant Asian American parents are very different from mainstream Americans in their parenting styles (Ng, Lee & Pak, 2007). A source of conflict occurs when children learn and interact with mainstream American teachers and peers at schools and hence acculturate much faster than their immigrant parents. For example, Annie shares that her parents do not understand American culture well and always ask her why she wants to attend those social events. She describes, “Just like my mom, kind of like being in American culture a little bit. She understands some of it, but other things she always asks a lot of questions because she does not understand what I want to do.” She further makes an example about football game:
If I want to go to football game, she is like “Why you want to go to football game? Why do you want to go and be there?” Just stuff like that. I just have to explain to her that everybody goes to football game at high school. And she understands why I want to go sometimes, but other times she does not.

Some Asian American students encounter cultural norms, beliefs, and practices in their home environment that are different from or sometimes contradictory with the mainstream American culture. At home relations between the immigrant Asian American parents and their children are often complicated by different expectations and worldviews. Chien-fu explains that he grew up with Asian morals that his parents told him. Then when he goes to school, he sees all American students who have American ideas and values. Those two different ideas sometimes come into conflict. For instance, his parents set the rule that he should be home before it gets dark at night, and by then he should be studying. Compared to that, Chien-fu describes, “Partying here is like ‘it’s dark. Let’s start partying.’ Then it’s like three in the morning and you can start going home now.” He gives another example concerning what kids wear:

There is always like dressing, like the way you dress. My dad, he showed me the picture when he was little. He was wearing a tie and a suit neatly because his family was really strict on that, like you should present yourself in the best possible manner ever. And that way, we use for the best impression on people, like first-hand impression. Well, as my thought is, it doesn’t really matter what I wear. If you are going to have first-hand impression, that’s fine. But if you are going to judge me entirely on that, I don’t want to be a friend with you. So it’s like those two different ideas coming into conflicts a lot because I guess I haven’t communicated my ideas too much that I should. So, I just like dress, and I have a really big T-shirt hanging on my knees, and like ‘um, hi, ba ba [daddy].’ He is like asking me to change it. I am like ‘okay, fine.’ And then I put on Polo and pants. And he is like ‘much better.’ And I am like ‘oh my gosh.’ So that’s really matter, you know.

He sheds some light on the cultural conflicts with his parents, which are caused by
different expectations. His parents have their own expectations generated from the way in which they were raised while his expectations are based on what he has seen, how his friends are raised, and how the society in the U.S. works. Through those conflicts he has also been able to learn about his parents’ culture and probably his culture as well. While being around with his American friends, Chien-fu does not like some Chinese cultural norms that his parents are practicing at home, such as expecting him to come back home and finish his homework after school. He explains:

I wish I could go out after school, just play video games until 7 o’clock, come home and do my homework, and go to school the next day. But instead I have to come home because my parents are expecting me home. Then I have to do my homework until I finish, and then I could run and play.

Doing homework first after school is also a hot spot that Annie is struggling with her parents due to their different perspectives. Her parents consider doing homework as a serious and important issue that needs to be handled with right after she comes back home while she thinks that she can relax first, and then do her homework. From Annie’s narrative, it can be seen how this culture clash has been caused by their tendency to understand and respond to Annie’s homework from their own different cultural standpoints even though they all possess a deep rooted value on education. She describes:

Like homework, my mom does not understand why I don’t do my homework right away when I get home. She yells at me, not yells at me, but she kind of like ‘you should do your homework.’ ‘No, I relax first, and then I do my homework.’ Oh my gosh, homework is always, my parents are always telling me that the only important thing is the schoolwork. I always know that the schoolwork is important. But I don’t have to do it exactly when I get home. That’s why my mom always forces me to have to do my homework when I get home.

According to the different cultural perspectives on homework, Nicole shares that
at school a large number of American students do their homework just because they have
to, and some students don’t even work on it. She describes, “They are just like ‘my
parents do not care. I can go and do whatever. I have social life.’ And I am like ‘I don’t, I
have school’.” She feels really weird about her peers’ attitude and action toward their
homework. She thinks that it is natural for her to finish homework, or even to get extra
credit. Besides her value on academics, Nicole points out responsibility as another Asian
American core cultural value that has been inculcated and developed by her mother at
home. It is different from her mainstream American peers who have been catered to by
their parents when they grow up. She states:

I went to school. I had a couple of American friends. They are back home
like ‘we go and have this kind of fun’ that I would totally being stopped as
an adult if I saying like this because we know your parents, your Asian
parents, oh my Asian parents would teach me a lot about responsibilities,
what is going to be required me as an adult. And I am really prepared
more. I think American kids whose parents cater to them. My mom kind
of beats me up to get me in shape of an adult because she doesn’t want me
to like, you know have to rely on her a lot as I grow up. And she knows it
once I get eighteen I am going to have to start to be responsible for myself.
And she wants me to be ready for that and I don’t have any surprises. She
really pushes for that because she got her education. She has to come over
here. And her sister and family saved a lot for her to have that schooling.
So she would do, or like now she is a manager, she wants me to have the
same kind of opportunity. So she is really pushing me.

In addition, Nicole’s personal account on “taking shoes off” shows how certain Asian
American cultural norms have been practiced in her family’s daily life. These cultural
differences have also increased the likelihood of her peers’ misconceptions on it as an
exotic or bizarre experience if they lack understanding of the cultural meaning of the
practice. She describes:

Whenever with my friends talking about ‘take my shoes off,’ they are like
that is weird. They don’t take off shoes. A lot of them wear their shoes, so
I am kind of like ‘oh, ha, it’s so awkward.’ There is another thing. Asians normally don’t have very many pets, or at least they don’t make a lot of nuts. They don’t think about that. They don’t normally do that. And another thing is like being Asian typically is, very like clean. Everything is clean, and like stuffy, no. American, they are like whatever. My mom is panic when my friends are coming over. That’s cleaning? No, that’s not, because they don’t care.

In my study, compared to Chien-fu, Annie and Nicole, most of the students do not think that they have experienced any conflicts between their own ethnic Asian American culture and the mainstream American society culture. For example, Kanan thinks that he has not come across cultural conflicts since he tries to learn and use different cultures when engaging in the specific cultural contexts: “when I go, I just try that one culture. We [some people] are trying hard when you are trying to get your traditional culture, and this is America and this culture. But for me, it hasn’t really been that hard.” My finding indicates that Kanan’s thoughts on cultural conflicts do not necessarily mean that he has not actually been encountered with any different or contradictory beliefs, norms, and values between his ethnic Indian culture and American culture. However, the potential conflicts that Kanan meets across these two cultures probably have been reconciled by the ways that he has constructed his dual cultural identity by binding both Indian and American cultures together to make it work out. It is also contributed by the factor that he has negotiated with his bicultural identity to respond to different socio-cultural expectations, which will be discussed in the next section of negotiating identities. Kanan gives an example of how he has drawn two cultures together to make a decision in playing sports that are suitable to him:

From American culture, I mean back in India, my parents they never really play any major sports. And even when they played it, it wasn’t like really big. So I’ve taken that idea of sports and mix that into Indian culture. It’s
been working really good. It’s not the most perfect, but it’s a good compromise. Tennis is definitely. I also play soccer. These both work really well together.

He further shows an appreciation of his ongoing hybrid selves:

I mean even though I have Indian culture, it’s not just been pure Indian culture because ever since I was born, I have been exposed to American culture too. So it’s like, I can’t be purely Americanized. I can’t be purely Indianized. I have to go between. It’s not like something I can just choose one or another. I don’t think that I just need get rid of one culture and for another. It’s really hard to do, especially because of parents, and then the rest of, I mean all the society right now, you need be Americanized. You need get along well because America right now is like the center of the world for the business and commerce. So, you have to be able to speak English. You have to be able to get along, socialized, and able to get some respects. So, American culture is definitely important. But then again traditional culture and something, you cannot give up.

Summary

The Asian American students demonstrate their similar or various perspectives on cultural differences that they have experienced at home and schools. To some students, besides generational gaps between the students and their immigrant Asian American parents, the cultural gaps have resulted in certain conflicts within families. Relations between the parents and their children are often complicated by different cultural values, beliefs, norms of behaviors, expectations, and worldviews. Yet most of the students do not think that they have encountered any conflicts between their own ethnic culture and the mainstream American society culture.

Negotiated Identity

As discussed above, the Asian American students’ identity construction and development is influenced by a variety of factors, including the expectations and practices in schools, families and communities, as well as the conflicts between their own
ethnic Asian American culture and the mainstream American society culture. My findings show that within the different but mutually interacting social contexts in which their identities are shaped, these students are also negotiating their multifaceted, fluid, and sometimes contradictory identities, which have influenced their behaviors in social interactions. They employ different strategies to cope with various social situations within schools, families, and communities. Some students at certain degree exercise an agency in terms of their positioning by relations of power.

At Jefferson High School Nicole affirms Asian as part of her identity and views herself as an Asian child: “I really like my Asian side because it’s different and unique. I like to be different and unique, and stand out. I always really like being Asian.” Sometimes she has experienced in being positioned by her mainstream American peers on her different Asian American background. She describes:

At school when things come up about culture, and being Asian or like Asian culture, like one time we had, there is a picture of like race stuff, and couple of kids like ‘Nicole, what’s meaning of that?’ ‘I have no idea. I grew up in the U.S. I don’t know.’

They have a problem where we, a lot of guys here like ‘Asian women’ and then they freak out. And you are just like ‘no, don’t do it to us.’ Like my sister, she is not really my sister. But I consider her [as my sister] because I grew up with her. She was supposed to come and get me on Wednesday and take me out. I was kind of scared of her coming here because my friends would say ‘oh, Asian.’ And I said ‘oh, no.’

It turns out that Nicole resists to that positioning and even counter-positions herself back in a powerful rather than marginalized position. The students at Jefferson High School come from different cultural backgrounds, but predominantly with white/European and African Americans. Sometimes their attitude and behavior has put Nicole in a vulnerable
and excluded position, and in response to that Nicole puts her views across during their interaction. She describes:

The different thing that does to me and how sometimes it really confuses because it’s like ‘well, it is acceptable and yours is not acceptable. In my house we do this.’ And you are like ‘no, we do it here.’ And so sometimes even people like ‘this is what American people are doing it.’ And ‘so what, here I am Asian. I am going to do in the Asian way.’

Besides holding her back from her peers’ so-called acceptable cultural norms at school, Nicole tends to disagree and resist the stereotypical images on Asian American students as a model minority. She illustrates:

They are also like, occasionally I get a couple of races jokes that they ever made, and you are like ‘ok, oh, whatever.’ Like there are kind of jokes about like ‘you are smart’ because I have Asian heritage, I am really. They are expecting Asian students are smart. I am not really all that smart. I just make good decisions. Sometimes there are some jokes like ‘oh, you are a smart kid. Help me do this.’ And you are just kind of like ‘well, I don’t know how to do that.’ sometimes because you don’t know how to do that, and sometimes you are frustrating. Sometimes these kids come back to you in another class that they are not good at, but you are good at, and ask for your help. And you are like ‘ha, what happened to that joke you made earlier?’ So that’s how it works.

In addition, Nicole persists with and claims on her identity as a student when being challenged by her peers who are picking on her study at school. She explains:

When I come to study, a lot of kids I talked to are like ‘oh, it’s good to study. But you probably have life outside of the school.’ I am like ‘well, I don’t really bother it now.’ I mean I understand the whole joy of being a kid, a teenager whatever. But you can do that and your schoolwork at the same time. A lot of Asian students do that. They are like ‘here you’ve been ridiculous. You are the kid you can play about your homework.’ I said ‘ha, you should actually try to do it sometimes’ because some kids, they do half of it, and then do like ‘I am bored’ and go to something else. I can’t do that because if I do that, I don’t have time for anything else, like I go home I have to help my brother.
Compared to Nicole’s resistance to being positioned by American students at school, Kanan is using another strategy to cope with the various situations. He connects both Indian and American cultures together, tries to adapt himself into the different socio-cultural contexts, and acts in the way that he is supposed to be. For example, he inclines to behave in a more American way in order to communicate with people effectively at school, and explains:

If I am talking to someone that seems very Americanized, then I act in that way too. I just make it easier for both of us because if both of us act in the same way, then it’s easier to have conversation and it’s easier to get along with. But if both of us are opposite or have different views, one person might not understand another. It is going to be difficult to communicate the ideas.

Similarly, Annie attempts to combine her own ethnic Filipino culture and American culture together, considering both as the important and inseparable components of her identity. At school she acts more in an American way when being around with her friends. While being confronted with the stereotype that Asian American students are smart, she tends to resist being positioned in that way at school. She disagrees and tries to clarify that she is smart because she works hard, not because she is an Asian:

A lot of people tell me that I am smart because I am an Asian. But that’s not really true. I am smart but not because I am an Asian. I know a lot of people whom just tell me that I am smart because I am an Asian. But I tell them it’s not right because I worked hard. And I guess I studied hard. That’s what I feel a lot of people do, especially this school such an accelerate school where Asian people, Asian kids are smart kids. They are going to us, but that’s not really true because you are Asian.

While for Pushpa, she does not think that she has to negotiate her bicultural identity within different cultural settings. Being born and raised up in the United States,
she has been adapted into mainstream American culture and known well about what she is expected on by other people.

At Franklin High School the stereotypical image of Asian American students as a problem-free model minority has a powerful impact on my four student participants’ life and school experiences, as discussed before. Chien-fu shares that as an Asian American student at school, he has always been expected by his teachers to make a better achievement in his coursework, and struggled with his experiences in being put as an outcast in academics just because of his race/ethnicity. He describes:

Oh, teachers’ expectation. Because I am an Asian, they expect me to be smart. There is a lot of work that I should do. If I was a white, they are like ‘oh, you are a very smart white kid.’ Because I am an Asian, I am like normal. It’s more just like, something like annoying. When I come to school, I just want to have fun and learn something. But then like when people came to me and pulled me out of classes, and like ‘hey, I know you can do better than this.’ And this is like ‘I know that probably I can’t.’ ‘But you are an Asian.’ Like not because you actually see me, because it’s me. I don’t know. It’s like, have you ever got pulled out by the teacher, and like you are out of the class because you are not really trying hard in that class, but you have tried hard in all that entire year.

Jun has been confronted with the same situation, where his teacher picked on him for his study during freshman year. He states, “He [Jun’s teacher] got really mad at me because he was like ‘I know you. You are like the smartest student in the class, and you should have been better than this’.” The higher expectations on students’ education in their families and community have also increased the possibility of reinforcing the picture of model-minority success. Jun, Qiang, Yung-ching and Chien-fu all point out another powerful influence and pressure that their parents have exerted on their schoolwork.

In this situation, these students rely on the strength of their scholarly identities to accommodate to the higher expectations on themselves from their teachers and parents.
For example, even though Jun feels so annoyed for his teachers and parents’ always expecting him to be smarter, he has to try so much harder. He states, “for me, the expectation that you should be smart, and then like negotiating that would be becoming smart.” In general, these students appear to favor the positive stereotype that Asian is smart, “better than the stereotype on Asian is dumb.” For Qiang and Yung-ching, the stereotypical image of Asian American students as a model minority has not affected them much. However, it has been a challenge for Jun and Chien-fu. Chien-fu considers it as the only thing that has an impact on his life being an Asian American student at school. He further critiques that this stereotype could bring much pressure on younger Asian American students’ school experiences: “I guess being Asian, stereotype doesn’t allow you to have as many flaws as you probably do. So that could be pretty pressuring when you are like smaller.” Jun adds on that:

> When you are younger, I guess it affects you more to defend the pressure to be smart as well. So it’s like, to try harder, and then you have to keep it up because otherwise, it’s just fallen apart. So it’s like, in middle school I liked to escape few classes in math, and then just like ‘oh, why we have like 9th grade calculus, that’s not right.’

**Summary**

These Asian American students have adopted different strategies to negotiate with their dynamic, multiple, and sometimes contradictory identities when encountering the challenges. Some of them employ assimilating or oppositional strategies to accommodate to or oppose the mainstream expectations and norms of behavior at schools. Others tend to use straddling strategy to perform cultural norms and practices to meet expectations at schools while still maintaining their own ethnic and cultural life within families and communities (Lee & Anderson, 2009).
Discussion of the Findings

In my study all the Asian American student participants at Jefferson High School and Franklin High School perceived themselves as scholars/students while demonstrating a variety of thoughts on their racial/ethnic and cultural identities. The factors that have contributed to the students’ identity construction include expectations and practices in schools, families, and communities. Students’ negotiation with their multiple, dynamic, and sometimes contradictory identities are situated in different social contexts. And they are interwoven together overtime within the process of their identity development.

Impact of School Attitudes

The first issue that needs to be considered is the effect of conscious or unconscious prejudice (Pang, 2006). Pang points out that many people do not know about issues that Asian Americans are facing such as immigration, language, identity, assimilation, and racism. Compared to the mainstream American society, Asian Americans have different and sometimes contradictory cultural beliefs, values, and norms of behavior. The Asian American community is not politically powerful and its voice is not often heard. Asian Americans are often viewed as foreigners because of their physical differences from other mainstream American citizens. Asian American students face a high level of prejudice from their peers and teachers (Kiang, 1998). Yet racism toward Asian American students is usually ignored.

In my study although student participants have shared that they do not feel discriminated against because they are Asians, some of their insights verify the perpetual existence of visible or invisible racial prejudice in the U.S. society. For example, Pushpa felt a shock when seeing the media fueled racism after September 11, 2001. She also
talked about her personal experience in being accused as a “damn foreigner” by a white lady in the store when she talked to her mother in Hindi. Scholars address that after September 11, 2001 the same as Arab and Muslim Americans, South Asian American communities have become targets of physical violence and racism by both the government and general public partly as they share physical characteristics and a large population of south Asians are Muslims. Verma (2008) points out that the post-9/11 representations lead to the rise in hate crimes and racist attacks against people who look like a “terrorist” and the incidents against Asian Americans increasingly happen in schools. Students are confronted with racial slurs and some are even physically attacked at schools. It reveals how local and global events are closely connected with these students’ daily school experiences. Pushpa’s story further underlies the mainstream U.S. society’s stereotype on Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners, perceiving them as outsiders and not full members of the United States even though they may be second, third or higher generation Americans. In my study school teachers more often refer to Asian American students as “Asian”, not as “Asian American” or “American”, which is echoed in Lee’s study (1996) that teachers’ language assumes the categories Asian and American are mutually exclusive although they may not leave Asian American out from the category of American purposefully.

Because of the racial experience Pushpa have encountered, she claims that the inclusive and supportive school environment at Jefferson High School is of importance to alleviate discrimination against people who are different from the mainstream Americans due to their appearance, gender, religion and culture. Annie views Asian American students’ school experience at Jefferson High School in a positive way - an open
environment and its smaller population of student body while with more Asian students, compared to other schools. She has also critiqued the race and race-related issues happening against Asian American students in American schools when they encounter racial slurs and jokes, and stereotypes on Asian Americans as well. My findings indicate that stereotype on Asian Americans as a problem-free model minority is the major factor related to the Asian American student participants’ racial experiences at both high schools. Asian American scholars have provided criticism of the model minority stereotype on Asian Americans in U.S. society and examined its inadequacies and negative consequences. Min (2006) points out that the minority image that assumes almost all Asian American students are successful in their school performance, correlated with cultural expectations of Asian parents, may positively affect the students’ academic performance. On the other hand, academic pressure may have negatively influenced their psychological well-being.

In my study the students consider themselves as students or scholars, and they highly value education and give academics priority. At the same time, their teachers think that these students are strong in academics and working very hard. Their student/scholar identity is closely related to expectations and performances in schools and communities, as well as their immigrant parents’ strong beliefs and practices concerning education which will be discussed later in the section of Impact of Immigrant Family Experiences. For example, Franklin High School and its community of Lexington both place high expectations on their students’ academic achievement. Jun, Qiang, Yung-ching and Chien-fu all perceive themselves as scholars and put academics as top priority. In particular, being Asian American students, they are expected to be smart, to do a lot of
schoolwork and to achieve high grades. Chien-fu further observes and critiques that this stereotype could cause excessive pressure on young Asian American students. Consequently, the model minority discourse is invalid and detrimental to the welfare of Asian American students.

The model minority stereotype on Asian Americans have to some extent affected the students’ construction and negotiation of their dynamic and complex identities in my research. For example, Jun and Chien-fu have experienced criticism of their academic performances by their teachers, who strongly believe that, as smart Asian students, they were not working up to their potential. As a result, they strive to work harder to meet their teachers’ academic expectations. In this way the school culture also reinforces the stereotypical image on Asian American students as a model minority. On the contrary, some students employ different strategies to oppose the stereotypical image of Asian American students as a model minority. Annie and Nicole have expressed their disagreement and resisted the oversimplified generalization that Asian American students are smart to their peers. For example, Annie tries to tell people at school that she is smart because she works hard, not because she is Asian. The students negotiate their identities to cope with the biased perceptions and expectations from mainstream American society. Their identity negotiation within conflict resolution is also inherent in the formulation of their identity. The process of identity negotiation is crucial when the identity relates to social relationships, learning environments, and self-development (Lee & Anderson, 2009).

In addition, my findings indicate that the students have articulated their various thoughts and perspectives on racial/ethnic identity, which can be categorized into three
different cases. In one case, some students affirm and validate being Asian as part of their identity. For example, Nicole sees herself more as an Asian child and really likes her Asian identity. In other cases, some students do not want to perceive themselves through the lens of race and ethnicity, viewing the self as a mixture of everything or claiming a white core identity. Yet their underlying value on their own racial/ethnic Asian cultural background is revealed especially when they experience challenges from the mainstream American society. For instance, Chien-fu’s engagement in and criticism of his social studies lesson on China is further indicative of his respect of and value of his own Asian/Chinese culture. In some cases, students are not willing to identify their racial and ethnic characteristics and state that they are part of the big group. They have not shown much affiliation with their own racial/ethnic culture even though they have extensive related knowledge and experiences. Qiang, for example, shares that he did not feel passionate when learning about China as he was not born and raised there and did not feel connected with that region. Even though there seem to be different degrees of association with their own race, ethnicity, and culture, these students have recognized and criticized the negative impacts on their school and life experiences due to the stereotypes and prejudicial beliefs of Asian Americans in U.S. society.

According to the students’ development of ethnic awareness, Gay (1978) discusses that young people become very conscious of the similarities and differences between themselves and other members of their own ethnic group, and other racial/cultural groups when the ethnic encounters occur during early adolescence. They begin to connect their personal identity to ethnic group membership such as “I am one of them.” They experience affinity and denial, acceptance and rejection, pride and shame
toward their ethnic group. The ethnic and racial attitudes, values, and stereotypes they have been learning start to surface and are actualized in their behaviors. This ethnic awareness has “psychological, social and emotional dimensions, often accompanied by internal and interpersonal conflicts and confrontations as early adolescents attempt to resolve dilemmas and answer questions about the relationship between their personal worth and their ethnic and cultural characteristics” (p.652).

**Impact of Immigrant Family Experiences**

Asian American immigrant families have influenced on the students’ identity construction and their negotiation. The family plays an important role in teaching and inculcating their children in the socialization process. Fillmore (2000) suggests that the family provides their children for the fundamental elements to success in life when they are growing up. Some elements consist of “a sense of belonging; knowledge of who one is and where one comes from; an understanding of how one is connected to the important others and events in one’s life; the ability to deal with adversity; and knowing one’s responsibility to self, family, community” (p.206). The content is different from family to family, and it cannot be taught at school.

First, the findings show that the students’ middle or middle-upper class Asian American immigrant families place great value on education and have high expectations for their children’s academic achievements, some with the tendency to compare their children’s educational experiences in American schools to those in their home Asian countries. As a result, these students prioritize academics in their schools. They are also perceived by their teachers as the higher academic achievers who are hard working, very diligent, and very motivated. Ogbu and Simons (1998) discuss that Asian immigrant
parents believe that education is crucial to life chances and try to promote their children’s school achievement. Most Asian American students’ academic achievement relies on their belief in hard working and persistent efforts in their school work. Gordon (2000) also mentions that first- or second-generation Asian immigrants sill strongly stick to their traditional values on education and tend to compare their American educational experiences and concept of success to those “in their home countries” (p.176). At the same time, the pressure that these students have borne in order to conform to the expectations of their parents and communities for higher academic achievement cannot be underestimated. For example, Jun has been struggling with his parents’ extra expectations on his academic performance when they compare him with other Asian students.

Scholars further suggest the role of “ethnic enclaves” among Asian immigrants, where Asian American families maintain forms of the “home culture” and its beliefs and practices with distinctive cultural qualities. In my study, all the parents of the Asian American student participants have been trying to develop their children’s knowledge, skills, and ability in practicing their ethnic languages and cultures at home and in the community. These students’ immersion and participation in their own racial and ethnic cultures has in varying degrees determined their positive racial/ethnic and cultural identity formation and development. These influences also affect the ways in which they perceive themselves, the mainstream American society, and the world. For example, the findings show that Pushpa, Nicole, and Annie at Jefferson High School affirm and validate being Asian as part of their identities. Pushpa’s parents teach her Indian languages and engage her in various Indian cultural activities such as singing, dancing,
watching movies, playing cards, or celebrating holidays. In this way, Pushpa senses that she is different from everybody else in school because she does have different cultural experiences. The immigrant Asian American families’ education about their own ethnic cultures has more or less developed their children’s individual ethnic awareness and a conscious conceptualization of personal ethnic identification.

Qin (2006) conducts an ethnographic research on the home environment of two Chinese immigrant families in the United States over a five-year period. The findings demonstrate about culture perspectives: parallel dual frame of reference and high academic pressure. A parallel dual frame of reference might be caused by notable factors: on one hand, the children have acculturated much faster than their immigrant parents through their learning and interacting with American teachers and peers at schools. And, on the other hand, there are cultural differences in terms of the compatibility of parenting styles with the mainstream American parenting values and practices. The cultural gaps between the immigrant parents and their children might increase the dissonance at home. According to my study, it cannot be ignored that during the students’ development of their own ethnic cultural identities, they have confronted different and sometimes contradictory expectations and experiences in schools and at home on how to behave or who to become. For example, Annie shares about the cultural gap with her parents, who often ask her why she wants to attend some social events, such as a football game after school, and question why this would benefit her. Nicole points out that some Asian cultural values and customs instilled by her mother at home contrast with those of her mainstream American peers. In addition, Chien-fu offers certain insights on cultural conflicts at home, which are mainly caused by different expectations between his parents.
and himself. His parents have their own expectations generated from the way in which they were raised, while his expectations are based on what he has seen through his friends who have been raised in American society.

The Asian American students’ knowledge and experiences in their own ethnic cultures have contributed to their skills in moving across cultural boundaries, an advantage when coming from a non-mainstream cultural background. Campbell (2000) analyzes cultural adaptability of four students in case studies, each individual having more than one cultural identity. James, born in a small town near Johannesburg in South Africa, black in color but with the Zulu, Indian, South African and Scottish ancestors, now has dual South African/British citizenship. Simon is a first-generation Chinese-Canadian immigrant originally from Hong Kong; Fathima, a daughter of Lebanese parents now lives in Australia with her family; and, Jenni, a Torres Strait Islander/German/Australian moved to Queensland with her family at age eight. Campbell finds that these four students can select one of their multiple cultural identities to smoothly fit into the immediate cultural context and switch their cultural identities between different cultural contexts. For example, Jenni has conducted many workshops on intercultural negotiation for government and private organizations because of having a good understanding of European and indigenous Australian cultures. She is very happy about her hybrid cultural identities that give her expertise to conduct those workshops.

In my study, the findings indicate that the students at both Jefferson High School and Franklin High School have developed and demonstrated their ability to switch their identities and move between different cultural contexts. For example, Kanan inclines to behave in a more American way in order to communicate with people effectively at
school. However, at home he behaves more in an Indian cultural way. Interestingly, Nicole likes to behave oppositely as she wants to be different and unique. She acts in the way of Asian society culture when she is at her American school, and in a more American way when in the Asian communities.

**Summary**

In this chapter, the Asian American students have presented a variety of self-perceptions. They all identify themselves as students or scholars and describe different perspectives on their racial/ethnic and cultural identity. My findings further indicate that expectations and practices in schools, families, and communities have contributed to these students’ multifaceted and complicated socio-cultural identity constructions. Sometimes they also employ different strategies to negotiate with their dynamic, multiple, and sometimes contradictory identities when being confronted with the challenges and opportunities in different social contexts.
CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS

SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

The study aimed to examine how Asian American students perceive and interpret social studies instruction and how their complex and multiple identities affect or are affected by their learning in the social studies curriculum at Jefferson High School and Franklin High School. In this chapter, I first present and analyze my findings on the students’ interpretation of their social studies learning and the intersections of their identities and social studies learning. Then I discuss these findings within the literature. I focus on issues in the education of Asian American students, problems in minority education, and issues of minority students in social studies education. Finally, there are also some implications for the teachers, teacher educators, curriculum policy, and future research.

Students’ Perceptions of Social Studies

As a result of data analysis, there are two major themes emerged from my study. First, the teachers play a significant role in how well the students have learned in the social studies curriculum. Second, the students have expressed their value of social studies education. My findings have further indicated the accordance between the
teachers’ perceptions of Asian American students, the teachers’ belief on teaching diversity and equity in social studies and their teaching decision-making towards a diverse student population in classrooms.

**Teachers’ Involvement in Social Studies Classes**

Both high school students have addressed their perceptions on teachers’ instructional techniques, and they have expressed positive opinions on the way that their teachers have helped them to learn and understand more in the curriculum. In this section, I present the teachers’ employment of various teaching methods to engage their students into active learning under each school. At Jefferson High School Mr. Smith’s practice in culturally relevant teaching and global education has also increased Asian American students’ participation in the classroom and promoted the development of their academics and personal growth.

**Teaching Activities**

*Jefferson High School*

I observed Asian American students enrolled in World Studies and American Government at Jefferson High School. Social Studies teacher Mr. Smith considers World Studies and American History as an integrated history course and had already covered history from the Enlightenment up to the Cold War and social movements, a lot of which take place during the time of the Cold War. Since the Cold War is really focused on the United States and Soviet Union, they have also tried to learn from grassroots version of history. Due to the complicated procedure of getting approval from the Human Subject Review Board of my education institution on my research, when I got to the research site of Jefferson High School and started my classroom observation, the students were
studying the final unit of World Studies – globalization, focusing on cultural
globalization, economic globalization, and political globalization. They also worked on a
final research project on the world health organizations “Millennium Development
Goals” (MDGs). Students chose four of eight goals including eradication of poverty and
hunger, empowering women/gender equality, environmental sustainability, and global
partnerships.

In their American government class, the students were studying the U.S.
Constitution. Mr. Smith shares that this course focuses on application - students use the
knowledge and the research that they gather about their “Millennium Development
Goals” projects to create legislation. The proposal that they are to submit to a local, state
or federal legislator is designed to influence public policy. He explains, “Because we are
studying the American system of government, they would take the ideas and try to apply
them to local government, state government or federal government to actually try to
create change.”

My findings show that the Asian American student participants all agree that
Jefferson High School offers very good social studies, and they have a very high opinion
of the way that Mr. Smith has taught in the classroom so that they are really learning
about the curriculum. For example, to Nicole, social studies is one of the highlights in her
school day because she thinks that history is more like storytelling and she can
understand it better. She indicates, “They are just really interesting to me. I like to study
humans. When I get nervous, I go there and I study human behavior problems. So for me,
to read a history and learn about it is probably the most interesting part of my day.”

Annie and Kanan explain that it is interesting to study about people’s different
perspectives and interpretations of history. Kanan describes:

They sometimes can completely be opposite because that’s the way history has been about why people think that they are right. So it’s interesting to see what types of stories to hear. And then it’s up to you to pull it together and see what happened.

Annie shares:

I really like social studies because it’s about history and just knowing. It’s different. I just like social studies in general. I like about it because it depends upon your opinion as long as you know what you are talking about. That’s what I like about it. Because people can try to prove you are wrong, but that’s the only thing you don’t have enough information to back it up. So that’s why I like social studies a lot.

These students also compare their present social studies learning experiences at Jefferson High School to those in their previous schools where it had been all about learning historical facts and events and memorizing them, which they considered boring. Annie did not like this course before while now she is starting to have a better understanding of it and is enjoying learning it: “I am really learning it. I am really, you know like actually think what I think about it. It’s like what my opinion is on that, and like how my opinion is like, and kind of that. So it’s different from my previous schools.” Kanan has a similar thought that: “Here it’s not just the information, memorizing it or keeping it in your mind. But you have to think everything what happened, and then put together the things. So the social studies curriculum I don’t think is bad at all.”

Here I would focus on Mr. Smith’s employment of various teaching methods to engage his students in active learning from my Asian American student participants’ perspectives. Nicole is very excited when talking about her teacher catering to every student and making the class interesting to them. She explains:

I would like to make the comment that our teachers are amazing! They are
not your average social studies teachers. They make you want to be a part of it, and learn because it’s something you’re interested in, not just something you have to do. I love that about class. The teachers somehow find a way to make it interesting to every student.

Mr. Smith’s thoughts on teaching social studies are consonant with the students’ observations and experiences in class: “I mean it’s about you trying to cater something to everybody. And so yea, I think that teachers that just teach the curriculum are going to lose interest from their students.” One example is about simulations. The factory simulation has been quite entertaining to the students. Annie describes:

Like when we were learning about industrialism, we started with the home machine and type of that stuff. So we came into the classroom. It dragged us back like, you know back in the 1800s. We started to pretend like we are looking at the factory. Give me kind of thoughts how it was like for the people back in the industrial age.

Nicole thinks that the factory simulation is really fun. The hands-on experience in the simulation also motivates some students who are kinesthetic like her to learn about it.

Pushpa is also eager to share another simulation activity when learning about imperialism:

“It’s fun, crazy, but it’s fun (laughing).” She describes:

Basically what happened, we are all in several little groups and each group has their own symbol. In imperialism we are basically claiming what we want. So the groups are sticking their post notes everywhere to show how different countries would work. Like America, if they see something that they want, they’d get it. So we apply that stuff, like if we want a chair, we get it. So that’s one of our activities.

Mr. Smith thinks that simulation is very helpful and easy to transfer or facilitate knowledge in his history or government class. It is about trying to tap into people’s emotion and what they can connect with. He explains:

What is really good about simulation is that it gets to people’s mindsets of what was the life of this person, how would you feel if you are going through this. I think that intellectual emotion gets carried. We are
remembering feelings much more than we remember the details. We knew how we felt.

Another example is about guest speakers. Kanan thinks that his social studies teacher’s inclusion of different people in the classroom has improved the curriculum in its political or cultural aspect. For example, Mr. Smith invited a Chinese teacher Mrs. Zhang at Jefferson High School to come in the class and talk about Mao Zedong. Considering that Mao gets a certain perspective in the western history books, Mr. Smith thinks that it is very important for his students to hear another perspective from the people who come from that cultural background. He tried to have them understand that there were two different perspectives due to two different cultural exposures.

The third example is about research projects and presentations. During my classroom observation, Mr. Smith taught the unit of globalization in his world studies class. I have paid attention that he is inclined to use technology in his teaching, such as the internet, computers, videos, and movies. Seated in groups at five round tables in the classroom, each of the students has a Mac laptop to work on. Mr. Smith usually sends out the unit plan, lesson plan, and other related course materials to the students through emails in advance, and reminds them to check their emails frequently. He also sets up the pull-down projector screen for presenting and discussing the content topics with his students in class. Sometimes he asks the students to pull up certain websites on their computers in order to look through more information related to the subject under study, watch something on YouTube, or shows some movies or videos on a 46 LCD flat screen TV, such as the film “BARAKA” and Thomas Friedman’s speech on globalization through his book *The World is Flat*. 

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Besides lecturing on all the essential content topics for this unit, Mr. Smith assigns the students to work on a final project, which is an inquiry-based authentic research project, Design a Sustainable World (DSW). In order to address the World Health Organization’s Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that closely tied to the State content standards for learning about globalization, the students need to choose one Goal from MDG 1: to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; MDG 3: to promote gender equality and empower women; MDG 7: to ensure environmental sustainability; and, MDG 8: to develop a global partnership for development in the DSW project. It aimed to learn about issues, obstacles and problems of achieving the MDG, current solutions and organizations about the MDG, and find a solution or propose a plan to the MDG. The DSW project included project proposal, three-minute lecture, five-minute audio/visual presentation (using iMovie, designing a website or other), research/analysis chart, and annotated bibliography. Mr. Smith gave the students almost two weeks of classroom time to develop their projects by themselves or working with others who have the same MDG. During the students’ individual meeting with Mr. Smith, he helped to refine their ideas and asked them questions about how to do the research. Finally, each of the students presented a lecture and audio/visual production in front of city and state officials, and scientific experts who were invited to come and hear their presentations in classroom. The students were assessed individually according to the rubrics that the teacher developed in advance.

Nicole, Annie, Kanan and Pushpa all performed well in their Design a Sustainable World (DSW) projects. When presenting to the real audience and experts in front of the classroom, each of these students looked professional, confident, and calm. They reported
on their DSW projects fluently and proficiently, and their iMovies were creative lessons on China, India, and Malaysia related to their research. These students’ answers to the audience’s questions were also brilliant. From their projects, it can be seen that some of the students paid attention to the issues and problems in Asian developing countries and brought their own knowledge and personal experiences into it. My finding also shows that what these students have achieved in their DSW projects to some degree correspond to Mr. Smith’s thoughts on it. He states:

> It’s a great project. Yes, I mean it’s tough. We scaffold a lot of time in class. And I think that’s the project where students, especially students of Asian heritage can bring their own experiences and knowledge. They can look at whatever they want to. So it’s designed to incorporate the background of students and allow them to use their knowledge as cultural experts.

Nicole’s project topic was MDG 8: to develop a global partnership for development and she focused on the effects on landlocked countries, small island countries, and new developing countries. She is interested in her research and attributes it to her Asian background:

> Which I like, because it is something I can relate to and have a good deal of information on, because my mom is from Malaysia, and I have been to both Malaysia and Singapore. Also, a lot of my friends have Taiwanese parents or parents from small island nations as well. So I know a bit more about how those countries are doing than the average person.

Nicole felt that her project was going reasonably well except that the group sharing did not really help her much because not many people were working on the same goal. She studied very hard and thought that the project was really big within such a short span of time. Her major challenge with this project was about synthesizing data and speaking in front of a group of people. For the benefits from this project, Nicole stated that it opened
her eyes a lot to the different professionals and people that are needed in the workforce to ensure the sustainability of the world.

Pushpa worked on the MDG 3: to promote gender equality and empower women in her DSW project. She did some research on sexual trade in different countries and thought that educating women around the world was very important due to the fact that seventy percent of the world’s illiterate adults were women. She proposed that women should learn, become independent, and stand up for themselves. Pushpa thought that the project was good because it was eye-opening to things that she had never thought about before. She shared that her challenge with this project was about the final solution, “We know all the stuff now. But what are you to do? I think a big challenge is how to get others involved.”

Annie’s DSW project was emphasized on the MDG 3: to promote gender equality and empower women too. At the beginning of her research, Annie did not think that it was going to be really hard since in her opinion women empowerment was not a serious issue. Yet, she found that there are many organizations for women, especially focusing on women education in the developing countries. When learning more about the current situation of girls’ education, Annie realized the necessity and significance of advocating for it in developing countries and around the world. She also shared that her major challenge with this project was about making a decision on the solution because there were so many different problems.

Kanan researched climate change and global warming along with carbon dioxide emission in some Asian developing countries, such as India, China and the Philippines, to address the MDG 7: to ensure environmental sustainability in his DSW project. He was
very passionate about it: “It’s only been the past one hundred years that we started destroying the earth, gases and everything. So you have to start to realize what we’re doing for it. And I started feeling pretty passionate about what I was doing”.

In his group work, although Kanan and his peers focused on different aspects of environmental sustainability, they shared a lot of input, and tried to understand each other’s views and how their topics were related to each other. Kanan considered his project solution about how to fix the problem as the major challenge in his DSW project. When thinking through the solution, he tried to come up with the methods that were going to fix the problem, and realized that not just one solution was going to work, but different solutions were needed in different places of the countries. He explained, “We can start working in one place and are going to work in another. And that’s just based on geology, geography, and like the difference how people are affected.” Therefore, Kanan developed different solutions and put them altogether for his project.

After the students finished their presentations, Mr. Smith asked them to reflect upon their experiences in the DSW project. Some excerpts from my classroom observation notes are as follows:

Mr. Smith: What do you think?
Student 1: It’s not like, the discrimination on women scared me. It’s something good to know what’s wrong and stand up to move forward.
Student 2: It takes a lot of time. What’s interesting is how world economy functions at the local level.
Kanan: I learned a lot more from research. We are doing more. We have to do something.
Student 3: Mostly that the world is running out of water. We need to consider it even when we take showers.
Mr. Smith: In the 21st century what type of mentality do we need?
Student 4: Win-win.
Student 5: I heard different views, and I agree or do not agree. More
knowledgeable.

Student 6: It’s surprising. I found something not heard at home. I can point it to my mom.

Student 7: I think it’s the global things, not localized, like just Africa. It’s here, everywhere. It’s everywhere. I think sustainable, win-win.

Student 8: I like how nice the solutions are. I like the idea of different solutions.

Annie: Interesting to see the Cycle of Women Empowerment. You need something to help. It’s not just one goal.

Mr. Smith: Yes. I agree with you.

Reflection is also one of the methods that Mr. Smith frequently uses in his social studies teaching. For example, during my observation in the American government classroom, Mr. Smith and Mr. Bowman organized one-period (two hours) reflection activities regarding what the students had learned from the unit of the U.S. Constitution and the government field trip. During the first one hour, the teachers asked the students for their feedback on the field trip. Then the students wrote down their answers responding to the teachers’ question “What do you remember most for the field trip on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday” in their field journals, and shared with each other in the classroom. They further discussed the top three highs and top three lows about the field trip. During the next one hour, the teachers engaged the students in the activity of World Cafe. The students were grouped into the four stations including Legislative, Executive, Judicial, and Influencers of Public Policy. Some students raised their hands to volunteer for the role of Cafe Manager who need facilitate the group discussion. At each station, the students reflected upon what they had learned on the topic at that station, like the Judicial station talking about Judicial system. Then they wrote on the whiteboard for two categories: one was for the most important and critical thing that the students need know in class, and the other about interesting asides such as fun facts.
and stories on the field trip. Each station had four minutes to look at their notes and pull out the relevant information. Afterwards the students rotated to the next station until finishing all of the four stations. I observed that my Asian American student participants were actively participating in this activity and contributing their opinions and experiences to the group work. Finally, the teachers asked each group of students to talk about their work at each station, and provided some clarification and insights on certain issues. The outcomes of students’ work implied that they had mostly mastered the required knowledge of the Branches.

Franklin High School

During my study at Franklin High School, the Asian American student participants were learning AP American Government. Mrs. Wills shares that her AP American government course explores how government works beyond the textbook, such as “how a bill really becomes into a law and what is the deal going on behind the scenes --,” which is different from the traditional government class. It is also a test-driven class, where Mrs. Wills tries to get her students ready for this upcoming AP government exam. In general, this course is taught mostly for two things: content topics and certain writing skills.

My findings show that the Asian American students at Franklin High School validate Mrs. Wills’ enthusiasm and preparation for teaching the AP American government class, which is “nice.” For example, Chien-fu particularly appreciates the knowledge and passionate attitude that his teacher has brought into the classroom each morning. He describes:

She seems to read the newspaper everyday, which is pretty hard if you
think about it because that’s a lot of literature. And she always opens up her lectures and everything. If she finds something good with this really excited piece of news, she is always so passionate. So that would probably be my favorite part of her class. Yea, like sometimes even when we get ready for the test and are panic, she is like ‘Guess what, the Congress passed the bill.’ And we then get really excited, and then it’s like a nice way to start a day.

Further, these students think that AP American government class is more active and engages them into discussion on the topics under study, which is fun. During my classroom observation, I observed that the students are seated in rows-and-columns with an aisle in the middle of the classroom so that the two sides are facing each other. There is a poster “Learn from the past, live in the present, plan for the future” attached to the wall on top of the blackboard. In class Mrs. Wills pulls down the projection screen which is hung on the blackboard and uses an overhead projector to explain key concepts in the course content. Besides lectures, Mrs. Wills frequently involves the students in discussions on certain content topics through telling personal stories and connecting to students’ experiences. She also encourages their different opinions on some issues, and further facilitates their debates and arguments in government class. One example is when she taught about Affirmative Action in the classroom. She described:

It was great! I just let them go. It was wonderful. Occasionally I would direct one person to another, but it was all about that. And occasionally I had to step in and say ‘Ok, I understand you disagree with Thomas, but Thomas has a good point, and we need to hear what he says.’ And then we moved on. And that established a lot of level of ‘It is fine to disagree, but you have to disagree respectfully.’ That is something also we are talking about very earlier on at the beginning of this year. We are going to talk about the emotional issues here. But you have to understand you are not only entitled to your opinion, and you may learn something from somebody else. I enjoy it. I just threw out it to them, and they went after it. And it’s fun to watch. I think they had a good time.
My finding indicates that Mrs. Wills’ fostering classroom discussion is consonant to her belief about teaching social studies, which is not just about memorization, but to make students feel curious, make them think, and make them ask questions. It also increases students’ participation and learning in government class. Jun shares, “I just like the discussion really because the people in our class are pretty active like Sarah, Peter.” Chien-fu adds to it, “I like our class right now because it’s sort of small and there are a lot more discussion which brings out a lot more passion in people for what you are doing. And it’s nice.”

Mrs. Wills also uses reflection as one of her teaching methods in the classroom. For instance, on the day after Mr. Cook, the Republican Candidate for State Governor was invited to come into Franklin High School to give a speech to students, Mrs. Wills spent almost 20 minutes (45 minutes per period) on having her students reflect upon what they have learned from the event. Some excerpts from my classroom observation notes are as follows:

Mrs. Wills: What do you think about him?
Student 1: I like him because I realize he does not lecture.
Student 2: He really shares his belief whenever people ask him about the liberal view. He talks about politicians should be honest to people.
Mrs. Wills: What else?
Student 3: I thought compared to other politicians, he is really honest. He did say something that he didn’t like the bill when it came out.
Mrs. Wills: He is a politician. Part of the reason that Democratic Party members don’t like him is because he disagrees sometimes openly.
Student 4: He scared me that he said that we are the generation who has to pay for the budget.
Mrs. Wills: Did you enjoy?
Students: Yeap.
Mrs. Wills: Did you see his Facebook account?
Student 5: I did.
Mrs. Wills: He usually posts everyday.

In addition, Mrs. Wills sometimes has guest speakers come into the classroom and share their life experiences which are relevant to the content topics that the students are learning in the course of AP American government. For instance, Mr. Rogers, a police officer in the Lexington community, was invited to the class when the students were studying about Civil Rights. Mr. Rogers showed searching procedures when looking for drugs and knives, and the students needed to tell whether he had violated people’s rights. Due to confidentiality, I was not allowed to participate in that occasion. Yet I have heard about some details from Mrs. Wills. She describes:

We usually take post ahead of the time, see that he posts that little bag of cocaine and says ‘put this into your pocket.’ We have that kid be a volunteer to search and help find it out. After doing the search, the kids tell when he violated the rights, you know searching without asking questions or whatever he offends. This year we have the Assistant Principals come in. They were just doing an observation. But ahead of time, we gave them a knife about this long and drugs, and said ‘put this on your body somewhere. See if Ben can find it.’ And he searched them and found them. The kids had to decide whether he did or did not violate their rights. --- So that went really well. Nicely done because they think it is fun.

_Culturally Relevant Teaching & Global Education_

My findings are indicative that the Asian American students at Jefferson High School have expressed their interest and excitement in learning more about the world especially Asian countries in the social studies curriculum. They have also shown their appreciation for Mr. Smith’s efforts in making curriculum relevant to their different cultural backgrounds, encouraging them to bring their own cultural knowledge and experiences into the classroom, and creating an open classroom environment that respects and promotes cultural diversity in the study. In the world studies class, the students study
human patterns and trends, compare similarities and differences among nations, and learn not just the American or westernized point of view but also the views from other people around the world. Annie states:

You can’t learn about American history not wanting to learn about the world history because it’s now like one place. --- I like it. I just think it’s cool to learn. Like it’s just history of different countries and how the world, it’s kind of the same, but after that it’s kind of different, and how like some are different governments, what they believe, and what they don’t believe, and what people think the right. It’s just really interesting to see what the same is and what is the difference.

Kanan explains:

I like the topics of the social studies because studying the history, it’s then like about human patterns and what happened in the history. But it’s always nice to know what happened before. Usually what was happening, something that happened already usually happens again in another way. So it’s always interesting.

The integrated history course of American History and World Studies has been taught at Jefferson High School by starting with American history, then mixing in the timeline from Europe with that of the United States, including industrialization, imperialism, World War I, the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War. Then Mr. Smith shifted away from Europe to focus on the regions from all over the world. The unit of a people’s history and 20th century social movements is considered by Mr. Smith as one of the lessons that he has taught about human diversity and the world that his students have enjoyed. He focused on the United States for half of the unit and the world for the other half of the unit. Then, he taught about Asia including South Korea, Asian Tigers, China, and South Asia like India and Pakistan; then Africa including Ghana, South Africa, and a combination of Uganda, Somalia, and Sudan with a focus on the genocides; then Latin America looking at Mexico, Columbia, and Argentina; and finally
the Middle East like Iran, Israel-Palestinian conflict, and Egypt. In each region the students learned about not just major social movements, but also the culture, specifically religion, economics, etc. Mr. Smith describes:

In each region we not only look at major social movements, but we are looking at the culture, specifically religion. We look at the effects of industrialism and imperialism on that region; we have looked at what binds that region more together, whether it is enlightenment values, or is it nationalism, which often times is driven by culture and religion. And we look at the standard of living; we look at life expectancy, at mortality rates, average per capita income, what else you know, even like having them get a picture of flags, the languages, the capital, population, so you know it’s a lot more diverse than what I got when I was in high school.

The way that this history course has been organized and taught is strongly shaped by the teacher’s belief and worldview of cultural diversity on the curriculum and his student body. Mr. Smith thinks that the social studies curriculum is very U.S.-centric or Eurocentric, so he created this unit to incorporate human diversity around the world in the classroom as well as the expertise of all the students who have different backgrounds. He believes the significance of having diversity in the curriculum when he has diversity in his student population. He wants all of his students to feel included, feel welcome, and feel that they have some first-hand knowledge in his class, which he thinks would also make history teaching much better. Mr. Smith focused on the areas in the curriculum where he could connect with students. His goal is to reach the students, validate the knowledge and experiences that they have already acquired, and add new concepts to it. He explains:

If I had a curriculum and my lesson plans were so based on one particular culture, I would be missing a lot of opportunities to help students learn. So I think that definitely changes my curriculum. It broadens it. It’s challenging because the content and standard are very Eurocentric.
Mr. Smith thinks that Asian American students have enjoyed learning lessons on China, India, and Pakistan and demonstrating their own knowledge as well. Annie’s thoughts confirm his belief in teaching about diversity and his observation on these students. Annie illustrates:

I think it’s cool to learn about Asian countries. I come from Asia and I like it when I talked about the Philippines country. I like to hear other kids do theirs, like India. We are learning about India. And we have a student from India. So I think it’s cool to hear what they, like what they know about it because you know from India. I like to learn about that type of stuff. That’s because for a lot of American students, that’s like a whole different world for them.

Kanan further discusses that it is also helpful for the mainstream American students to know more about the world and to resist their unexamined stereotypes on other people who are different from themselves. He explains:

I think it’s like a good thing because it’s not just, you are exposed more to the world, and you learn more things rather than just the stereotypes, like media because most of people just watch the news and then they make their own judgments without really understanding and knowing anything. And so it’s totally a bad thing.

Mr. Smith likes to teach about stereotypes. He talks to students not to “buy into the stereotypes.” They have to be reflective of that stereotype and take the information when it comes. Sometimes in the classroom Mr. Smith and the other social studies teacher Mr. Bowman engage students in character role plays. The students are informed in advance to be very culturally sensitive about what they are doing. For instance, when the students participated in a historical debate involving characters from China and Japan, the teachers told them to be careful and not to play with stereotypes.

Nicole expresses positive feelings about Mr. Smith’s attitudes and efforts of not allowing stereotyping and promoting respect on the diversity. It has contributed to a more
open classroom environment. She illustrates:

They are really thinking about the different cultures and they don’t stereotype on it. The rule in our social science class is like you don’t stereotype and that kind of stuff. You don’t make jokes about that, and you respect people. And that makes it more open, more fun environment because we can lash without clashing a lot of the times. I mean that there are one or two people who are clashing occasionally. We rarely have time to deal with that because we are still busy in learning and enjoying the environment that has been set up around.

On the contrary, the theme of teachers’ practice in culturally relevant teaching and global education has not been generated through my data analysis on the Asian American students’ perceptions of social studies instruction at Franklin High School. But Mrs. Wills considers that the social studies curriculum has been inherently designed for teaching diversity, and social studies teachers at Franklin High School have put much emphasis on appreciation of the diversity. She explains:

We joked around in the American History [course] a lot when we started working on this, ‘as Americans, we are thieves.’ We have stolen from all the other cultures because we are only two hundred years old. You know we were swiping until one hundred years into the development of America when we actually started to develop our own literature styles. Up to that point, we were stealing from other people. We stole the ideas of the Constitution from Europe, from France. We joke around about how we would be without being influenced by other cultures, and how often Americans probably appreciate other cultures more because of the understanding of our history. So from my perspective, I think that social studies has to become much more focused on diversity of education and diversity of social studies curriculum. Probably for the last ten years, it’s been a big focus. Personally it’s a big focus for me in all of my classes.

To Mrs. Wills, having Asian American students in her classroom has not made a difference in her instruction. Occasionally she connects some topics under study to her Asian American students’ personal knowledge, perspectives, and experiences. She gives an example:
Sometimes we are talking about Pearl Harbor and perceptions of dropping atomic bombs in history class. Sometimes we talk to Japanese kids about what you learn about it, and what your parents learn about it.

Mrs. Wills shares that in her classroom the issues of cultural diversity are brought forth for discussion when it is appropriate to the course context. For instance, relating to the current news event of the Polish plane crash, she further talks about the differences between Polish government and American government, and tries to develop her students’ understanding and appreciation of the diversity. She explains:

What would we do if we lost a good person of our government in a plane crash? Okay, now according to the Polish Constitution, what will they do? And so the best approach is to take what they [students] know and try to interject what the different from what they [students] know. And then obviously also appreciate the difference because you know for example, Poland doesn’t have a Vice President. Why not? Well, because their democracy is built in that way. They have a Prime Minister; we don't. So you have to appreciate the difference in the way they choose to develop their democracy. It’s just different from the way that we choose to develop ours.

Another example is about the illegal issue in Austria of denying the Holocaust. Mrs. Wills addresses to her students how history has impacted the government’s behaviors and responses to the historical events in different countries, such as Austria and the United States. She thinks that students need to gain an understanding of their different perspectives: “They are not just abusing the rights of free speech. They are saying ‘Don’t you have this history’? This indeed happened to us. Don’t tell us it didn’t.’ So in that context, we are talking about cultural differences.”

**Students’ Value of Social Studies Education**

My findings show that all the Asian American students agree social studies is useful, practical and important, and prepares them for the future. At Jefferson High
School the students think that the American Government course is very good and provides practical and important information. Pushpa states that her American government class has opened the way for them to see what they can do with it. Through studying the U.S. Constitution, students learn about the country’s past and how it will affect the future as well. She also points out that this course is practical: “If I or any other of my classmates would want to run for office, we have the knowledge about what goes on in the government, and the pros and cons of the system that we are living in. So I like the American Government class.” Compared to World Studies, Annie considers American Government more important, but much tougher with extensive in-depth information. She describes:

When I read them and kind of realize that it’s a lot tougher because you have to know each article there, especially the Constitution, Declaration of Independence, and Bill of Rights. You have to know them. You have to know how people got there and how it affects real life. So you have to go like all the way back to 1776, and then you have to relate 1776 to 2010. So it’s a lot tougher, I think. American Government curriculum is a lot.

Kanan thinks that the American government course is very crucial in their lives: “It’s knowing how and what the government does and what it can do for you, and makes you able to use the government or become a victim of it. So as long as you know your rights and liberties, it’s going to be very crucial.” In addition, Nicole has positive remarks on the chronological way that Mr. Smith has set up this class: “For us to travel through history up to the present, and then start working on the present issues, it really works well.” At the beginning of the American government class, she was scared and somehow resistant to it, based on her previous experience with social sciences “that was boring.” Now she has become attentive to the course and realizes how important it is.
These students’ comments on American government class have to some extent mirrored Mr. Smith’s belief and practice in social studies teaching that is to develop independent and critical thinking citizens who can fully participate in democracy. He emphasizes the analysis and evaluation of what has happened before in order to apply it to the present and future: “I always tell them [students] we would never study anything of history that we cannot use. And a lot we study in history is people. It’s all about understanding people and human nature, human society. We are just using historical facts to achieve that goal.”

At Franklin High School the Asian American students express their positive opinions on the AP American Government class. They agree that this course offers a great deal of important and practical information that they would need in their lives, and actually they have learned a lot from the class. Qiang and Jun point out that AP American Government has introduced many things that they did not realize before and could probably cause some trouble. It is also absolutely helpful to know about policies and gain an understanding in politics. Jun states, “It’s about what’s going on in politics in America, like Obama Administration. So it actually helps my views on what we should do in America.” Chien-fu highlights the practical and useful knowledge that he has learned from this class, and thinks that this course relates to him as a person at the most: “It’s something that I will need when I go out into the real world. And like it’s something that will affect me personally without having to go and look for it to affect me.” For instance, both Chien-fu and Yung-ching feel impressed about the election process that was discussed in the class. Chien-fu gives an example, “Like I learn that I have to register
to vote. So that is one of the things for me. So Government has a lot of practical information which is awesome.”

Mrs. Wills shares that from the government perspective, the most important thing to do as a citizen in a democratic society is to participate. Democracy doesn’t work unless people participate, so firstly it means to vote. She explains, “We actually have the problem with that because only fifty percentages of American population vote, and last year local action is fifteen percentages. That’s really a ridiculous number.” Then for participation, the students need to know the basic information about how democratic government works. She further shows an appreciation for American government to her students by relating to her experiences in the university international exchange program. She describes:

We traveled to Poland to Ukraine and Germany to work with their developing education system on how to teach democracy in civic education in their college and high school classrooms. And so, my experiences with Polish teachers, Ukraine teachers and German teachers gave me a lot of insights as to appreciation of American government. This is something that as American citizens, 18 year old that vote for their first election, you have to appreciate. This is not a burden. You have to appreciate that you have an opportunity to have a voice because not everybody does. And people who are getting in Poland after the fall of wall, 99% voters turn out because they didn’t have it before and they appreciate now. And we as American just take it for granted. Otherwise, the democracy doesn’t work if people don’t participate. So it’s kind of an override message this year.

Further, my findings show that all the Asian American student participants agree they have been benefited from learning social studies in their education. At Jefferson High School the students demonstrated that they have gained certain knowledge, skills and attitudes in social studies, which can also be transferred to other course learning and applied in their school experiences. For example, Kanan thinks that what he has learned
in the social studies curriculum has been connected to his study in other courses. He has used parts of history in other different classes, “We are reading about different time eras in English class about the settlers here.” He also considers the skills of test taking and time management as mostly what he can take from social studies to use in other classes: “I think that’s really what I take away more than like the content because the teachers have been able to train us to make sure we get things on time and then to study well enough.”

Annie discusses about the skills and abilities that she is learning from social studies, such as public speaking, paper writing, interacting with people who have different points of view on certain issues in the real world and so on:

Social studies has an aspect of having literature, also has a little bit science because it’s a social science class. So it has, like we work on speech. We work on speaking in public. We work on writing a paper. And the science part of it, we work on how social studies, how we interact in our real life, and what kind of issues we are facing in our real life, like politics, religions and stuff like that, and different people’s points of view because you have to live with people’s other points of views in our real life.

Nicole addresses that her social studies learning, particularly in the Design a Sustainable World project, has affected what she brings to other classes, and most importantly it makes her become more aware of the world around her. She describes:

I should try to fill my head with knowledge on what the world has, so I can deduce what it does not have and what it needs. And once I have that information, I can decide what should be done about it. A key example of this learning can be found in my Design a Sustainable World Project.

Her narratives further reveal the development of her world-mindedness and making connections between her community, national, and global identity.
At Franklin High School the Asian American students think that they have mastered required skills through learning this AP American government course, which to some degree has prepared them for college. Qiang shares that he has learned to get the needed information from a variety of articles and resources, while Yung-ching and Chien-fu both think that now they can write outlines and abstracts for a paper, and work on different readings: “That’s pretty spectacular. I can do thirty pages in two hours and understand what’s going on in the book.” Mrs. Wills indicates that her AP American government class aims to prepare the students to be successful when they attend college in the future. In this sense, this course is also the vehicle to teach them about the skills for college, where they need to learn how to write, how to read critically, and to be able to discern facts and opinions.

**Summary**

The Asian American students have discussed their different perceptions and interpretations on the social studies instruction. My findings show that the teachers’ involvement in the classes plays a significant role in the Asian American students’ learning in social studies. In particular, the students have expressed positive comments on Mr. Smith’s teaching styles at Jefferson High School. These students also express their values of social studies education. There are four factors contributing to my findings: 1) social studies teachers’ beliefs on teaching diversity and equity in the social studies curriculum, 2) social studies teachers’ understanding of the challenges that the Asian American students encounter, 3) social studies teachers’ practice of culturally relevant pedagogy and global education, and 4) social studies teachers’ classroom activities aimed at engaging students.
**Interactions between Students’ Identities and Social Studies Learning**

My findings indicate that the Asian American students’ identities have influenced their learning in social studies in certain ways, and likewise social studies instruction has affected their identities. The findings show that on the one hand, the students at Jefferson High School have made a connection between their racial/ethnic and cultural identity and their social studies learning, and contributed to the study of diversity in the curriculum. Most of the students at Franklin High School have not reflected upon their racial, ethnic, and cultural identity in their learning experiences while they claim that their identity of scholar focusing on education and having a good work ethic is the major factor that has influenced their learning in social studies. On the other hand, the social studies instruction at both high schools has developed the students’ knowledge of the subjects and affected their identity of scholar/student to a certain extent. Particularly, the social studies instruction at Jefferson High School has contributed to the development of the students’ racial/ethnic and cultural identity potentially in a positive way.

**Impact of Students’ Identities on Learning**

The Asian American students in my study demonstrate how the different specific layers of their multifaceted and complex identities have been conducive to their learning in the social studies curriculum. At Franklin High School Jun, Qiang and Yung-ching credit their identity as scholars for playing a positive role in their social studies learning. Growing up as Asian Americans, they have possessed a good work ethic and therefore have put much effort into their schoolwork, including social studies. As presented earlier, these students are all reluctant to identify their racial/ethnic identity as Asian Americans within the school setting. My finding also shows that they have not reflected upon the
connection of their racial/ethnic and cultural identity to their social studies learning. It does not necessarily mean that they have not gained certain knowledge and experiences in their own ethnic Asian American culture. Instead, they incline to learn this subject matter for the purpose of becoming more knowledgeable of it. Referring to the lesson on China’s development in the modern world history course that they took during their freshman year, Yung-ching shares that he just learned it, while Qiang did not feel passionate about it either. Qiang says, “I guess it’s something like the region because I wasn’t born and raised in China. It’s kind of distance.” For Jun, he really liked that lesson because he knew more than everyone else in the classroom. He thinks that it was actually the only thing that he felt happy and really good about in the class: “It’s just like another learning topic because I still love that familiarity about it. It wasn’t like the sense of Asian pride. No, I like developing some new interest.”

Interestingly, Chien-fu claiming his white-core identity, shares the powerful impact of his ethnicity being a Chinese on his learning in the same social studies lesson on China. He was more involved in the class, and showed his ethnic pride when learning about positive aspects of Chinese culture: “Like when they say Chinese people invented paper, that’s just a simple statement, but it brings more pride to me than it would for someone who is not Chinese.” He also challenged the authority and commented on the stereotypes that portrayed Chinese people as crazy victims of opium in the textbook of *Modern World History*. He explains:

I think when you learn things you can’t believe it’s absolutely true. When you learn things, you also have to question why they put it there. If that’s not really true, why did they put it in there? So in the case of like I know, I was working on this book [*Modern World History*], and there is a chapter on European westernization on Asian people, especially China, and how
they do this whole thing, and how Chinese people were crazy victims of opium. That was one of those things that is like, oh, I find that my grandparents were not victims of opium. So it’s sort of like ‘wow, hold on, why did they put like all Chinese people, you know?’ But then so I looked into that. And it’s like, one of the things is like because I am an Asian, I would question that. If I were white, if I were black, I would just read it and like ‘okay, let’s keep going.’ Because this is related to my ethnicity, I feel that those words have more meaning.

In comparison, the students at Jefferson High School appear to connect their racial, ethnic, and cultural identity to their learning experiences, and enrich the study of diversity in the social studies curriculum. For instance, Nicole considers that her Christian identity and background of Christian education has allowed her to acquire more knowledge of geography and history in Middle East than some other students in her class. She states, “That actually affects my attention span when learning about those regions.”

Annie likes to talk about the country Philippines in the social studies class, and shares that when learning about Asian countries other students always asked questions to Asian American students whether they had been there or they had weird experiences. She says, “It’s nice to be able to say something and be able to talk about being an Asian American during class.” At the same time, she wants to hear from other people about their experiences in different countries, which is “cool and contributive.” She describes:

The other day we talked about water. I talked about the water in the Philippines about how I was drinking the water. I had to drink bottled water because they were immune to it, because they drink it all the lives, but I wasn’t. So I had to drink bottled water. And other people like Kanan and Nicole were using other stories to tell them about their experiences in different countries. So it’s really interesting to hear, like how it is kind of similar and how they figure out the same things being in different countries.

Kanan shared his personal knowledge and experience in India with his classmates in the unit of India. He explains, “I have been there every three or four years. I know a good bit
about how different they are.” He had offered his insights on some important topics under study, such as the religions of Hinduism and Islam, caste system and partition in India. Besides introducing Indian culture to her classmates, Pushpa helps other students to identify updated and useful books on India, and describes, “A lot of books that we have are about ancient India, not about the culture today because the culture today is way different. It’s like not recognized.”

My findings indicate that these Jefferson High School students’ being able to reflect on their racial/ethnic and cultural identity in social studies learning and bringing their special knowledge and experiences into the classroom has been closely tied with their teacher, Mr. Smith’s attitude, belief, and teaching practice of creating and embracing diversity in his class, as discussed before. Mr. Smith explains:

Let’s say we are talking about Indian culture, I have students from India, wow, guess what, I can have first-hand knowledge. We wonder, can you add anything to it, can you explain it? They love doing that. Because of this, I don’t know the whole story, but I know some of it. But you know in that way everybody is a little bit more knowledgeable. I think starting off with the idea that they do things in different ways and it makes sense for them, just like what we do makes sense for us, but what we do may not make sense for them. The goal is to try to think like that kind of person, try to get yourself in their head.

Another example is about the research project of Design a Sustainable World (DSW). Mr. Smith shares that the DSW project has been inherently designed for incorporating the diverse background of his students and allowing them to use their own knowledge and experiences as cultural experts. These Asian American students can research the topics that they feel interested in and make connections to their own cultural background. For instance, during my classroom observation, Nicole focused on Global Partnership for
Development in her DSW project. She was excited and confident to be able to relate her experiences and resources in some Asian countries into this project. She reports:

Within that broad topic [on Global Partnerships] I am looking up the effects on landlocked countries, small island countries, and new developing countries which I like, because it is something I can relate to and have a good deal of information on, because my mom is from Malaysia, and I have been to both Malaysia and Singapore. Also, a lot of my friends have Taiwanese parents or parents from small island nations as well. So I know a bit more about how those countries are doing than the average person.

After Nicole finished her DSW project presentation to the audience in the classroom, Mr. Smith asked her several questions responding to her project. Some excerpts from my classroom observation notes are as follows:

Mr. Smith: Was this a personal project for you?
Nicole: Really personal. My mom comes from Malaysia. They suffer from this problem (of water). When I went to her hometown, I drank the bottle water because the water was not clean. But doing this project, I mean it is not just a smaller country. It is around the world that needs to be done about that. It worries about me. I couldn’t handle it.

Mr. Smith: What do you think about Asian tigers? How would it be if something happened to Asian tigers?
Nicole: That would be really really bad. A lot of stuff are from Asian tigers. Here goes the world.

The product of her DSW project demonstrates that Nicole has further been developing her world-mindedness through paying attention to the issues from local, national and global levels, being aware of the world interconnectedness, and committing to a global ethic. Nicole’s global awareness is also conveyed from her statement addressing what she has benefited from her social studies learning at school:

I should try to fill my head with knowledge on what the world has, so I can deduce what it does not have and what it needs. And once I have that information, I can decide what should be done about it. A key example of this learning can be found in my Design a Sustainable World Project.
On the other hand, my finding reveals its consistency with Mr. Smith’s ultimate goal of his social studies teaching; to create both knowledgeable and capable American and world citizens. He explains:

I mean in terms of social studies teachers in American high schools, I feel that my job is to create both capable American as well as world citizens. To me, they have to have dual identities. I served my country and I believe in the ideals of the United States and its government. I want them to be effective citizens. I want them to be proud of who they are. I want them to be honest about who they are because I acknowledge the shortcomings of my country and hope that we can overcome them. But also I see myself as a world citizen and I want them to see themselves as world citizens because we, as Americans, are part of a larger structure which becomes more interconnected.

Impact of Learning on Students’ Identities

The Asian American student participants at both Jefferson High School and Franklin High School all agree that through learning social studies, they have been more informed about the subject matters and become more open-minded in their ways of thinking. From another side, it implies probable effects on strengthening these students’ important layer of identities as a scholar/student, which has been validated and justified through the learning progress that they have achieved in the curriculum from their or other people’s perceptions on themselves. For instance, Annie shares that now she has more knowledge of social studies, has gained a better understanding of it and developed more competence in her debates on certain government issues. She explains:

I am educated more on it and I think that people can see that. You know I can really talk about different issues. And I can support what I say and I can debate. I think that people see that. I gain more competence when you really know what you are talking about. So I think that really helps me just like to understand the things that I am talking about.

Nicole thinks that her social studies learning has made her wiser to think about what she
did not know before, such as economics: “I didn’t really like it. I didn’t care for it. I didn’t want to know anything about it. But, you know, I had to learn it for class. And they [her social studies teachers] made it interesting. So probably I could actually pay attention.” Kanan points out that the way his social studies teacher goes beyond historical facts to further explore what historical figures did and the motives behind that, has helped him to be able to look at things in different ways. He describes:

It really helped me view how people act and why they act in that way. And one of the major things that I learned is that when people are in desperate times, they would do anything to get what they need or want. So that’s definitely influenced my way of thinking about some people’s actions. So it’s not always just that they want to harm someone because they want to benefit. But sometimes it’s just they need so bad. They try to do it. Yeap, it’s influenced my thinking in a lot of ways.

Jun, Qiang and Yung-ching also address that their social studies learning has broadened their views of point and allowed them to be able to form better opinions. Chien-fu shares that now he has started reading newspapers since he can understand the issues discussed by newspaper editorials and has gained discernment on the things that are related to his life:

It’s actually like opening up to a page. And then it’s like they are talking about the stuff like public policy. I am like ‘I know what it is. I just do my homework on that yesterday.’ So that’s really a nice feeling. I am actually motivated to go out and read things. And when I returned, I have more to talk about, and I also know more about what’s going on around my life and how that impacts me as a person.

In particular, for the students at Jefferson High School, even though they have not explicitly examined the impact of social studies instruction on their racial and ethnic identities, as discussed earlier, their teacher Mr. Smith’s inclusion of the diverse background of these Asian American students in the curriculum and acknowledgement of
them as cultural experts bringing their own experiences and knowledge into the
classroom, has promoted the likelihood of their positive self-image of being Asian
Americans to some degree. It is echoed with some students’ comments on that. When
learning about Asian countries in class, Annie wants to talk about the Philippines, and
shares, “It’s nice to be able to say something and be able to talk about being an Asian
American during class.” In addition, Pushpa and Kanan state that learning about India in
social studies class has developed the knowledge of their own ethnic Indian culture.
Kanan feels interested in seeing that what Mr. Smith taught about India is exactly what
happens there. It has made him become more open to looking at things and more
knowledgeable of them. Pushpa likes the classroom discussion on India and wants to hear
about how other people as outsiders perceive India and Indian culture. She describes:

It’s just like to see different sides as an outsider’s point of view of my
culture, which is cool. And it’s fun to have discussions in class, even learn
about what other people think, and what other people want to know. It’s
fun to share and get different ideas about something you’ve been growing
up and something you basically, like a lot of my classmates are used to
that kind of stuff. So I like that in my social studies class.

Summary

The Asian American students’ identities have affected their learning in social
studies in certain ways, and likewise social studies instruction has influenced their
identities. My findings show that at Jefferson High School the students’ racial/ethnic and
cultural identity has contributed to their social studies learning and enriched cultural
diversity in the curriculum. The students at Franklin High School focus on their scholar
identity that has mainly influenced their learning in social studies. Further, the social
studies instruction at both high schools has grown the students’ knowledge of the subjects
and to some extent affected their identity of scholar/student. In particular, at Jefferson High School the students’ racial/ethnic and cultural identity has been further developed through their learning experiences in the curriculum.

**Discussion of the Findings**

As my findings indicated, the students at Jefferson High School and Franklin High School have articulated their different perceptions and opinions of the social studies instruction. These students’ multiple socio-cultural identities have influenced their learning in social studies in certain ways, and likewise social studies instruction has affected their identities. The factors that have contributed to these findings include their social studies teachers’ personal beliefs and teaching decision making.

**Teachers’ Beliefs and Practices**

The Asian American students at both schools all agree that the knowledge they have learned in social studies is practical and important. In particular, the students at Jefferson High School appreciate the opportunity to learn more about the world, compared to other high schools. For example, Annie thinks that it is “cool” to learn history from different countries, including what people believe or do not believe in various parts of the world. Annie further discusses the importance and benefits from learning about multiple perspectives when interacting with different people in the real world. Howard (2004) points out that the social studies curriculum often presents an American perspective on history and lacks multiple perspectives on historical events.

My findings further indicate that these students’ perceptions of the social studies instruction and participation in classes are closely tied to their teachers’ personal beliefs and pedagogy. The students at Jefferson High School especially give their social studies
teacher, Mr. Smith, high praise for his inclusion of their variously personal cultural knowledge and experiences in the curriculum and employment of different strategies to help them really learn about it. They have also affirmed his attitudes and efforts of not allowing stereotyping and promoting respect of the diversity, which has contributed to a more open classroom environment. It shows that Mr. Smith’s culturally relevant teaching has become an effective way to facilitate these Asian American students’ learning by providing relevancy and meaning in their school experiences. The social studies curricular content and classroom activities should incorporate students’ prior historical thinking and knowledge, and enable students to make connections between their diverse historical understanding that they bring to school and their experiences in school (Epstein, 1997; Seixas, 1993).

Being aware of the challenges that Asian American students as a minority encounter in their school experiences, Mr. Smith advocates that their cultural identities be validated and celebrated in the classroom. He wants them to be able to see both their similarities to the mainstream American students and their special backgrounds, so that they can celebrate both cultural identities. At the same time, Mr. Smith thinks that the social studies curriculum is usually very U.S.-centric or Euro-centric, and the inclusion of diversity in the curriculum is very important when he has a diverse student body in the classroom. He believes that his mainstream American students can also benefit from exposure to different worldviews and cultures. Therefore, he has diligently worked on the curriculum to make it relevant to his Asian American students, and has incorporated first-hand knowledge and experiences that these students brought from their own cultural backgrounds. Some examples of the lessons that Mr. Smith has created and taught for
diversity during my study include a unit about a people’s history and 20th century social movements, and an inquiry-based authentic research project - Design a Sustainable World (DSW) - in the unit of globalization, etc. His end goal in teaching social studies is to create both knowledgeable and capable American and world citizens.

According to Gay (2000), culturally relevant teaching is using ethnically diverse students’ cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles to make learning encounters more relevant and effective to them. It is culturally validating, multidimensional, empowering, and transformative. Culturally relevant teachers create an environment where students from different ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds are not denigrated, but cared about, accepted, and respected. They facilitate cultural competence to recognize differences, appreciate students’ diverse backgrounds, cultural experiences and knowledge as resources of diversity learning, and communication among different cultures. They also encourage students to build up positive social and cultural identities, transcending the negative effects of the dominant culture.

However, many teachers are not prepared for the complexities of the diverse student population in American classrooms because they are of European background and were trained within the context of a mono-cultural society (Kirkwood, 2002). My findings show that Mrs. Wills at Franklin High School has not tried to integrate insights from her Asian American students’ or their families’ experiences into the formal curriculum study, despite a relatively high percentage of Asian students in her class. She thinks that the social studies curriculum has been inherently designed for teaching diversity, and focused much on the theme that the United States is a melting pot and everybody has contributed to its cultural diversity. Even though Mrs. Wills has expressed
an appreciative attitude toward cultural diversity and her Asian American students’ own
ethnic heritage, as well as her recognition of the mainstream American society’s
perpetual prejudicial beliefs about minority groups, having Asian students has not made a
difference in her teaching. She seldom brings her Asian American students’ different
knowledge, perspectives, and experiences into the classroom, and the cultural issues are
only discussed when they are appropriate to the curriculum content.

Many educators have called for a multicultural approach to the social studies
instruction. According to Banks and Banks (2001), multicultural education is “a field of
study designed to increase educational equity for all students that incorporates, for this
purpose, content, concepts, principles, theories, and paradigms from history, the social
and behavioral sciences, and particularly from ethnic studies and women’s studies” (p.
xii). However, this multicultural perspective has not been integrated into many of today’s
U.S. curricula; instead curricula “reinforce the dominance of the European American
perspective and sustain stereotypes of any group perceived to be outside the mainstream”
(Nieto, 1992, p.75).

Mrs. Wills believes the major challenge her Asian American students have to
overcome is the stereotype as a model minority that they have carried with themselves.
Her explanation of individual mobility in U.S. institutions in response to these students’
not willing to see themselves through the lens of race and ethnicity, further demonstrates
her view on race and multicultural education through the European Americans’ ethnic
experience. She thinks that it is great if the students just want to be judged on their school
performance, and she further claims to give them opportunities for achieving success in
the U.S. society by ignoring institutional barriers. By citing Omi and Winant’s (1986)
clarification of ethnic theory that equates race with European ethnicity, Sleeter (1993) criticizes it for asserting the ideology that individual mobility can be achieved through hard work within an open system. It denies white social institutions any complicity in subordinating people of color, and so “averts a structural analysis of racism and inequality in contemporary U.S. society, implicitly reaffirming the superior position of EuroAmericans” (p.165).

**Students’ Identities and Learning**

My findings indicate that the Asian American students’ racial/ethnic and cultural identities have played a certain role in their learning in the social studies curriculum. Likewise, they have also been able to learn more about their own ethnic Asian cultures through the course and know more about the outsiders’ viewpoints on that. Epstein and Shiller (2009) address that young adults’ perspectives about the social world are influenced by their identities as members of families, communities, and nations, and by their affiliations with racial, ethnic, religious, and other groups. Their racial and ethnic identities are not inert. Instead, “these identities and affiliations influence if, how, and how much young people engage with social studies teachers and texts in schools and how much they learn from school subjects” (p.95) In my study, Nicole, Pushpa, Annie, and Kanan at Jefferson High School have demonstrated their interest in learning certain content topics which are culturally relevant to them. During the lessons on China and south Asian countries in the unit of a people’s history and 20th century social movements, they have enjoyed not only learning about Asia, but also sharing their personal knowledge and experiences in some Asian countries as cultural experts. Regarding their Design a Sustainable World (DSW) research projects for the World Millennium
Development Goals (MDGs), most of these students have paid attention to the issues and problems in Asian developing countries and connected their prior personal knowledge and experiences to their research.

At Franklin High School Jun, Qiang, and Yung-ching have not reflected upon the relationship between their ethnic cultural identity and their social studies learning experiences. Referring to the lesson on China’s development in the modern world history course that they took during their freshman year, they think that their inclination of learning this subject matter is just for becoming more knowledgeable of it, articulating a diminished sense of Asian pride. However, Chien-fu shares that he was more engaged in the content topics on China, and very proud of his racial/ethnic and cultural identity when learning about positive aspects of Chinese culture. He also critiqued the stereotypes that portrayed Chinese people as crazy victims of opium in the textbook, reliant on his own family’s life experiences. As Epstein and Shiller (2009) explain, “children’s racial identities also affect how they interpret primary sources and how they judge the significance of particular subject matter” (p.97). Epstein (1997) also discusses that the life experiences of the students or their families related to their ethnic identities have significant effects on shaping their historical perspective. In his study, Seixas (1993) explores the high school students’ construction of historical knowledge and their perceptions of the disjunctions between school and family as sources of historical knowledge. He finds that the students’ family experiences and other sources of information outside school significantly affect their historical understanding. Most students recognize that secondary interpretations and media reports are described from the viewpoint of the authors.
Implications of the Research

Several implications are generated from my study of the eight Asian American students. These implications might be helpful for teachers and Asian American students by contributing to the creation of inclusive and supportive classroom environments, and by developing relevant curriculum and pedagogy to meet different needs of the students in the social studies classrooms. There are several suggestions for the future research in education too.

First, in order to meet the needs of Asian American students, teachers need to distinguish and understand Asian American students’ different socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, and their diverse and complex identities. All Asian American students are not from the same culture or country. Simply generalizing Asian American students would create barriers when teachers reach out to them and reinforce the stereotypes of Asian Americans. Teachers also need to be aware that conscious or unconscious prejudicial beliefs and racial categorization on Asian American students have influenced these students’ learning experiences in American schools. The model minority representation on Asian Americans seems to be positive and flattering, yet this stereotype is dangerous as it informs Asian Americans and other minorities how to behave, it is used against other minority groups to silence claims of inequality and increase interracial conflicts, it silences Asian Americans’ experiences in failing to achieve model minority success, and it can be used by some Asian Americans to judge their sense of worth and to lose their identity (Lee, 1996). The absence of Asian Americans’ experiences in school textbooks has further strengthened the perpetual foreigner stereotype on Asian American students in American schools. Teachers need to
find ways to integrate accurate and comprehensive information related to Asian Americans into the existing curriculum. Asian American communities and organizations can be involved in providing their support on curriculum design and selection.

More than simply offering education to Asian American students, teachers need to create and maintain an unprejudiced orientation in a positive learning environment in American classrooms. In certain situations teachers need to work with Asian American students and their classmates on sensitive issues. The children of Asian American families may experience certain difficulties in their attempts to navigate between two different worlds: home and school. “Maintaining loyalty to family tradition while building an identity and life in an Anglo-American society that emphasizes individuality may prove troublesome for children and adolescents” (Baruth & Manning, 1992, p.106). Teachers and counselors need to help facilitate Asian American students’ successful social and emotional adjustment in school environment. Teachers need keep contact and share with the parents of Asian American students for more information of school function and social activities in American schools. Teachers can also collaborate with the parents by inviting them to talk about their cultural backgrounds and life experiences and interact with students in the classrooms.

Further, teacher education programs need to scrutinize the perpetual existence of racism in U.S. society and the role that institutions play in maintaining prejudiced educational practices. Social studies teachers need to examine the issues and concepts of culture, ethnicity, identity, roles and functions of ethnic groups in U.S. history and culture. They also need to be prepared to help students critically examine the factors that have shaped people’s thinking and worldviews. Teacher education programs need a thorough
reflection in multicultural education to prepare teachers to meet the complexities of language, ethnicity, culture, and nationality of students of color. They also need to develop global education to prepare all the students for the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are required in the age of globalization.

Finally, there are several suggestions for possible future research in Asian American education. Additional research needs to investigate the perspectives of the parents of Asian American students about their children’s experiences at home and school, in order to gain a better understanding of the complexities of Asian American students’ identities. It needs to examine American students’ perceptions of and experiences with Asian American students at school, in order to learn better about these students’ school experiences. It also needs to explore more about the experiences of teachers who have Asian American students enrolled in their classrooms, in order to know more about Asian American students’ challenges and opportunities in American schools.
References


Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (pp.119-161). New York: Macmillan.


Gunel, E. (2007). Understanding Muslim girls’ experiences in Midwestern school settings: Negotiating their cultural and interpreting the social studies curriculum. The Ohio State University.


APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHICS OF ASIAN AMERICANS IN THE UNITED STATES
Figure A.1: Demographics of Asian Americans in the United States.
APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORMS FOR TEACHER PARTICIPANTS, STUDENT PARTICIPANTS, AND PARENTS OF THE STUDENT PARTICIPANTS
The Ohio State University Consent to Participate in Research Form for Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Title:</th>
<th>Understanding Asian Students Identities on Their Learning Social Studies in American Schools</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher:</td>
<td>Dr. Merry Merryfield &amp; Jing Gao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsor:</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.

Your participation is voluntary.

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose:
This study aims to examine how the identities of Asian students influence their learning in the social studies curriculum and school experiences in Midwestern school settings. This study will focus on how students perceive and interpret knowledge in the social studies curriculum and how their identities influence their learning experiences in schools. It will identify the major issues and concerns regarding Asian students’ learning with their challenges and opportunities in schools. It will also encourage awareness in this field that might affect future educational practices and policies.

Procedures/Tasks:
Throughout the study, you will be interviewed for three to six times. Each interview will last 20 minutes and be recorded on audiotape. Time is flexible depending on your schedule.

Your classroom will be observed once or twice a week to learn how the Asian students interact and respond to instruction. Observation will not interrupt the class. Field notes will be taken for classroom observations.

The relevant documents will be collected, including curriculum materials, unit plans, lesson plans, and copies of textbooks currently used in your classroom.

Once a month you will be asked to review raw data and tentative findings and discuss them with the researcher. It will be based on convenient time for you.
The study will use pseudonyms to protect you. All data will be coded and no identifying names will be attached to raw or analyzed data. Information will be confidential. The data including interview transcripts, tapes, and observation notes will be kept in a securely locked place once the data collection is started.

**Duration:**
The study begins January 2010 and ends in May 2010. Throughout the study, your classroom will be observed once or twice a week. You will have three to six twenty-minute interviews with the researcher. The relevant documents will be collected, including curriculum materials, unit plans, lesson plans, and copies of textbooks currently used in your classroom. Once a month you will be asked to review raw data and tentative findings and discuss them with the researcher.

You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University.

**Risks and Benefits:**
Risks in this study are minimal due to its noninvasive nature. The study requires time for interviews and interaction with the researcher. However, you can select the times and places for interviews. Teachers may feel psychological stress from being asked about backgrounds and teachings. At the beginning of any interviews, the researcher will ask if you are comfortable in talking about the topic. The interview will be discontinued if there are any signs of stress.

Participants may find to be benefited from the data collected as it will provide documentation on the identities of students and its relation to their learning in the social studies curriculum and school experiences over time. It will help teachers and students to think more deeply about what is being learned and what meaning it has and so in effect will add to their learning process.

**Confidentiality:**
All data will be coded to protect confidentiality. Names will not be attached to raw data or findings. The data including interview transcripts, tapes, and observation notes will be kept in a securely locked place once the data collection is started. Tapes will be destroyed one year after the study is completed. Transcripts of tapes and observation notes will be kept for three years after the study ends.

Efforts will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;
The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.

Incentives:
You will not be paid for participating in this study. Yet your effort will greatly benefit the study by contributing new knowledge to this area.

Participant Rights:
You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Contacts and Questions:
For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Jing Gao at (614)805-5576 or gao.91@osu.edu. You may also contact Dr. Merry Merryfield at (614)766-9968 or merryfield.1@osu.edu.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

If you are injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, you may contact Jing Gao at (614)805-5576 or gao.91@osu.edu. You may also contact Dr. Merry Merryfield at (614)766-9968 or merryfield.1@osu.edu.

Signing the consent form
I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Printed name of subject</th>
<th>Signature of subject</th>
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<td>AM/PM</td>
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<td>Date and time</td>
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<tr>
<th>Printed name of person authorized to consent for subject (when applicable)</th>
<th>Signature of person authorized to consent for subject (when applicable)</th>
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<td>AM/PM</td>
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**Investigator/Research Staff**

I have explained the research to the participant or his/her representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Printed name of person obtaining consent</th>
<th>Signature of person obtaining consent</th>
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</table>
The Ohio State University Assent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Understanding Asian Students Identities on Their Learning Social Studies in American Schools
Researcher: Dr. Merry Merryfield & Jing Gao
Sponsor: None

- You are being asked to be in a research study. Studies are done to find better ways to treat people or to understand things better.
- This form will tell you about the study to help you decide whether or not you want to participate.
- You should ask any questions you have before making up your mind. You can think about it and discuss it with your family or friends before you decide.
- It is okay to say “No” if you don’t want to be in the study. If you say “Yes” you can change your mind and quit being in the study at any time without getting in trouble.
- If you decide you want to be in the study, an adult (usually a parent) will also need to give permission for you to be in the study.

1. What is this study about?
The main focus of the study is to understand how the identities of Asian students influence their learning in the social studies curriculum and school experiences in Midwestern school settings.

2. What will I need to do if I am in this study?
I will conduct four to eight interviews with you throughout the study. Each interview will last twenty minutes and be recorded on audiotape. Time is flexible depending on your schedule.

I will observe you in your social studies classroom once or twice a week. Those observations will lead to follow up questions to understand your perspectives and experiences in the social studies classrooms. During observations, I will not interrupt the class.

I will also collect documents such as textbooks currently used in your classroom. I will not access to your school/academic records.

Once a month you will be asked to review raw data and tentative findings and discuss them with the researcher. It will be based on convenient time for you.
3. **How long will I be in the study?**  
The study begins January 2010 and ends in May 2010. Throughout the study, you will be observed in your social studies classroom once or twice a week and have four to eight twenty-minute interviews with me. Once a month you will be asked to review raw data and tentative findings and discuss them with me.

4. **Can I stop being in the study?**  
You may stop being in the study at any time.

5. **What bad things might happen to me if I am in the study?**  
There will be no possibility that allows bad things happen to you if you are in the study. All the information you share with me will be confidential. I will use pseudonyms to protect you and not use any identifiers that link the information to you. The audiotapes will only be used for research purposes and kept in a secure place. As federal regulations require, study records will be kept for three years after the study ends.

6. **What good things might happen to me if I am in the study?**  
This study will help you to think more deeply about your beliefs, values, and identities in relation to what is being learned and what meaning it has and so in effect will add to your learning process. This study will also give you a voice on your concerns, expectations, and experiences in school. It will contribute to an understanding of the major issues regarding Asian students’ learning with their challenges and opportunities in schools. It will also encourage awareness in this field that might affect future educational practices and policies.

7. **Will I be given anything for being in this study?**  
You will not be paid for participating in this study. Yet your effort will greatly benefit the study by contributing new knowledge to this area.

8. **Who can I talk to about the study?**  
For questions about the study you may contact Jing Gao at (614)805-5576 or gao.91@osu.edu. You may also contact Dr. Merry Merryfield at (614)766-9968 or merryfield.1@osu.edu.

To discuss other study-related questions with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.
Signing the assent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form. I have had a chance to ask questions before making up my mind. I want to be in this research study.

_________________________  ________________________________  AM/PM
Signature or printed name of subject  Date and time

**Investigator/Research Staff**

I have explained the research to the participant before requesting the signature above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

_________________________  ________________________________
Printed name of person obtaining assent  Signature of person obtaining assent

_________________________  AM/PM
Date and time

**This form must be accompanied by an IRB approved parental permission form signed by a parent/guardian.**
The Ohio State University Parental Permission
For Child’s Participation in Research

Study Title: Understanding Asian Students Identities on Their Learning Social Studies in American Schools
Researcher: Dr. Merry Merryfield & Jing Gao
Sponsor: None

This is a parental permission form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you permit your child to participate.

Your child’s participation is voluntary.
Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to discuss the study with your friends and family and to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to permit your child to participate. If you permit your child to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose:
This study aims to examine how the identities of Asian students influence their learning in the social studies curriculum and school experiences in Midwestern school settings. This study will focus on how students perceive and interpret knowledge in the social studies curriculum and how their identities influence their learning experiences in schools. It will identify the major issues and concerns regarding Asian students’ learning with their challenges and opportunities in schools. It will also encourage awareness in this field that might affect future educational practices and policies.

Procedures/Tasks:
Your child will be asked to sign an assent form for being willing to participate in the study.

Throughout the study, I will observe your child in his or her social studies classroom once or twice a week and conduct four to eight twenty-minute interviews with your child to learn his or her ideas on the topics. Each interview will be recorded on audiotape. I will not interfere with instruction and learning at any time. I will also collect documents such as textbooks currently used in your child’s classroom. I will not access to your child’s school/academic records.

Your child will be informed how the data will be collected and used. Your child does not have to answer questions if being uncomfortable with that. I will have honest relationships with your child in which concerns, demands, and reciprocity is discussed.
All the information your child shares with me will be confidential. I will use pseudonyms to protect your child and not use any identifiers that link the information to your child. As federal regulations require, study records will be kept for three years after the study ends.

**Duration:**
The study begins January 2010 and ends in May 2010. Throughout the study, your child will be observed in his or her social studies classroom once or twice a week and have four to eight twenty-minute interviews with me. Once a month your child will be asked to review raw data and tentative findings and discuss them with me.

Your child may leave the study at any time. If you or your child decides to stop participation in the study, there will be no penalty and neither you nor your child will lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University.

**Risks and Benefits:**
Risks in this study are minimal due to its noninvasive nature. The study requires time for interviews and interaction with the researcher. However, your child can select the times and places for interviews. Your child may feel psychological stress from being asked about backgrounds and learning experiences in school. At the beginning of any interviews, the researcher will ask if your child is comfortable in talking about the topic. The interview will be discontinued if there are any signs of stress.

Your child may find to be benefited from the data collected as it will provide documentation on the identities of students and its relation to their learning in the social studies curriculum and school experiences over time. It will help teachers and students to think more deeply about what is being learned and what meaning it has and so in effect will add to their learning process.

**Confidentiality:**
All data will be coded to protect confidentiality. Names will not be attached to raw data or findings. The data including interview transcripts, tapes, and observation notes will be kept in a securely locked place once the data collection is started. Tapes will be destroyed one year after the study is completed. Transcripts of tapes and observation notes will be kept for three years after the study ends.

Efforts will be made to keep your child’s study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your child’s participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your child’s records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;
- The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.
**Incentives:**
You and your child will not be paid for participating in this study. Yet your support will greatly benefit the study by contributing new knowledge to this area.

**Participant Rights:**
You or your child may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you or your child is a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status. If you and your child choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights your child may have as a participant in this study.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

**Contacts and Questions:**
For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Jing Gao at (614)805-5576 or gao.91@osu.edu. You may also contact Dr. Merry Merryfield at (614)766-9968 or merryfield.1@osu.edu.

For questions about your child’s rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

If your child is injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, you may contact Jing Gao at (614)805-5576 or gao.91@osu.edu. You may also contact Dr. Merry Merryfield at (614)766-9968 or merryfield.1@osu.edu.

**Signing the parental permission form**
I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to provide permission for my child to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to permit my child to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

____________________________________
Printed name of subject

____________________________________
Printed name of person authorized to provide permission for

____________________________________
Signature of person authorized to provide permission for
Investigator/Research Staff

I have explained the research to the participant or his/her representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.
APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT LETTERS FOR TEACHERS, STUDENTS, AND LETTER OF INFORMATION FOR PARENTS
Recruitment Letter for Teachers

Dear Sir or Madam,

My name is Jing Gao, a doctoral candidate in Social Studies and Global Education in College of Education and Human Ecology at The Ohio State University. I am planning on conducting a study about how the identity of Asian students influences their learning in the social studies curriculum and school experiences in Midwestern school settings. I would like to ask if you would participate in my study. If you agree to participate, I will observe your classroom once or twice a week to learn how the Asian students interact and respond to instruction. During observations, I will not interfere with instruction. I will also conduct three to six twenty minute interviews with you throughout the study and interviews will be recorded on audiotape. Time is flexible depending on your schedule. I will also ask you to allow me to collect the relevant documents: curriculum materials, unit plans, lesson plans, and copies of textbooks.

At the end of the study, I am planning to write a dissertation and publish the study findings. I will use pseudonyms to protect you. I will not use any identifiers that link the information to you, your students and school. The audiotapes will only be used for research purposes and kept in a secure place. All the information you share with me will be confidential. As federal regulations require, study records will be kept for three years after the study ends.

Agreeing to participate in this study does not obligate you to complete the study. You may withdraw from the study at any time or choose not to answer questions. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you agree to participate, I am required to gain your signed informed consent.

Your support with this study would be highly appreciated. If you have some questions related to this study, please feel free to contact me at (614)805-5576. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant contact The Ohio State University Office of Responsible Research Practices (ORRP) at 1-800-678-6251.

Sincerely,

Principal Investigator: Dr. Merry Merryfield
(614)766-9968 or merryfield.1@osu.edu

Co-Investigator: Jing Gao
(614)805-5576 or gao.91@osu.edu
Recruitment Letter for Students

Dear Student,

My name is Jing Gao, a doctoral candidate in Social Studies and Global Education in College of Education and Human Ecology at The Ohio State University. I am interested in investigating Asian students’ learning experiences in high schools in Columbus, Ohio. The main focus of the study is to understand how the identities of Asian students influence their learning in the social studies curriculum and school experiences in Midwestern school settings. This study will help students to think more deeply about their beliefs, values, and identities in relation to what is being learned and what meaning it has and so in effect will add to their learning process. It will identify the major issues and concerns regarding Asian students’ learning with their challenges and opportunities in schools. It will also encourage awareness in this field that might affect future educational practices and policies. Your ideas and explanations on these issues are very important for this study.

I am asking if you would participate in this study. If you agree to participate, I will observe you in your classroom once or twice a week. During observations, I will not interrupt the class. I will also conduct four to eight interviews with you throughout the study. Each interview will last twenty minutes and be recorded on audiotape. Time is flexible depending on your schedule. I will also collect documents such as textbooks currently used in your classroom. I will not access to your school/academic records.

All the information you share with me will be confidential. I will use pseudonyms to protect you and not use any identifiers that link the information to you. The audiotapes will only be used for research purposes and kept in a secure place. As federal regulations require, study records will be kept for three years after the study ends.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time or choose not to answer questions. If you agree to participate, I am required to gain your signed informed assent.

If you have some questions related to this study, please feel free to contact me at (614)805-5576. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant contact The Ohio State University Office of Responsible Research Practices (ORRP) at 1-800-678-6251.

Sincerely,

Principal Investigator: Dr. Merry Merryfield
(614)766-9968 or merryfield.1@osu.edu
Co-Investigator: Jing Gao
(614)805-5576 or gao.91@osu.edu
Letter of Information for Parents

Dear Parent,

This letter is intended to inform you about my research project that will be conducted in your child’s school about Asian students’ learning experiences in high schools in Columbus, Ohio. My name is Jing Gao, a doctoral candidate in Social Studies and Global Education in College of Education and Human Ecology at The Ohio State University. My research will be from January 2010 to May 2010, and its title is “Understanding Asian Students Identities on Their Learning Social Studies in American Schools”. The purpose of this study is to understand how Asian students perceive and interpret the social studies curriculum and their school experiences in Midwestern school settings.

I would like to inform you that throughout the study I will observe your child in his or her classroom once or twice a week and conduct four to eight twenty-minute interviews with your child to learn his or her ideas on the topics. I will not interfere with instruction and learning at any time. I will also collect documents such as textbooks currently used in your child’s classroom. I will not access to your child’s school/academic records. Your child will be informed how the data will be collected and used. Your child does not have to answer questions if being uncomfortable with that. I will have honest relationships with your child in which concerns, demands, and reciprocity is discussed.

All the information your child shares with me will be confidential. I will use pseudonyms to protect your child and not use any identifiers that link the information to your child. As federal regulations require, study records will be kept for three years after the study ends. If you permit your child to participate in my study, I am required to gain your signed parental permission.

Your support with this study would be greatly appreciated. If you have some questions related to this study, please feel free to contact me at (614)805-5576. If you have any questions or concerns about your child’s rights as a participant contact The Ohio State University Office of Responsible Research Practices (ORRP) at 1-800-678-6251.

Sincerely,

Principal Investigator: Dr. Merry Merryfield
(614)766-9968 or merryfield.1@osu.edu

Co-Investigator: Jing Gao
(614)805-5576 or gao.91@osu.edu
APPENDIX D

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

FOR TEACHER AND STUDENT PARTICIPANTS
Interview Questions for Teachers

First Interview Questions:

1. Please tell me about your background?

2. How did you come to be a teacher? How many years have you been teaching? At which grade level have you taught? Have you taught subjects other than social studies? If yes, what subjects?

3. How would you describe your philosophy of teaching? What do you believe helping students learn? What other ideas guide your teaching?

4. What did you learn in your teacher education program to help you teach students of diverse cultural backgrounds?

5. What is social studies? How is it significant to new immigrants?

6. What are major topics in the social studies curriculum that you are or will be teaching this year?

Second Interview Questions:

1. What’s special about Asian students in your classes? How has it made a difference in your instruction?

2. How important is it for Asian students to learn to critically reflect their beliefs, values, and identities in their learning in the social studies?

3. Do you think the American History and World Studies curriculums are diverse? Please explain.

4. How are cultural issues talked about in classrooms?
5. What are some of the lessons you have taught about human diversity and the world that students enjoyed?

**Third Interview Questions:**

1. What is the best way to help students develop better understanding of other cultures?
2. What are materials you have to support your teaching for diversity and equity? What else would you like to have?
3. What are extra-curricular events beyond the courses taught that also relate to developing students to understand/interact with people of diverse backgrounds?
4. How do you teach about stereotype?
5. What do you see as the major challenges and opportunities in Asian students’ school experiences?
Interview Questions for Students

First Interview Questions:

1. Please tell me something about your background? Your family? The people who are significant to you? Schooling? What generation of immigrant? Where from? When? What languages spoken? Parents speak what language(s)? Parent Occupation?
2. Please describe your typical school day?

Second Interview Questions:

1. How do you identify yourself? (could include as a poet, an athlete, a scholar, a musician, a gamer, as well as racial, ethnic or religious identity --as a Tamil, as a Korean American, as a Buddhist, etc.)
2. What’s it like being an Asian American student here?
3. How have your identity, values, and beliefs affected your learning in the social studies curriculum and school experiences?
4. What do you study here in the social studies? What do you like best in the social studies classes? What would you change in the social studies curriculum if you were to?

Third Interview Questions:

1. How culturally diverse is your school?
2. Which subject do you like most in school? Why?
3. Has your learning in the social studies influenced your own or other people’s perception on yourself? If yes, please explain.
4. Have you experienced the situations of cultural conflict, e.g. at home and school? If yes, how did you learn it?

5. How did you negotiate your identity when encountered with challenges and opportunities in school?

Fourth Interview Questions:

1. What do you like to do in your spare time? Why?

2. What kind of social events do you attend?

3. What are your friends like? Where do you feel most comfortable?

4. Who are the students whom are being looked up too here?

5. How do you see your experiences in social studies classroom as they relate to your education?

6. How do you see your education connected with your future career plan?
Conceptual Map of Asian American Students’ Identities

Self Identifications
- Volunteer, athlete, musician, poet, writer, artist, singer, Christian, comforter/healer, band geek, talker, Buddhist, gamer, skater, slacker

The immigrant Asian American parents place great value on education and have high expectations for their children.

Students do/don’t relate to their racial and ethnic identity.

Mr. Smith:
- His four AA students are high academic achievers, very motivated and diligent, and possess probably higher level of critical thinking skills.
- They favor positive Asian American stereotype.
- They contribute to the diversity of the social studies curriculum.

Mrs. Wills:
- Her four AA students are bright, work hard, and have different strengths and personalities.
- They participate in their own ethnic Asian cultures.

The cultural gaps between the parents and their children result in some conflicts at home.

The parents teach their children about their ethnic languages and cultures at home and in the community.

Stereotypes & Racism

The Model Minority & Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype

The Model Minority & Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype

Ethnic Cultural Learning

The immigrant Asian American parents place great value on education and have high expectations for their children.

Community Social-economic Status

School Environment

Perceived by Teachers

Cultural Conflicts

Identity Negotiation: Different Strategies
Conceptual Map of Asian American Students’ Perceptions of the Social Studies Instruction

Asian American Students’ Perceptions of Social Studies

Teachers’ Involvement in Social Studies Classes

Teaching Activities
- Mr. Smith at Jefferson High School
  - Catering to Every Student
    - simulation, guest speaker, research project & presentation, reflection

- Mrs. Wills at Franklin High School
  - Passionate, Knowledge

- AP Gov class is active & fun.

Culturally Relevant Teaching & Global Education
- Mr. Smith at Jefferson High School
  - Learning More about the World (Asian Countries)
    - discussion, guest speaker, reflection

- Making Connection to Students’ own Cultural Knowledge & Experience

Students’ Value of Social Studies Education

Practical and Important Information

Development of Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes

Mr. Smith at Jefferson High School

Catering to Every Student

Passionate, Knowledge

AP Gov class is active & fun.

Learning More about the World (Asian Countries)

Making Connection to Students’ own Cultural Knowledge & Experience
Conceptual Map of Asian American Students’ Identities in Relation to their Learning in Social Studies

Jefferson High School
Asian American Students

Religious Identity

Knowledge of Geography and History in Certain Regions

Connecting to Learning Experiences

Enriching the Study of Diversity in Curriculum

Development of World-mindedness

Ethnic cultural identity

Franklin High School
Asian American Students

Scholar Identity

Putting Much Effort into Schoolwork

Ethnic Pride - Y/N

Criticizing Stereotypes in the Textbook

Ethnic cultural identity

Asian American Students
Identities

Asian American Students
Learning in Social Studies

More Knowledgeable & Open-minded

Learning More about Ethnic Culture

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