San Jose State University
SJSU ScholarWorks

Master's Theses

Master's Theses and Graduate Research

Fall 2009

Negotiating multicultural identities within the classroom.

Teresa Lee Teng
San Jose State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses

NOTE TO USERS

This reproduction is the best copy available.

NEGOTIATING MULTICULTURAL IDENTITIES WITHIN THE CLASSROOM

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Communication Studies

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Teresa Lee Teng

December 2009

UMI Number: 1484356

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

The Undersigned Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled

NEGOTIATING MULTICULTURAL IDENTITIES WITHIN THE CLASSROOM
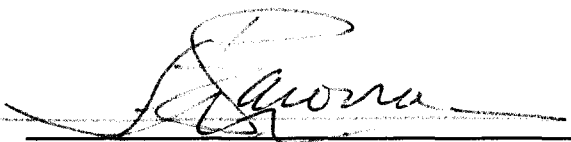
by

Teresa Lee Teng
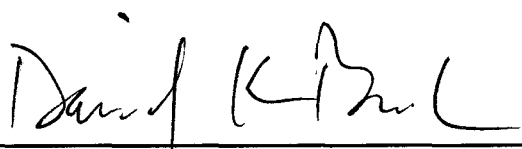
APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

_____   _____
Dr. Deanna Fassett,   Department of Communication Studies   Date

_____   _____
Dr. Shawn Spano,   Department of Communication Studies   Date

_____   _____
Dr. Federico Varona, Department of Communication Studies   Date

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

_____   _____
Associate Dean   Office of Graduate Studies and Research   Date

ABSTRACT

NEGOTIATING MULTICULTURAL IDENTITIES WITHIN THE CLASSROOM

By Teresa Lee Teng

This thesis explores cultural identity negotiation among American born Chinese (ABC) college students. Specifically analyzing their communication patterns within the classroom, the author illuminates how ABC students negotiate their multicultural identities through emergent dialectical tensions and patterns of praxis.

Derived and adapted from Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) work, emergent dialectics, as well as patterns of praxis emerge in this thesis. The five most dominant dialects are: advantages/limitations (of bilingualism), sufficiency/insufficiency (within cultural communities), conformity to/defiance against (the norm), fulfillment/failure (of expectations), and familial obligations/sense of independence. The responses to these dialectical tensions, or patterns of praxis, are: helping, restricting, (re)appropriating, balancing, and prioritizing. These dialectics and patterns of praxis are shaped inductively through participant interviews and supported by autoethnographic accounts.

The implications for this thesis reveal that every individual in the classroom plays a part in constructing and reconstructing these dialectics. Social interactions within the classroom always consist of emergent tensions; therefore, we are all agents for social change.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you, to the participants I interviewed. It is an honor meeting and getting to know you. I dedicate this thesis to you.

Thank you, Dr. Fassett. It is an honor having you as my advisor and my mentor. I am forever grateful for everything you have taught me. I admire you as a scholar, as a teacher, and, most importantly, as a person.

Thank you, Dr. Spano and Dr. Varona. It is an honor having you on my committee. Taking your classes and reading your work inspires me to be a better writer and thinker.

Thank you, Members of the Department of Communication Studies. It is an honor being part of this community. I cherish the memories.

Thank you, San Jose State University. For all the faculty, staff, and reviewers who have contributed to the success of thesis work, I appreciate you. Your work is so commendable and has not gone unnoticed.

Thank you, my Graduate School and GTA Cohort. Thank you for your friendship.

Last, but most definitely not least, thank you dear family, friends, and loved ones. I could not have done this without your love and support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I am an American born Chinese college student. I must negotiate my Chinese culture with my American culture. These cultures continuously and mellifluously permeate through me with every breath I take. I am not either/or but both identities. Many others can relate to my multicultural experience. In 2007-2008, Asians were the second largest racial group (23.4%) within San José State University's student body (San José State University, 2009). The growing rate of cultural diversity in American schools has made multicultural identities prevalent among students. We live and experience two or more distinct cultures simultaneously, yet separately. That is, we may speak a certain language and practice certain cultural traditions at home, while speaking English and adhering to American norms in school never completely neglecting one culture over another. Consequently, we develop multicultural identities. Through the language/s I choose to speak, the awareness of my race (and others' awareness of my race), and the ways in which I communicate my culture/s, I constantly negotiate my multicultural identities within the classroom. With these constant negotiations, I grapple with dialectical tensions that push and pull me in various directions. These dialectical tensions manifest in communicative acts that I perform in social interactions.

In this introductory chapter, I am honored to share my personal narratives that illuminate the dialectical tensions I experience due to my multicultural identities. In the subsequent chapters of my thesis, I will introduce dialectical theory as my framework for this study (Chapter 2). I utilize in-depth qualitative interviews and autoehthnographic accounts as my methodologies (Chapter 3). The findings are a culmination of interview

1

data as well as my own personal narratives (Chapter 4). I will conclude with discussion and implications for future research within communication studies (Chapter 5).

Language

> If you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity--I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself.
> (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 81)

"Ok class, now we are going to read aloud a Chinese parable. It is a story about a courageous little girl from a village in China," my fifth grade teacher says to us. Given that Diana and I are the only two Chinese girls in the class, our teacher gives us both a smile and a wink, implying that we may already know of this story. The main character in this parable is named Joi Shau, which means "littlest one" in Chinese. "Who wants to start reading?" my teacher asks. Multiple hands raise and my teacher calls upon the boy in the front row. As he starts reading, he stops mid sentence and says, "I can't pronounce this name. It's spelled so weird!" Diana raises her hand and informs the whole class the proper Mandarin pronunciation of the character's name. "Thank you Diana! Teresa, do you know how to pronounce this name also?" my teacher asks me, not wanting me to feel left out. I simply shake my head and slouch down into my seat.

***

I still am a little confused as to why I did not volunteer to speak Mandarin just as Diana did. I remember feeling embarrassed. But, I'm not sure if my embarrassment stemmed from speaking Chinese in front of my class, or knowing how to speak it and being unwilling to do so. Making sense of that situation allows me to learn how much I negotiated and balanced my cultures even at such a young age. Often, this negotiation

2

process caused me much strife when there was tension involved. The tension I felt was my discomfort sharing my own language, my family's language, "my home tongue" with my schoolmates (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 78). All my life I have been conditioned to speak Chinese at home and speak only English at school in order to fit in with my other classmates.

When an opportunity arose for me to speak Chinese in the classroom, this conflicted with everything I learned about how to maintain (and separate) my cultures. I thought to myself, if I speak Chinese in front of my classmates, this sets me apart of the norm, this will make me different. The boy in the front row already called it "weird," therefore, I couldn't risk seeming weird. I silenced myself. The silencing of my "mother tongue" is what Anzaldúa (2007) calls "linguistic terrorism" (pp. 78, 80). Discouraged from speaking her native language in an American elementary school, the author proclaims, "In childhood we are told that our language is wrong. Repeated attacks on our native tongue diminish our sense of self" (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 80). I was complicit in a form of "linguistic terrorism" where I believed Chinese to be subpar to English in the classroom setting (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 80). Yet, it is this exact linguistic terrorism that allows me to articulate non-accented English fluently, which helps me gain cultural capital and upward social mobility in America (Goffman, 1958, p. 23). Given the context, both languages (English and Chinese) can serve me and undermine me socially and culturally. That is, I benefit from speaking fluent English in this society; I do not have an accent, a marker that deems me as a non-native speaker. Therefore, my English gives me credibility as an American, but perfecting my English comes at the expense of

3

perfecting my Chinese. Within the Chinese community, I will forever be considered white-washed. But, holding on to my Chinese language allows me to understand, experience, and access my heritage culture in ways that I will never be able to without my bilingualism.

This relationship of struggling to keep my own language, yet assimilating to American speech is an imperative dialectic to observe because it is in the process of negotiating this relationship that we come to acknowledge the strong implications and consequences of silencing one language while voicing another. While language is something we silence or hide, there are some aspects of culture that we cannot. My racial construct (i. e., physical features including hair color, facial structure, and skin pigmentation) will mark me as non-white.

<div align="center">Racial Awareness</div>

> This racial sense informs people of where I should be in the social landscape; effectively structuring my life options...My racial complexion... I am a nonwhite... I cannot emphasize enough how important race is in determining whether my body symbolically conveys characteristics deserving moral treatment...my embodiment is semiosis that signals to the majority whether I am respectable or not, whether I should be treated with deference or suspicion. (Amaya, 2007, p. 203)

Just starting eighth grade, I am placed in the intermediate math group. I'm very relieved not to be in the advanced math class because there are rumors that they are starting to learn trigonometry. That seems like way too much work. Thankfully, I'm not in the remedial class because those students must do long division without calculators, which seems like even more work. I'm right where I belong: Algebra. I'm completely

<div align="center">4</div>

fine being in the intermediate math class; I have never strived to be the very best in school, especially in math, my worst subject.

"Please get into groups, we are going to do problem-solving equations today," my algebra teacher says in a stern tone.

"I hate problem-solving! Math should just be numbers, not words too!" one of my group members says, whining about his disdain for mathematical word problems. "But, it's alright; we have Teresa in our group. Everybody knows Asians are good at math!" he says, snickering with one of his buddies.

<div align="center">***</div>

I still don't know whether to take this as a compliment or an insult. On one hand, my classmate was confident in my math skills. He believed I was the smartest and most competent student in our group, at least mathematically; therefore, he appointed me the leader. On the other hand, my classmate bestowed this title upon me not because he knew my grade in the class, but because of a gross generalization not of my own making. This racial stereotyping I experienced in middle school is a miniscule example of how much racial features dictate how others perceive us, how we perceive others, the decisions we make, the opportunities we have, and the lives we lead (Amaya, 2007).

My Chinese features will always reveal that I am non-white. I cannot physically pass for being anything other than Asian, other than non-white. The minute I step into a classroom, I am aware of my race, ethnicity, and cultures because I am placed against the backdrop of the dominant white majority. Even though the classroom may be culturally and racially diverse, every student is learning in an American educational system, a

system constructed by white ideologies (hooks, 1994). Therefore, I am eternally the racialized Other. Due to my racialized identity, I am always engaged in an uncomfortable dialectical discourse between how others perceive me because of my race, how I perceive myself because of my race, and how I can present that in a mindful and communicative way. Culture is a learned process that is inscribed and re-inscribed through communication (Hall, 1981).

Communicating Cultures

> Normal Chinese women's voices are strong and bossy. We American-Chinese girls had to whisper to make ourselves American-feminine. (Hong Kingston, 1977, p. 172)

About twenty minutes before one of my graduate seminars, my professor asks me to accompany her to her office and carry computer equipment to the classroom. During our walk across campus, she asks me if I plan on applying for doctoral programs. I reply, "I don't know. I might not have the brain capacity for it," half joking and half serious, considering the heavy load of work I currently have. When achieving a Master's degree still feels so out of reach, achieving a PhD seems impossible. Being the wonderfully forthright professor that she is, she responds, "What?! Of course you have the brain capacity for it! Why would you think that? Is it an Asian thing? We Asians are taught to think that way. But, I'm the opposite. I think I try to overcompensate." Although my professor is half joking, I think to myself, *she has a point.* I wonder, *how much of what I communicate and how I communicate to others is influenced by my cultural upbringing?*

***

One of the greatest differences between my undergraduate experience and my graduate experience is the way I communicate with my professors. As an undergraduate student, I hardly ever communicated with my professors outside of the classroom. As a graduate student, communication with my professors can be more personal, in-depth, and enlightening inside and outside of the classroom. The conversation I had with my professor about cultural influences reveals how we are all complicit in inscribing and re-inscribing our culture in one way or another. We cannot escape the effect culture has on us. When my professor asked me, "Is it an Asian thing? We Asians are taught to think that way" she is implying, "We Asian *females* are taught to think that way." That is, Chinese females traditionally learn that we are of lesser value than men and our capabilities are greatly limited (Hong Kingston, 1977). Yet, she says, "I'm the opposite. I think I try to overcompensate," meaning she rejects the cultural stereotype of docile Asian female so much so that she purposefully communicates in an outspoken and assertive way.

The interaction I had with my professor shows that our communication is very much influenced by how we think we *should* communicate and how we think we *shouldn't* communicate. In my case, I grew up to be very humble and modest. My mother taught me to be confident in myself, but never voice that confidence for fear of coming off as arrogant. She told me to be proud of my own achievements, but never to brag about them to others. But, in an American academic setting, what may seem "arrogant" is encouraged because it shows assurance in your work. "Bragging" is the norm where you need to establish your credibility. As a student, I am constantly

grappling with the proper way to communicate with others when Chinese ideologies and American ideologies contradict one another.

The classroom has always played and still plays an extremely significant part in how I learn to understand my own cultural identities. I remember the first day of kindergarten like it was yesterday. I entered into a new place of discomfort and excitement. Everything was different and everybody looked different. Upon entering my kindergarten classroom, I realized that I didn't have my mother's hand to hold anymore. I had to learn on my own. When all my classmates were speaking English fluently, and I couldn't understand, I had to learn how to communicate with them. When the teacher asked me a question, I had to pay close attention to her hand gestures because I couldn't decipher the words that were coming out of her mouth. Language not only taught me that I was different, but also taught me how to negotiate that difference.

Well into the school year, after taking speech classes every day, I was finally able to communicate with ease in the classroom. Kindergarten was almost over, and I would soon endure the long hours of first grade. I was becoming more comfortable with my surroundings, and I was beginning to fit in more with the rest of my classmates, until something happened that made me feel even more different than before. It was during playtime when a few girls and I decided to play house. I picked up a doll and said, "I'm going to be the mommy." Another girl pointed at me accusingly and said, "You can't be the mommy! The doll has blond hair and blue eyes and you don't!" The girl who said this to me had long, luxurious blond locks that I adored so much. She was right. I looked different; therefore, I was not allowed to "be the mommy," to play the role I wanted to

8

play. I became aware of what I could and could not do because of my physical features. I became racially aware.

As kindergarten came to an end, I started behaving and communicating in ways I thought were appropriate given my cultural contexts. In school, I was acting like my American classmates. I started speaking English more fluently and learned the idioms, colloquialisms, and slang associated with this language. I learned the importance of eye contact, hand gestures, and strong vocal projection when speaking English in school. I also started wearing my hair in curls (just like my blond classmate) and dressed in ways my American classmates dressed. I was communicating the American culture as best as I could. Now, the way I communicate (verbally and nonverbally), seems so natural that sometimes I forget it is a learned and culturally influenced behavior.

My experience in kindergarten illuminates when I began understanding how necessary it is to negotiate my multicultural identities. Through language, racial, awareness, and communication, I continue to navigate the complexities involved in experiencing two or more cultures simultaneously. This is a process I started learning in kindergarten and continue to develop for the rest of my academic career. Many other American born Chinese college students may or may not share my same experiences. Therefore, I am interested in obtaining their first hand experiences of the ways in which they communicatively balance their cultural identities.

In the following chapters, I explore how American born Chinese college students negotiate their multicultural identities in the classroom. I interview 11 American born Chinese students over the age of 18, asking participants questions about how they

negotiate their multicultural identities specifically within the classroom. That is, I ask participants how being Chinese-American affect their student selves. My goal is to bring awareness, understanding, and appreciation to the complexities of managing, balancing, and navigating multiple cultural identities. From this investigation, I can use the information I collect to improve campus understanding and appreciation for cultural diversity.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following literature review, I introduce dialectical theory as the leading

theoretical framework in this study for how American born Chinese college students

negotiate our multicultural identities. I explore the areas of research (intercultural

communication, interpersonal communication, and critical communication pedagogy)

that help inform this study. Then, I define and discuss the concepts and terms ("Chinese

culture;" "culture;" "roles"/"identities;" and "in the classroom") I use throughout this

study. Next, I provide the foundation of communication theory in which I base my study.

I conclude by formulating my own research questions based on dialectical theory.

Introducing Dialectical Theory

Dialectical theorists believe "social life is a dynamic knot of contradictions, a

ceaseless interplay between contrary or opposing tendencies" (Baxter & Montgomery,

1996, p. 3). That is, our goal is not to "smooth out" the "rough edges" of social life, but

to "understand its fundamental ongoing messiness" (p. 3). Baxter and Montgomery

(1996) foreground dialectical theory into the field of communications studies. The

authors coin the term "relational dialectics" as the ongoing interplay of contradictions,

constantly performed through communicative interactions. With extensive research in

interpersonal communication, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) focus their attention on

"the communicative enactment of friendships, nonmarital romantic relationships, marital

relationships, and family relationships through the lens of relational dialectics" (p. 4).

However, the authors do not specifically take into account the cultural identities of their

participants. The authors focus on the constructed contradictions solely from an

interpersonal lens. I focus on the constructed contradictions from an interpersonal as well as an intercultural lens. With this same concept, I place relational dialectics within a cultural context, centering Chinese and American cultural identities as the primary dialectical tensions. This brings the significance of cultural influences to the forefront.

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) define relational dialectics as less of a traditional theory and more as "a set of conceptual assumptions" (p. 6). The underlying assumptions of the dialectical perspective are contradiction, change, praxis, and totality. The authors define contradiction as inherent in social interaction, neither positive nor negative but necessary for social change, and a fluid and dynamic process in social life (p. 8). Often confused with dualism, the authors clarify dialectics as the "interplay of oppositions" instead of the independence of oppositions (p. 10). The "interplay of oppositions" is what drives social change, which leads to the next assumption.

Dialectical change consists of two different models. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) depict the teleological model versus the spiraling change model. The teleological model refers to the Hegelian dialectic of thesis-antithesis-synthesis (p. 12). In other words, one situation leads to an opposite situation, which ultimately leads to a new, resolved, and contradiction-less situation. For the purpose of this thesis study, I will reject the teleological model of change and incorporate the spiraling change model. This is because the teleological model has a fixed goal in mind. The synthesis is a solution that resolves any sort of conflict. When studying cultural identities, this is almost impossible because identity negotiation is an ongoing process that will never be completely synthesized. The spiraling change model, on the other hand, views change in

patterns that are constantly in flux (p. 13). These spiraling changes are displayed through communicative acts, which position social actors as primary agents for change. This is what "dialectical theorists have termed 'praxis'" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 13).

Praxis is a term that appears in many theorists' work (e.g., Freire, 2007; hooks, 1994). Dialectical theorists believe "praxis focuses attention on the concrete practices by which social actors produce the future out of the past in their everyday lives" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 14). Contrary to the Marxist theory on dialectical materialism, relational dialectics "situate the interplay of opposing tendencies on the symbolic, not material, practices of relationship parties" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 14). That is, while Marxist theory looks at the contradiction of production/consumption by the proletariat/bourgeoisie in the capitalistic sense, dialectical theorists look at the contradiction produced by communication (p. 14). Therefore, communicative actions between social actors create change. The notion of this joint action leads to the last dialectical assumption, totality.

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) describe totality as the "core concept of dialectics" (p. 14). Totality does not equate completeness. Instead, it "is a way to think about the world as a process of relations or interdependence" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 15). Totality refers to the location of contradictions as the unit of analysis, focusing less on the individual and more on the relations of social actors. That is, dialectical tensions are a manifestation of joint actions *between* individuals, not *by* individuals. These tensions are interdependent and contingent on the context. All these assumptions make up the conceptual definition of dialectical theory.

In response to these tensions, we perform patterns of praxis. According to Baxter and Montgomery (1996), "praxical communicative choices" can also have the power to "create 'new' dialogic realities," which allow us to comprehend and manage these tensions (pp. 59-60). The authors introduce the term "praxical determinism" which can be "envisioned as a kind of communicative improvisation" which students perform in order to live happily amidst these tensions (pp. 59-60). In order for communicative acts to be "praxical" we must acknowledge and embrace the presence of dialectical tensions in our lives. Moreover, the acknowledgement and acceptance of these tensions inform our decisions and actions.

Applied within a cultural context, relational dialectics can illuminate the complexities of identity negotiation. Exploring how ABC college students negotiate multicultural identities is an ambitious study that covers many different areas within communication studies. The emergent dialectical tensions among these students will inevitably be informed by cultural influences, personal influences, and societal influences. Therefore, it is crucial to draw from various sub-disciplines within communication studies in order to succeed in a sufficient and fruitful study.

Areas of Research

Trying to fit this study in one specific area of research has been very daunting to me. After much consideration and contemplation, I decided against it. My goal is to generate a greater understanding of how American born Chinese (ABC) college students negotiate our multicultural identities in the classroom. My assumption is that cultural factors shape how students think and behave within the classroom. Yet, cultural factors

also inform and are informed by gender, religion, class, and age, none of which are mutually exclusive. That is, I cannot learn about a participants student identities without understanding other aspects of their backgrounds because they all intersect. Intersectionality is extremely important to this study because it allows us to acknowledge the fact that multiple factors influence human communication. This study crosses many different fields within the discipline of communication studies, each informing and illuminating one another. Understanding the role each field plays broadens our lens and enables us to see the complexities involved in human communication.

Intercultural Communication

Due to my interest in the negotiation of cultural identities, this study must necessarily engage in intercultural communication research. Intercultural communication "refers to the communication phenomena in which participants, different in cultural backgrounds, come into direct or indirect contact with one another" (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984, p. 16). Even though ABC college students are born in the United States, we are considered minorities due to our race and our distinct non-white physical features. Often ABC students are first generation Americans (i. e., the first generation in their family born in the United States) and have parents who are immigrants from China or Taiwan. Because of this, ABC college students may very well be bilingual and fully immersed in both Chinese culture and American culture. Because of this multiplicity of cultures at home and at school, students start developing what Hall calls "cultural wisdom," which "leads to systematic thinking about the learning process" they go through when interacting with others from different cultures (Hall, 1981, p. 37). Therefore, when we

grow up with two or more distinct cultures, we learn to interact with others from various

cultures and learn the norms associated with each culture. This interactive process with

others and the self also falls under the field of interpersonal communication.

Interpersonal Communication

Ting-Toomey defines "cross-cultural interpersonal communication…as the

comparative study of differences and similarities of relational communication patterns

between two or more cultural communities" (Ting-Toomey & Korzenny, 1991, p. 1).

Further, Ting-Toomey (1991) defines the term "cross-cultural" as "two or more cultural

communities," that is, a group from the United States compared with a group from China

(p. 1). However, I am more interested in investigating intercultural communication, that

is, how people from various cultures interact with one another in a given setting. But, it

is worth noting the interpersonal aspect of communication within a cultural context.

Ting-Toomey (1991) brings up the crucial point that not all interpersonal interactions are

the same. Interpersonal interactions strongly depend on the individual's cultural

background. I wonder how much of my interpersonal relationships depend on my

cultural upbringing. Identity negotiation often cannot exist without interactions between

ourselves and others. I am particularly intrigued with the complexity and intricacy of

cultural identity negotiation within the classroom, which relates this study to the field of

critical communication pedagogy.

Critical Communication Pedagogy

In most cultures, classrooms provide young students with the fundamentals of

reading, writing, and arithmetic. As they grow older, classrooms provide students with

access to pursue degrees and career skills that will develop them into productive workers in society. Yet, what about learning the ins and outs of social interactions? The classroom is one of the first places we learn the importance of "social roles" outside of our home (Moghaddam, Taylor, & Wright, 1993, p. 82). According to hooks (1994), the classroom can never be a safe space as long as oppression, injustice, and ignorance exist in the world. The classroom is a place where identities are shaped, molded, embraced, resisted or harmed. Going to school was the first time I was exposed to a culture outside of my own. It was the first time I realized I was different. I realized that I was still able to experience culture shock even though I was born in the United States. That is, I was in a state of uncertainty, having a difficult time understanding and making sense of my surroundings since I had always been used to Chinese cultural norms at home. At school, I was put into a situation where I was bombarded by American cultural norms. Exposure to a new cultural environment forced me to "pay attention to those details of (my) life" that are so different from others (i. e., classmates) (Hall, 1981, p. 32). Everything in the classroom, from the demographics of the teachers and students to the language we used or the seating arrangements, all played a significant part in how I learned to negotiate who I was and who I am. Critical communication pedagogy addresses "ways of seeing and thinking about educational practice, communication, and how each is influenced by power, culture, and the production of knowledge within institutional contexts" and is crucial for this study (Fassett & Warren, 2007, pp. 9-10).

The study of how ABC college students negotiate their multicultural identities within the classroom spans various fields (intercultural, interpersonal, and critical

communication pedagogy) in the discipline of communication studies. This topic also generates many concepts and terms that may be polysemic and vary greatly between contexts. Here, I will present the definitions for the major key terms I will be using throughout this study. These definitions will reveal many of the epistemological and ontological assumptions that guide this study.

Terms and Concepts

I will explain in great detail what I mean by "Chinese culture," "culture," "roles and identities," and "in the classroom."

Chinese Culture

> In the West, we cling to the notion that there is such a thing as "the" English language or "the" French language, or "the" Spanish culture or "the" Navajo culture. The "the" model is oversimplified. It does not do justice to either language or culture. Ultimately, use of the model can only lead to frustration, because there is little in language or culture that can be pinned down the way many would like.
> (Hall, 1976, p. 115)

Hall (1976) brings up an imperative point about the discussion of culture and language. Culture is something we can rarely (or even never) pinpoint. In trying to do so, we are trying to define something that words can never fully express. Culture is more of a process than an object. That is, it functions more as a verb than a noun because it is constantly being constructed and reconstructed through human communication. For this

18

reason, I will refer to Chinese culture and American culture without the definitive article "the" that can potentially oversimplify or do the terms injustice. For the purpose of this study, I will define American born Chinese college students as students born in the United States to one parent or both parents who are ethnically Chinese and were born in China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan.

I define myself as a Chinese American. I was born in New York, raised in New Jersey, and moved to California when I was nine years old. My mother was born in Hong Kong, raised in Taiwan and moved to New York as an adult. My father was born in China, raised in Taiwan and moved to New York as an adult. I am a first generation American. Thanks to my mother's hard work and unbelievable strength, my siblings and I were raised in affluent areas of the country and attended private schools. By continuing on to my graduate degree, I have come to fit the model minority stereotype pinned on many Asians confront. What is interesting and somewhat hidden is that the life I live and my parents' ability to enter successfully into this country are attributed to a long, pain-staking, and strenuous history of many Chinese people in America. The ABC students I will interview are all descendants of "the oldest immigrant group in this country" (Kwong & Miscevic, 2005, p. x).

According to Kwong & Miscevic (2005), Chinese people have been present in the United States for over 150 years. Our length of time in the United States and the oppression we faced from this country (Chinese Exclusion Act, Chinese railroad laborers, Chinatown ghettos, etc.) are often obscured by the fact that we (as a race) are considered

successful by American society (socio-economic status, education, residents in affluent neighborhoods, etc).

In many ways, Chinese culture almost seems completely opposite from American culture. Chinese culture values "high-context communication," which means "most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message" (Hall, 1976, p. 79). On the other hand, "American culture...is toward the lower end of the scale" (Hall, 1976, p. 79). That is, Chinese people rely more on subtle non-verbal cues to convey their message whereas Americans prefer to directly and blatantly verbalize their message. An example of high-context and low-context communication patterns is apparent in Gao's study involving Chinese and American participants. According to Gao (1991),

> My Chinese respondents would not provide elaborate answers to my question. To get detailed accounts of some aspects of the relationship, I had to "pull out sentences from their mouths"...In contrast, the North American respondents I interviewed were relative strangers but they would open up and become very elaborate and explicit. (Gao, 1991, p. 103)

I find the vast difference in cultural beliefs between Chinese and Americans fascinating for this study. For ABC students, who are immersed in Chinese culture as well as American culture, this creates a "dialectical tension" that makes our identity negotiation that much more nuanced and complex (Anderson, Baxter, & Cissna, 2004, pp. 163-164).

My interest in Chinese culture cannot be fully understood without discussing the pertinence of culture in this study.

Culture

As I stated earlier, defining culture is to attempt to define a phenomenon that words can never fully express. I find myself attempting to define the un-definable. Given that the word "culture" appears in so many different contexts, I find the need to establish a concept of culture that can be coherent throughout this study. Hall's argument that "culture is communication," establishes the crucial link between culture and communication and how one cannot exist without the other (Hall, 1981, p. 97). In other words, we intrapersonally make sense and make meaning of what and how we communicate depending on what we learn from our culture. Extending this concept of culture is Lustig & Koester's (2006) explanation of culture as "a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, norms, and social practices, which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people" (p. 25). With these concepts of culture in mind, we agree that in this study, we will use culture within a communication framework. Cultures shape our behaviors and ideologies. We form our roles and identities based on our culture.

Roles and Identities

At face value, "roles" and "identities" may seem very similar, but with a more in-depth look, these two terms have quite distinct characteristics. "Roles" refers to "a set of norms that prescribe appropriate behavior for the individual in that position" (Moghaddam, Taylor, & Wright, 1993, p. 82). That is, according to Moghaddam, Taylor,

& Wright (1993), "social roles affect our behavior" (p. 83). Therefore, roles are a series

of behaviors we perform in order to fit what Goffman describes as "a front" (Goffman,

1958, p. 13). According to Goffman (1958),

> When an actor takes on an established social role, usually
>
> he finds that a particular front has already been established for it.
>
> Whether his acquisition of the role was primarily motivated by a
>
> desire to perform the given task or by a desire to maintain the
>
> corresponding front, the actor will find that he must do both.
>
> (Goffman, 1958, p. 17).

As American born Chinese students, we have multiple roles we must adhere to in order to

fulfill our social norms and expectations. The authors state, "assignment to a role can

have very different behavioral consequences in different cultures" (Moghaddam, Taylor,

& Wright, 1993, p. 85). For example, my role as a Chinese female indicates my duties as

an obedient daughter and a respectful family member. There are many ways in which I

can fulfill this role. I can help my mother with various errands and household chores, I

can be her emotional support when in need, and I can help her take care of my elderly

grandfather. This particular case reveals how my Chinese culture places great emphasis

on filial piety, which other cultures may not value as much. As a student, my role is to

attend and participate in class, finish my readings, and do homework. My role as a

student depends significantly on my culture's value on education. Roles are something

we "do" whereas identities are something we "are." I will further discuss the distinction

between roles and identities by applying Mead's sociological perspective to this matter.

This definition of identity is what Mead describes as the "self." According to Mead (1959), "The self has a character which is different from that of the physiological organism proper. The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity" (p. 135). In other words, the self is shaped and formed in relation to the social world. Strengthening this notion is the idea of (cultural) identity being a dialogic process in which "self understanding" consists of a "relational nature" (Anderson, Baxter, & Cissna, 2004, p. 226). The self is a reflective and reflexive entity of that individual after experiences and interactions with others. The self is mindful of one's behaviors and interprets those behaviors. As a Chinese American, my identity greatly depends on how successful I am (perceived success as determined by myself and others) in performing my roles. For example, I am fluent in Chinese, I am able to assist my mother in translations (from English to Chinese and vice versa), I have a great relationship with my family, and I go back to Taiwan frequently. As an American, my identity greatly depends on the fact that I was born in the United States, I speak fluent, unaccented English, I understand and appreciate American popular culture, and I have received my entire education in American schools. All these aspects attribute to my identity, specifically my cultural identity. Therefore, my cultural identity is strongly contingent on my relationship with my cultural community and as Mead suggests, "Selves can only exist in definite relationships to other selves" (Mead, 1959, p. 164). The "other selves" I am particularly intrigued in studying are persons who bring awareness to cultural identities within a culturally diverse classroom.

In the Classroom

In this study, I specifically use the term "in the classroom." Methodologically, I want to specifically focus on occurrences inside the classroom as opposed to other areas on a school campus (i. e., cafeteria, dorms, library, bookstore, etc.). Not to say students do not learn outside of the classroom, but the classroom is a designated and assigned area in which diverse groups of people come together for the sake of gaining knowledge on a particular subject and/or fulfilling credits. Technically, everything about a classroom is regulated: The number of students on the roster, the number of waitlisted students allowed to add, the seating arrangements, the time in which class is in session, the course syllabus, the course criteria, etc. Yet, the students who make up the class and the interactions within the class are completely unpredictable. Teachers can never determine what the students will say, how the relationships between students will develop, how students will react to certain topics, and what students will take from the class. Critical communication pedagogy scholars describe the importance of the classroom by stating, "if the classroom is a microcosm of worlds, a metonym of the cultures we'll encounter throughout our lives, then it is also a site of social change. It is a meaningful environment for engaging differences, for creating community..." (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 63). In this study, I explore the classroom within a cultural context. Expectations within the classroom vastly differ from one culture to the next (Almeida, 2004; Harris, 2003; hooks, 1994; Mortenson, 2006). Chinese American students face a peculiar situation in which our two cultures (Chinese and American) view education and success very differently, therefore causing dialectical tensions in our expected norms and

24

communication patterns (Yin, 2005; Yin & Miike, 2008; Zhang, 2007). These dialectical tensions play a vital role in our everyday decision making process and the continued struggle in negotiating our cultural identities.

<center>Communication Theory</center>

Outside the field of communication studies (i. e., intercultural studies, curriculum studies, and education) scholars use a strong critical approach to investigate the tensions students experience as a result of their multicultural identities (Chae, 2004; Rich & Davis, 2007; Souto-Manning, 2007). Most students living in a multicultural situation experience two or more cultures. That is, they practice their culture of origin and speak their language of origin (mother tongue) at home and adjust to American culture in school (Rich & Davis, 2007). Attempting to adapt in their school environment causes them to have "deficit perspectives" on their culture of origin, hence triggering them to engage in "strategic management of identities" in order to cope with these dual roles (Rich & Davis, 2007; Souto-Manning, 2007). Also, problematic stereotypes such as the "model minority," in which Asians are believed to be overachieving bookworms, "creates polarized representations of Asian-origin people" (Chae, 2004, p. 60). In uncovering the problems multicultural students face, non-communication studies scholars neglect to investigate the communicative social interactions that are involved in developing cultural identities. For instance, Chae (2004) gathers first-hand accounts of "how Asian-origin youth comprehend" the model minority stereotype (p. 60). The author focuses on his participants' cognitive understanding of the model minority discourse instead of

<center>25</center>

exploring the shared meanings and behaviors that constitute such an understanding. Thus, a communication perspective is more appropriate for this topic of inquiry.

Communication studies scholars explore the range of communicative behavioral differences (Mortenson, 2006; Zhang, 2007), racial awareness (Johnson & Bhatt, 2003; Sarkey, 2007), and language/culture appropriation inside and outside of the classroom (Shi, 2006; Shi & Lu, 2007). Addressing each of these is key to understanding the complexity of an ABC student's multicultural experience.

Communication is a powerful systemic, symbolic, and meaningful process that enables individuals to interact with one self and others (Wood, 2004). The study of human communication illuminates these daily interactions through theory and inquiry in order to grasp a greater understanding of the social world in which we live. Therefore, it is crucial to explore how students with multicultural identities navigate the complexities and nuances in their lives.

Studying how students negotiate their multicultural identities in the classroom with a communication perspective allows me to understand how students' communicative acts are constitutive of their realities. The extent to which students experience and identify with their cultures become extremely apparent in how they communicate. In the classroom, students are faced with various cultures that differ from their own, which helps them become more aware of their own cultures. American born Chinese students in the classroom already have the experience of being immersed in two or more distinct cultures simultaneously. We understand what it feels like to be American without looking white. We know how opposite Chinese ideologies can be from American

ideologies. We learn how to code-switch between Chinese and English in order to communicate with different groups of people in our lives. We face all the dialectical tensions that exist when two cultures are constantly battling to claim our identity. Dialectical tensions are "contradictory impulses" or "opposing tensions" that are "continuous and have no ultimate resolution" and "change is the one constant..." (Wood, 2004, pp. 173-174). According to Wong (2006), "dialectical thinking" has been emerging throughout history and across many cultures, including German, Greek, and specifically Chinese (p. 239).

Dialectical Theory

Dialectical thinking spans time and nation (Wong, 2006). Wong (2006) argues that the Chinese Dialectic has greatly influenced our current understanding of dialectical theory. Using a holistic approach to dialectical thinking, the Chinese Dialectic of "yin and yan" refers to the "subtle observation and understanding of the contraries and changes in the universe and the human world" (Wong, 2006, p. 245). Studying dialectical tensions within a cultural context has been quite limited within the field of communication studies.

The majority of communication studies research analyzes culture/s and identity/ies using cultural identity models (Ponterotto & Pedersen, 1993), critical race theory (Olmsted, 1998), muted-group theory, standpoint theory (Kramarae, 2005), social identity theory (Edwards & Harwood, 2003), and theories on biculturalism/acculturation/assimilation (Lu, 2001). Here, I will articulate why these more common cultural models and theories are insufficient for the scope of this study.

Then, I will justify dialectical theory as the most suitable theoretical framework for this study.

Cultural identity models provide very linear, predictive modes of identifying how individuals come to terms and make sense of their cultural and intercultural experiences. Ponterotto & Pedersen (1993) depict three "culture-specific models of racial/ethnic identity development" which consists of: Black identity development, Asian-American identity development, and Chicano identity development (pp. 48-57). These models of identity development are not suitable for this study because they over-generalize (among many other cultures) the Asian-American experience. They neglect to acknowledge the fact the Asian American population consists of Chinese, Japanese Korean, Vietnamese, and Indian individuals (just to name a few). These countries have very distinct cultural values, ideologies, language, and histories. Therefore, combining all these different cultures under one umbrella term: Asian-American fails to meet the needs for this study. Dialectical theory allows a very nuanced and specific look at the communicative patterns ABC students use to negotiate their dialectical tensions. Whereas, cultural identity models generalize the cognitive and behavioral aspects of cultural identity.

Similar to cultural identity models, social identity theory (SIT) "examines the relationship between individual cognitive processes and larger scale group dymanics" (Edward & Harwood, 2003, p. 60). That is, SIT looks at how identity construction is informed by and informs group interaction. Although social identification is very important among cultural groups, I believe its over-simplification overlooks the complexities in multicultural experiences.

Critical race theory, muted-group theory, and standpoint theory are all extremely

critical and judicious suppositions that expose the underlying

racism/marginalization/oppression that are inherent in our society's institutions/cultural

patterns/communicative patterns (Kramarae, 2005, Olmsted, 1998). Although there may

be some experiences with racism within the ABC community, this study does not seek

out to expose the racial constructs of the academy. Instead, I hope to explore the internal

or external contradictions between the Chinese culture and American culture an ABC

student may face within an academic setting. I'm interested in exploring how these

students come to understand this dialectical relationship that may or may not shape their

cultural identities, like it has shaped mine. Therefore, this study utilizes dialectical theory

in an interpretive way to capture my voice, as well as the voices of my fellow ABC

students.

Theories on biculturalism (experiencing two cultures), acculturation (cultural

pluralism), and assimilation (rejection of host culture) may seem most related to this

study, but the degree of acculturation and assimilation between American born Chinese

individuals and native born Chinese individuals are vastly different. American born

Chinese students were born and raised in America. Although we may experience

Chinese culture on a micro (family) level, we are socialized within the macro level of

American society. Moreover, receiving an American education allows us to be fluent

(without an accent) in English. ABC students may be more likely to experience cultural

pluralism because our socialization in American culture does not threaten our Chinese

culture. A native born Chinese student may have much more of a difficult time with

acculturation; therefore, may find to need to assimilate for "social acceptance" (Lu, 2001, p. 206). In all, the experiences of American born Chinese students and Native born Chinese students are far from the same. Since theories on biculturalism, acculturation, and assimilation are built on studies with Native-born Chinese participants, they will not suffice for this study.

Although there is limited research utilizing dialectical theory among a cultural context, dialectal theory has been well integrated within communication scholarship. Baxter (2004), a communication scholar who has published extensively in dialectical theory, states "from the perspective of relational dialectics, relating is a complex knot of contradictory interplays, including but not necessarily limited to integration-separation, certainty-uncertainty, and expression-nonexpression" (p. 115) Further, the author suggests, "these bipolar forces do not exist in parallel to one another but interweave in ongoing dialectical interplay" (Anderson, Baxter, & Cissna, 2004, p. 115). In response to the dialectics of integration-separation, certaninty-uncertainty, and expression-nonexpression, the authors provide a series of patterns of praxis which individuals perform in order to cope with this tensions, which include: "denial," "disorientation," "spiraling inversion," "segmentation," "balance," "integration," "recalibration," and "reaffirmation" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, pp. 60-67). Using dialectical theory in the study of identity negotiation among American born Chinese college students allows me to explore how I, as well as other ABC students experience the tensions of integration-separation, certainty-uncertainty, and expression-nonexpression.

Integration-Separation

Within the integration-separation contradiction, Baxter (2004) also indicates two other contradictions: right vs. obligation and presence-absence (p. 116). The tension between integration and separation is poignant to discuss due to the overwhelming inconsistencies between Chinese culture and American culture. Yet, Chinese-Americans learn to constantly balance and negotiate these cultures in our lives. As a little girl, I separated my Chinese culture from my American culture every chance I had. I established home as my Chinese setting and school as my American setting. It was almost two worlds. I did so in order to make sense of what was expected out of me from both settings. Growing older, I realized that integrating these cultures was not only inevitable, but also permissible. Yet, I continue to grapple with the ideologies that differ between these cultures. For example, as a young American woman, it is my "right" to be independent and voice my own opinions. But, filial piety is greatly valued within Chinese culture. Therefore, as a Chinese daughter, it is my "obligation" to be family-oriented and obedient, especially with my elders.

Another interesting contradiction is the fact that my fluency in spoken Chinese is "present" but any reading and writing skills or formal educational background in this language is completely "absent." Every word in Chinese I know is learned from my family members who raised me speaking Chinese. Yet, to say I am fluent is not entirely true because I am lacking in one of the most crucial aspects in language: literacy. Yet, to say I'm not fluent is also not entirely true because I am conversationally competent in

Chinese and I am aware of all the colloquialisms, metaphors, and idioms only one fully immersed in the culture can grasp.

In a classroom setting, ABC students may purposely try to integrate as well as separate cultural identities depending on the situation. That is, we may appropriate one culture or another in order to serve a specific purpose. ABC students knowingly and unknowingly attempt to integrate and separate cultures for many reasons (such as, to comprehend, to avoid discomfort, or to learn). Studies have shown the perception of language use and cultural appropriation is contingent on the expected gain of cultural capital (Shi, 2006; Shi & Lu, 2007). In other words, students may decide to excel in one language over another based on the desired upward social mobility it can create. Immigrants in the United States learn English in order to find better paying jobs. College students may acquire a foreign language to broaden the scope of their career opportunities in international business. Similarly, ABCs appropriate their culture and language for pragmatic outcomes (Shi & Lu, 2007). ABC students excel in English and associate themselves with their American cultural identity to gain a sense of belonging in society. On the other hand, they can also work hard at maintaining their fluency in Chinese in case of any career opportunities overseas. Also, ABC individuals can communicate with their elders or extended family with ease and gain a greater understanding of their Chinese culture (Shi & Li, 2007). Often times, ABCs will code-switch between two different groups of people (i. e., family and friends).

More research should focus on the appropriation of language and culture, especially the phenomenon of code-switching in an academic setting among ABCs. It

will be interesting to see the paradox of the Chinese language spoken in an American

setting. Most ABCs may condition themselves to view home life as Chinese and school

life as American in order to make sense of these dual worlds. As a child, it is necessary

to dichotomize these two worlds in order to comprehend the expected norms of each. As

we grow older, we understand these worlds intertwine, but we may feel resistant. For

example, we may resist speaking Chinese on campus or English at home since that is how

we have conditioned ourselves for so long. Therefore, when and why do American born

Chinese students speak to other American born Chinese students in Chinese on campus?

And what significance is there in the choice of language? In what ways do American

born Chinese students' use of language/s in the classroom affect their sense of cultural

identity/ies?

These questions are a strong indicator of how ABCs negotiate their cultural

identities in school or within a classroom. Language is one of the greatest representations

of culture. It is interesting to explore how the choice of which language/s to use and in

what contexts reflects each student's sense of cultural identities. Understanding how and

why we face this tension will be a significant facet in this study. Aside from the tension

of integration-separation, certainty-uncertainty is another fascinating matter to

understand.

Certainty-Uncertainty

The certainty-uncertainty dialectic can refer to the "interplay of past and present"

or the contradiction of "conventionality versus uniqueness" (Anderson, Baxter, & Cissna,

2004, p. 116). The authors interpret Bakhtin's view of social life as "a fragmented,

disorderly, and messy interweave of opposing forces…. order is not given; it is a task to be accomplished" (Anderson, Baxter, & Cissna, 2004, p. 118). That is, there is no maintenance of constant certainty in the social world. We have moments of perceived certainty, when we make sense of a certain phenomenon. When that particular phenomenon changes, uncertainty prevails once again.

When there are bouts of uncertainty within one's own cultural identities, this is especially worth noting. An awareness of one's race or culture is often heightened by a sense of uncertainty or unfamiliarity of a surrounding environment (Johnson & Bhatt, 2003; Starkey, 2007). Often, it isn't until students are bombarded with various viewpoints and ways of thinking that they realize how resistant to change they really are. Johnson & Bhatt (2003) explore the ways in which "we struggle with dual existence" (p. 230) and find the need to "name ourselves and each other" (p. 233). We need to put ourselves in a certain category in order to make sense of ourselves and identify with others who are similar. Yet, this poses a unique challenge to those who experience two cultural identities at the same time. Those who cannot limit themselves into one category face the issue of being falsely considered one identity over another (Starkey, 2007). When immigrants travel to another country, they are cast as "foreigners." But what if the country where you were born considers you a foreigner?

American born Chinese students face the interesting contradiction of experiencing certainty-uncertainty internally and socially. We honor and perform Chinese culture without living or growing up outside of the United States. We are certain of our ethnicity, but have an uncertain kinship with our parents' country of origin. On the other

hand, we are born and raised in America, yet our physical appearance will forever mark us as non-white and/or foreign. American born Chinese students cannot obfuscate the fact that we are non-white; therefore, we always run the risk of being mistaken as foreigners. Due to what Johnson & Bhatt (2003) call "coloredness/foreigness," ABCs may be seen by others as "an authority of culture" (p. 234). Due to our "coloredness/foreigness," we cannot fully ever belong to one culture or another. We are constantly in-between cultures. Our internal conflict can become very apparent in our social interactions, especially within a culturally diverse classroom.

As ABC students, when do we find it necessary to reflect on our own cultural identities in the classroom? When do we fully embody one cultural identity over another? When is it necessary to assume one cultural identity over another? In what ways do American born Chinese college students become aware of their race and cultural identities in the classroom? What are the tensions due to this sense of awareness?

The goal for these questions is to understand the process it takes for ABC students to become aware of their Chinese-ness or American-ness in the college classroom. Further, I will inquire about struggles involved (if any) in appropriating these cultures within certain contexts. Appropriation of a given culture can take the forms of performing or behaving in a culturally acceptable manner. The performance/behavior aspect of cultural appropriation leads to another dialectic that is significantly apparent within a social context among ABC students: expression and nonexpression.

Expression-Nonexpression

Baxter (2004) frames the expression-nonexpression dialectic within an openness-closedness context. That is, an individuals' willingness to be open in order to share their true feelings versus choosing to be closed in order to protect themselves and others. Following Baxter's concept of this dialectic within a cultural perspective can be extremely poignant because the acceptance of expression (or nonexpression) indicates what that culture values. For example, Chinese culture values subtle expression. Chinese culture is also weary of expressing one's personal or shameful struggles in order to save face for all the parties involved. American culture, on the other hand, encourages open and unabashed expression. For instance, I rarely revealed anything personal in my class assignments until the latter part of my college career. I felt like sharing anything about my family or friends was in a way dishonoring them. I was afraid I might present them in a negative light or they may be misjudged. Reading works from many authors, I realized that personal accounts are what makes writing literature that much more rich and beautiful.

Another example of the expression/non expression dialectic is how open or closed students may be when asking for help. Given that Chinese culture is very high power distanced and American culture is very low power distanced, interacting with a professor may have very differing meanings. Also, academic performance within the classroom can hold greater or less weight depending on a student's cultural background. Studies have shown there have been noticeable differences in behavior between non-American born Asian students and American born Asian students in an American college

classroom. Different cultural values may unfairly determine the outcome of a student's

success within a class (Mortenson, 2006; Zhang, 2007). For example, non-American

born Asian students may show reticence in class and suffer poor participation grades

because "in Eastern culture under the influence of Confucianism, teachers are usually

perceived as the authority and transmitter of knowledge" therefore, silence is a form of

"respect to the teacher" (Zhang, 2007, p. 212). Or, non-American born Asian students

may lack familiar "support networks" or "embody cultural values that might discourage

them from sharing troubling feelings" that can often lead to stress or academic failure

(Mortenson, 2006, p. 128). Although the participants in these studies are international

students who have spent most of their childhood and young adult lives in their country of

origin, these studies can greatly relate to ABC students under immense cultural

influences from their families and/or religious beliefs.

Few studies have explored the ways in which American born Chinese (ABC)

college students negotiate their multifarious cultural identities within the classroom. In

other words, how and in what ways do we traverse our role as a student given our

multicultural identities? Unlike non-American born Asians, ABCs are raised with

Chinese culture (home) concomitantly with American culture (school). Therefore, we

have access to and familiarity with both cultures. In the classroom, do we display more

Chinese cultural characteristics, or American? What promotes one cultural behavior over

another?

All these series of unanswered questions bring me to my research questions:

RQ 1: In what ways do American born Chinese college students communicatively

37

express or perform multicultural identities in the classroom?

RQ 2: What are the dialectical tensions due to the expression or performance of different cultures?

RQ 3: What are the coping strategies or "patterns of praxis" in response to these tensions?

My ultimate goal for these research questions is to understand how ABC students' cultural identities influence their role as student. In order to achieve this goal, I apply dialectical theory in order to explore how cultural contradictions and tensions can be communicatively negotiated within a culturally diverse classroom. I want to know the emergent tensions current American born Chinese college students grapple with on a daily basis. Also, I want to know how ABC students communicatively respond to these tensions. Like many other dialectic theorists, I am interested in understanding the consistent struggles these contradictions cause. It is because of these struggles that make cultural identity negotiation so complex and poignant.

In the following chapter, I discuss in detail the methods, sample, procedures, mode of analysis, protocol, and potential limitations for this study.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

In order to explore my research questions, I developed an appropriate research design that fits the purpose and interpretive paradigm of this study while upholding my ethical responsibilities to my participants, to my discipline, and to myself. The interpretive paradigm holds a "subjectivist approach to the analysis of the social world... informed by a concern to understand the world as it is... at the level of subjective experience" (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 56). This was extremely significant for my study because my goal was to present how American born Chinese college students make sense and make meaning of their own cultural experiences, as well as what role culture plays within their subjective realities. Through an interpretive lens, I came to understand how American born Chinese college students negotiate their multicultural identities within the classroom. Because the purpose for this study focused on cultures within the classroom, this spanned across many areas within communication studies, including intercultural communication, interpersonal communication, and communication pedagogy.

In the last few decades, quantitative research dominated intercultural communication studies (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984; Ting-Toomey, 1991; Ting-Toomey et. al., 1991). Although these scholars provided influential foundational work within this field, I was drawn to the qualitative approaches that present culture as more of a learning process than a fixed entity (Chen, 1992; Fujimoto, 2001; Hall, 1976; Martin & Nakayama, 1999; Moon, 1996). Integrating culture with interpersonal and pedagogical inquiry allowed me to view cultural identity negotiation as communication, as a constant

dialogue between the self and others (Anderson et. al. , 2004; Fassett & Warren 2007; Goodall, 2000; Hall, 1976; Madison, 2005; Martin & Nakayama, 1999; Moon, 1996).

Interviews

Although the constant battle among scholars between the *emic* ("holistic-contextual-qualitative orientation") and *etic* ("analytic-reductionist-quantitative approach") forms of methodology (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984, p. 26) persist across all fields of academia, in this study, the *emic* prevailed. Critics of qualitative interviewing believe its greatest "weaknesses" are "the substantial selectivity of perception and the subjectivity of interpretation on the part of the researcher and the lack of systematic controls for reducing such biases" (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984, p. 26). However, the goals of qualitative interviews were not to generalize or predict behavior. Qualitative interviewers understand the "interviewee is not an object, but a subject with agency, history, and his or her own idiosyncratic command of a story," where "interviewer and interviewee are in partnership and dialogue" to "construct memory, meaning, and experience together" (Madison, 2005, p. 26). We aim to reach "deeper truths than the need for verifiable facts and information" (Madison, 2005, p. 27).

I used in-depth, face-to-face, structured, opened-ended, one-on-one qualitative interviewing, based on the "Patton Model" and the "Spradley Model", as one of my research methods in this study (Madison, 2005, pp. 27-30). According to Lindlof & Taylor (2002), "Interviews are particularly well suited to understand the social actor's experience and perspective" (p. 173). I was interested in obtaining first hand experiences of American born Chinese college students and the ways in which we balanced our

cultural identities. It was extremely important that I illuminated the voice from each individual's lived experience. Qualitative interviewing allowed me to attain the social actor's "stories (personal narratives), accounts (justifications), and explanations (interpretations)" of their behavior (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 173-174).

Knowing the depth and complexity of experiencing multicultural identities, I conducted one-on-one interviews with 11 American born Chinese college students at San José State University. Since I used qualitative interviewing as one of my methodologies, the questions that made up my interviews were crucial for the culmination of this study. It almost seemed as if it was a universal truth that the *best* answers were probed by the *best* questions. The reason why I referred to this as "almost a universal truth" was because I heard this statement countless times that I could not even find its source. Also, the interpretive paradigm rejects the notion of any universal truths and believes in the subjective reality of multiple truths (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, pp. 56-58). I italicized "best" because it is a polysemic and ambiguous word that can be interpreted in vastly different ways. In this case, I elicited answers that were honest, engaging, evocative, constructive, and transformative. That is, my participants responded as truthfully as their memories and emotions allowed. They reflected on their deepest emotions, either troubling or soothing. Their responses led to awareness and positive change within themselves or in their lives.

I integrated aspects of what Madison (2005) refers to as "The Patton Model" and "The Spradley Model" into my interview questions (pp. 27-30). From "The Patton Model," I employed behavior/experience questions, in which I asked ABC students to

share and make sense of their communicative acts. The opinion/value questions asked for ideological and contemplative thought about certain acts. Feeling Questions sought out emotional reactions. Background/demographic questions asked for factual information. From "The Spradley Model," I focused on contrast questions which "evoke comparisons" (p. 28). Contrast questions elicited the dialectical tensions that ABC college students experienced within the classroom. Through these qualitative interview questions (please see appendix for attached interview protocol), I achieved the *best* responses in order to bring these voices to life.

Autoethnographic Accounts

Due to my personal interest and membership in the ABC community, I integrated autoethnographic accounts into this study. Autoethnography is "writing that combines the personal and the professional, as well as work that may be rendered as a story, or an account that derives rhetorical force from a blurring or blending of literary genres" (Goodall, 2000, p. 190). As an American born Chinese graduate student, I had (and still have) my own personal experiences of negotiating my identities within the classroom. I was not only a researcher in this study, but also a participant. I could not deny my membership in this group, nor did I want to. Therefore, my positionality within this research study posited me as a distinctive voice. In other words, I could relate to my participants more so than a non-group member (i.e., non-ABC college student), and this allowed me to obtain an "insider" look within this community as well as an "outsider" look as a researcher. Culture and cultural identity cannot exist without intrapersonal and interpersonal human experiences. Interviews along with autoethnographic accounts

attempted to capture the most genuine form of human experience. Crawford (1996) argues that autoethnographic writing in ethnography is almost inevitable due to the researcher's role within this type of study. The author writes "ethnographer is unavoidably in ethnography one way or another, manifest in the text, however subtly or obviously. The extreme position is ethnographer as text, ethnographer as other. From this perspective, there is no choice and no escape" (Crawford, 1996, p. 158).

Without an escape, the ethnographer is inevitably the autoethnographer. As an autoethnographer, I formed a relationship with my text, my participants, and my readers. The relationship I developed between my interviewees and the readers of this study was partnership. They were "rhetorically and narratively induced to identify with" me. They were "actively involved in" this text (Goodall, 2000, p. 67). Succeeding in this meant achieving what Goodall (2000) calls, "co-constructing a text, coauthorship of meaning, building empathy, identitfication, and relationship coordination" (p. 67). Although, I acknowledged building these types of relationships could potentially endure some limitations.

I understood that my positionality allowed me access to an "insider's" look, but at the same time may have limited my scope and formed biases. As a researcher, I was aware of the fact that my participants might have interpreted or have had opinions about their experiences as ABC students that were greatly different from mine. I did not *only see what I wanted to see.* I engaged a reflexive voice in which my role as the researcher played a huge part in the creating and meaning-making process of knowledge. I was aware that I did not know everything there was to know about being an ABC student.

Others encountered certain phenomena that I would never experience or fathom. Therefore, I conducted my research with what Madison (2005) calls, "positive naiveness," which means, "acknowledging that you do not know and that you must rely with humility on others and trust upon the knowledge of knowers" (p. 32). Also, I was "capable of grasping what [I] do not know with integrity, intelligence, and conviction" (Madison, 2005, p. 32). I specifically asked my participants to clarify and explain to the best of their ability any responses I may not have fully understood. To ensure I captured their voice, I paraphrased their responses back to them and allowed them to confirm (or refute) my interpretations. When any participants' experiences greatly differed from my own, I highlighted this in my findings because it was a poignant issue to study. Writing autoethnographic accounts allowed me to embrace my ABC identity and understand the vicissitudes of cultural identity negotiation. This process of identity negotiation within ourselves and within the context that surrounds us is what Amaya (2007) calls "radically rewrit[ing] myself" (p. 195). I used authoethnography not only to share my voice, but to learn the ways in which I "rewrite" my cultural identities.

The beauty of autoethnography is its ability to capture an expressive and intriguing voice from the author. In integrating autoethnograhic accounts, I revealed my humanistic identity without compromising my research. According to Turner, "Each of us has had certain 'experiences' which have been formative and transformative, that is, distinguishable, isolable sequences of external events and internal responses to them" (As cited in in Crawford, 1996, p. 158). In other words, every researcher who has lived life has had worthwhile experiences that can be a great contribution within academia. It is

when we yearn to have a "deepening understanding of what it means to observe and participate in a given social context became interspersed with intense periods of questioning, confusion, fragmentation, and darkness" that true critical and reflexive inquiry begins (Crawford, 1996, p. 162). I utilized autoethnography in order to contribute my own reflexive voice within the study. Goodall (2000) defines reflexivity as "the process of personally and academically reflecting on lived experiences in ways that reveal the deep connections between the writer and her subject" (p. 137). My own reflexive voice was a process of learning about myself within my writing.

<div align="center">Participant Recruitment</div>

For the purpose of this study, I defined American born Chinese college students as individuals who were racially/ethnically Chinese, were born in the United States, were first, second, or third generation Americans, were fluent or semi-fluent in one or more Chinese dialect/s, and were enrolled at SJSU. Participants who were not at all fluent in Chinese were not able to respond to questions about code-switching, but they shared the reasons or implications for their lack of fluency in Chinese (i. e., parents did not want them to speak Chinese in fear they would develop an accent, and how that was significant in their understanding of culture/s).

I conducted purposive sampling in order to find participants who were most relevant for my study. With permission from the course coordinator, I searched for participants by recruiting in Comm 20 (public speaking) classes as well as various other lower division communication studies classes. I searched for participants first here at San José State University. Students taking lower division communication studies classes

were ideal for my research because they were mostly first year college students experiencing life with more freedom from their parents. It was interesting to see how they negotiated their cultural identities with a greater sense of independence from their families. After recruiting in these classes at SJSU, I asked my participants to inform me of any of their friends who are ABC college students. I intended to use snowball sampling if I did not find enough participants from recruiting, but that was not necessary. I interviewed 11 male and female participants for this study to achieve a range of experiences. All my participants were at least 18 years or older.

Participants

(All names have been changed)

I had the privilege of interviewing 11 American born Chinese college students attending San José State University. Of the 11 participants, 5 (Cynthia, Nancy, Sarah, Shannon and Veronica) are female and 6 (Alan, Jason, Daniel, Kyle, Martin and William) are male. At the time of the interview, 3 participants (Kyle, Martin and Nancy) were freshmen, 5 participants (Alan, Daniel, Sarah, Shannon and William) were sophomores, 2 participants (Jason and Veronica) were juniors, and 1 participant (Cynthia) was a senior. 7 participants (Alan, Cynthia, Jason, Kyle, Martin, Sarah and William) consider themselves full Chinese (i.e., both parents are Chinese), 3 participants (Daniel, Nancy, and Veronica) consider themselves half Chinese (i.e., only one parent is Chinese), and 1 participant (Shannon) considers herself one-fourth Chinese (i.e., only one parent is half Chinese). 7 participants (Alan, Cynthia, Daniel, Jason, Kyle, Nancy and William) are first-generation American born (i.e., both parents were born outside the United States)

and 4 participants (Martin, Sarah, Shannon, and Veronica) are second-generation

American born (i.e., one or both parent/s were born in the United States). 6 participants

(Cynthia, Daniel, Jason, Kyle, Nancy and William) are fluent in Chinese (either

Cantonese and/or Mandarin), 3 participants (Alan, Sarah, and Veronica) are semi-fluent

in Chinese (i.e., they can only understand and/or speak a few phrases in Chinese), and 2

participants (Martin and Shannon) are not fluent at all in Chinese (i.e., they can only

speak English).

<div align="center">Interview Protocol and Procedures</div>

The one-on-one, face-to-face interview protocol for this study involved 1) a

briefing before the interview; 2) conducting the interview; and 3) a debriefing after the

interview.

In the briefing before the interview, I first introduced myself to each participant. I

explained that I was a graduate student in the Department of Communication Studies here

at San José State University (SJSU). By informing each interviewee that I was

conducting research for my thesis, they got a better understanding of the purpose of this

study. I made sure to express my gratitude for their participation. I further articulated the

purpose and goal of this study. That is, I explained to each participant that I would be

asking them questions about how they negotiated their multicultural identities specifically

within the classroom. The goal of this research study was to bring awareness,

understanding and appreciation to the complexities of managing, balancing, and

navigating multicultural identities among ABC students. Each interview was

approximately one hour long.

Right before conducting the interview, I reviewed the consent form. The consent form stated each participant's involvement in this interview was completely voluntary. In the event individuals were uncomfortable responding to a question or a series of questions, they declined to comment. All interviews were audio recorded with a digital recorder. I also took notes during each session to capture nonverbal communication that were meaningful for this study. Each participant's confidentiality was protected with a given pseudonym. There were no identifying factors in my thesis to ensure each interviewee's protected privacy. After I transcribed all the interviews, I deleted them from my digital recorder as well as my computer. After reviewing the consent form, all interviewees signed a copy before we started the interview. I understood that the formalities of the interview process were necessary, but with that done, it was really important for me to build rapport and comfort with each participant. Therefore, I conversed with individuals in a friendly nature and welcomed them to ask me any questions they had.

With the consent form signed and all questions answered, we were ready to start the interview. The interview guide consisted of four sections. The first section included introductory questions to assess the participant's pseudonym, age, generation, background information, and language fluency. The next three sections correlated to each research question within the study. Applying "The Patton Model" and "The Spradley Model" (Madison, 2005, pp. 27-28) to my interview questions, there were approximately 10 questions under the scope of each research question that included: Opinion/value questions; feeling Questions; background/demographic questions; and

contrast questions. When at any point I needed clarification from respondents, I asked specific questions that were not on the interview guide, such as "Can you please explain..." or "Do you mean..." I also paraphrased interviewees' responses and allowed them to affirm or refute my interpretation. Please refer to the attached appendix for the interview guide.

As the interview came to an end, I asked participants for any thoughts, comments, questions, or opinions they would like to add. By this time, we have engaged in an hour of deep, intellectual, and meaning-making discourse that felt more like a conversation than an interview. I thanked participants again for their time and participation and reminded them of the goals for this study. Most importantly, I provided them with a sense of where this study is going- that is, the progress of my thesis and the emergent patterns from the interviews so far. Before they left, I invited all respondents to leave their contact information if they were interested in the findings of this study. I also provided them with my contact information if they had any questions regarding this study that they did not get to ask me in person.

<center>Data Analysis</center>

I followed Lindlof and Taylor's "three fronts" in order to analyze my interview data. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), "During data analysis the qualitative researcher hopes to make progress on three fronts: *data management, data reduction, and conceptual development*" (p. 211, emphasis theirs).

The first front was data management in which I, as the researcher, organized all my accumulated, transcribed interview data in a manner that makes sense to me and was

accessible to me. In this front, I grouped together all the interviews that had general overarching similarities. For example, I grouped together all the interviews that had mostly positive experiences, and grouped together individuals that may had mostly negative experiences. This way, I was able to see differences and similarities in factors that attributed to positive or negative experiences.

The second front, data reduction, was when I weaved out the interview data that were not particularly relevant for my study. In this phase, I "prioritize[d] according to emerging schemes of interpretation" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 211). I did not throw any data away, but, they "[were] 'reduced' by categories and codes that put [me] in touch with only those parts of the material that counts toward [my] claims" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 211). Therefore, the process of categorizing and coding was my mode of analysis for this second front. According to Lindlof & Taylor (2002) "Categorization refers to the process of characterizing the meaning of a unit of data with respect to certain generic properities" (p. 214). The authors further this argument by quoting Spiggle (1994), "The essence of categorization is identifying a chunk or unit of data as belonging to, representing, or being an example of some more general phenomenon" (As cited in. in p. 214). Therefore, I categorized interview responses into common and emergent "concepts, constructs, themes, and other types of 'bins' in which to put items that [were] similar" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 214). In order to have successfully categorized the data, I *code[d]* the data. "Codes are the linkages between the data and the categories" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 216). As I closely read each interview response, I coded (or "mark[ed] the units") of the text as they related meaningfully and relevantly to each

prescribed category. Lindlof & Taylor (2002) quote Charmaz (1983), "Codes...serve as shorthand devices to *label, separate, compile, and organize* data" (As cited in. in p. 216).

I used an inductive approach during this categorization and coding process in which I "stimulate[d] the development of categories; that is, a category [began] to form only after [I] figured out a meaningful way to configure the data" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 215). With inductive thinking, I carefully read and analyzed the data to find emergent patterns or themes that were significant to my research questions. Influenced by Baxter's (2004), employment of dialectical theory in communication research, in which her studies derived "from the perspective of relational dialectics, relating is a complex knot of contradictory interplays, including but not necessarily limited to integration-separation, certainty-uncertainty, and expression-nonexpression" (Anderson, Baxter, & Cissna, 2004, p. 115), I developed the dialectical tensions that emerged organically through my conversations with participants as categories for my data.

The last front of data analysis, conceptual development, was when concepts emerged from analysis that led to theoretical contributions within the field. The contribution I made within the academic community was a greater sense of appreciation and awareness for their own cultures as well as others' cultures. So much of our cultures define us and we don't even realize it. We may come to realize how important culture/s is/are in our lives. Or we may find the need to make some changes in our lives. In any event, cultural awareness and understanding is progress toward successful communication within a culturally diverse classroom.

In the subsequent chapters, I discuss all the interview responses of American born Chinese college students. I integrate ABC college student responses with my own autoethnographic accounts in order to capture the complexities of the multicultural experience through various voices. I discuss the emergent tensions ABC students experience and how we negotiate those tensions with patterns of praxis, specifically within our student selves. I also consider how these experiences and how we interpret or perceive these experiences relate to a greater nexus of societal and cultural influences.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS/DISCUSSION

Learning how we negotiate dialectical tensions and form communicative

strategies coping with these tensions provide a meaningful look into how our actions are

shaped by our multicultural identities (i.e., where we experience two or more cultures

simultaneously). Despite knowing the importance of these cultures in my life, and the

roles they play in my identity, I still struggle with providing a definite answer for what

exactly being Chinese-American means to me.

I cannot commit to words that are worthy enough to depict the complexity,

richness, and significance of Chinese-American culture. What I mean by that is, just as

Hall (1976) indicates, we commit injustice by viewing culture as a fixed and tangible

object, I believe we can never fully capture or depict culture, but we can experience it.

Chinese-American culture has persistently undulated with the tides of history and society.

The essence of Chinese-American culture will always change in meaning depending on

past, present and future. The rich aesthetics, traditions, and customs of Chinese culture

continue to be recreated and carried on by those who are many miles away from China.

Chinese-American culture is so significant, it spans across generations and eras, making a

place in the lives of people who continue to sustain its significance. Therefore, how can

we explore culture, in all its complexity and mystification, in a hermeneutic and heuristic

way? I believe this exploration is achieved through engaging in dialogic communication.

Dialogic communication characterized the conversations I had with the participants in my

interviews. Instead of asking participants to simply answer the interview questions, we

developed an environment where we shared our own experiences through in-depth

narrative. We discussed the ways in which we are immersed in two distinct cultures (Chinese and American), and how we communicate our multicultural identities through our actions, specifically within the classroom. Without focusing on "defining or answering," we focused our energy on making meaning of the messages we were sharing and creating through constant dialogue. These 11 interviews transpired into an engaging and intellectual conversation. In this chapter, I illuminate shared experiences I had with my participants through writing because "writing [is] a process that turns life into language" (Bochner, Ellis, & Tillman-Healy, 1998, p. 45). I introduce the emergent dialectical tensions they (and we) experienced, and the emergent coping strategies participants communicated within the classroom.

Communicating Cultures

After surveying participants for their background information, I asked each participant to describe their perception of "Chinese culture" and "American culture" and explain what each culture means to him/her. Although cultures are nearly impossible to describe in so many words, the goal of this introductory question is to obtain a sense of how they view their cultures- that is, some of the first thoughts that emerge when thinking about these cultures. Responding to this question reveals how much/little they are aware of culture in their lives and to what extent culture noticeably shapes their identities.

All participants relate Chinese culture to family, such as "family values," "traditions," "Chinese holidays" and "respecting elders." As Alan states, "Being Chinese means having Chinese blood…my parents are Chinese, if they have a son, he's going to

have Chinese blood." This notion of ancestry, heritage, and history is extremely strong among the participants' interpretations of Chinese culture. The need to cling to Chinese culture stems from a long, tumultuous historical relationship between Chinese immigrants and our American nation. "The first permanent Chinese settlement in North America was in New York in the early 1800's…and later in the west coast in the 1850's," yet Chinese Americans still remain guests at best, and intruders at worst in this country (Kwong & Miscevic, 2006, p. 42-43). Despite Chinese presence in America for more than two centuries, there have been numerous accounts of racial discrimination, including but not limited to the unfair treatment of Chinese laborers in the mid 1800's, the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, and the immigration stations of the early 1900's (Kwong & Miscevic, 2006). Therefore, the Chinese community preserves our customs and traditions to honor our ancestors who have come before us, who have endured the multitude of hardships in order for us to live in America.

After asking participants to describe Chinese culture, I followed with a question about American culture. Students had less of a personal or familial attachment in defining American culture. Participants associated American culture with "speaking English," "freedom," "opportunity," "school," "rude people," "eating hamburgers and fast food." Although, there is one salient conflict when William describes America as "McDonald's, rock & roll, and a history of bloodshed, violence, and power hungriness," while Daniel describes being American as "taking pride in what this country has done… defend your country…pay taxes…vote…it's your land, take pride in it." These two

conflicting ideals of American culture paint a very vivid picture of historical implications among Chinese Americans.

On the one hand, we have those who resist the whole notion of the "American dream" due to our long-lasting colonial past with and within this nation. On the other hand, we have those who are proud to be American citizens, since it is what our ancestors fought so hard to obtain. Or we have those who are conflicted between the two and engage in a dialectical discourse of what it means to be Chinese American. In conjunction with the historical, political, and social consequences of our nation's past, how do American born Chinese college students of today experience and negotiate dialectical tensions when communicating their multicultural identities within the classroom? That is, in what ways are they able to make sense of these tensions in a meaningful way? According to Baxter and Montgomery (1996), "Dialectics views the interplay between opposing forces as neither positive nor negative but absolutely necessary for change in any living system" (p. 8). As stated in Chapter 2, examples of emergent dialectical tensions in the authors' research include, but are not limited to: "integration/separation," "certainty/uncertainty," and "expression/nonexpression." With these necessary opposing forces, the authors present "patterns of praxis" that act as responses to these tensions, which include: "denial," "disorientation," "spiraling inversion," "segmentation," "balance," "integration," "recalibration," and "reaffirmation" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, pp. 60-67). These "patterns of praxis" are communicative responses exercised by the social actor's interactions with oneself, and others.

Dialectical Tensions

"Opposites attract" *but* "Birds of a feather flock together."
"Out of sight, out of mind" *but* "Absence makes the heart grow fonder."
"Two's company; three's a crowd" *but* "The more, the merrier."
(Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 3)

The above proverbs represent the contradictions that are unquestionably inherent in folk wisdom. The contradictions are so prevalent in our lives, yet we often do not notice their existence. Here, dialectical theorists appreciate these contradictions, viewing them as necessary in analyzing the intricacies of social interaction. Derived and adapted from Baxter's work, emergent dialectics, as well as patterns of praxis in this thesis, were shaped inductively through participant interviews, and supported by my autoethnographic accounts. In extant research, Baxter (2004), noticed three distinct dialectics in the lives of participants: "integration/separation" "certainty/uncertainty" and "expression/non-expression." In this thesis study, I notice five dialectics that appear to be most prominent: advantages/limitations (of bilingualism), sufficiency/insufficiency (within cultural communities), conformity to/defiance against (the norm), fulfillment/failure (of expectations), and familial obligations/sense of independence. Similar to Baxter's findings, struggling to appease loved ones significantly contribute to the creation of these tensions. Baxter & Montgomery's (1996) "patterns of praxis" or coping strategies are communicative acts performed in response to these tensions. The patterns of praxis ABC students perform are: helping, restricting, (re)appropriating, balancing, and prioritizing. Here, I will name the dialectical tensions as participants describe them, share autoethnographic accounts and explanations to illuminate these tensions.

Advantages/Limitations (of bilingualism)

It is my second semester in graduate school. Everything is still very new to me. My insecurities in my writing are at an all time high. Here, my writing is under a microscope for every professor to examine. Never has my English been under so much scrutiny. I walk with my classmate to class. "What are you doing after class?" she asks. "I need to meet with my professor. I want to talk to her about my paper. I got a B, so I'm hoping to revise it and see if she has any suggestions for me." I reply. "That's cool" my classmate says, "Wow, it's so windy today! I can't stand it when everything is blowing all over the place! My hair is getting all messed up!" I laugh. "I like it when it's windy. Whenever the leaves and branches shake from the wind, my grandmother would always tell me the trees are dancing!" My classmate smiles, "That's nice. I wish I could have talked with my grandmother. You're lucky. My grandmother doesn't speak English. I wish I was bilingual!" I nod and think to myself, *Yes, I am lucky.*

After class, I meet with my professor. She opens my file on her computer and my paper appears on her screen. She reads over a few lines in the paragraph. "Teresa, I like your writing style, but sometimes you phrase things very awkwardly," she states matter-of-factly. "Oh," I reply. "Be vigilant about your diction. Remember, it has to make sense." That's when it dawns on me; *sometimes being bilingual takes a toll on my writing.*

***

One noticeable tension that surfaces during my conversations with participants is the notion that being bilingual comes with many advantages, as well as limitations.

Almost every participant acknowledges that bilingualism comes at the expense of something else. Similar to my experience, participants truly appreciate being able to speak with their parents and elders in Chinese. Daniel states, "It's nice to be able to communicate with your elders and be able to understand what they're saying because you won't feel like such an outsider." We acknowledge the fact that without language as a common thread, we would lose touch with our culture, and forfeit the opportunity to communicate with many family members on a deep and substantive level. In my life, I have basically learned everything I know about Chinese culture by communicating with my family members, especially my elders. All my knowledge about Chinese food, history, ideologies, and beliefs are from conversations I had with my elders. Knowledge we learn through oral tradition has a different impact than knowledge we obtain from reading a book. Through physically conversing with my elders, I have a sense of immediacy and interaction that enables a rich and evocative meaning-making process, through which we reenact culture. When speaking about the advantages of knowing Chinese as a second language, Alan rhetorically asks, "If I don't speak Chinese, how am I going to talk to my parents?" Or "speak to other Chinese people?" Similarly, William inquires, "Have you ever had the experience where you go somewhere and you just can't communicate? Even if it's one little word? Without language, how are we supposed to communicate?" In these cases, participants stress the importance of language through negation, that is, how difficult it would be without it.

Other participants also see bilingualism in a practical and pragmatic light, such as its value in obtaining job opportunities and furthering one's career. Sarah explains, "I

think when you apply for a job, people want to broaden their range so if you speak different languages, they get more people to buy in." Similarly, Kyle observes, "They'll probably hire you if you know two languages." He attributes his current job as a teller at Bank of America to his bilingual skills. With the growing diversity in America, Cynthia confirms, "People are from everywhere now in America, so different companies might have different people who can't speak English. It gives you more opportunities. The more languages you speak, the more you can communicate with people." Like these participants, I view bilingualism as a strength to add on to my resume: something that sets me apart from the rest of my classmates, as well as other prospective employees in the job market. Many participants mention the need for international relations due to globalization. Perhaps these beliefs regarding bilingualism as an imperative career asset are due to the vast international and globalized American market. In the current market, Chinese Americans play a vital role the American economy. According to Kwong & Miscevic (2005), "With their transnational background and connections, Chinese Americans (and Americanized Chinese) have become an active force in the globalization of the American economy, while shaping the political and economic landscape of Taiwan and mainland China in America's image" (p. 437). Encouraged by the current success of many Chinese Americans in the workplace, and the growing relations between China/Taiwan and the United States, ABC students are aware of the business advantages that can come to fruition due to their language skills. In regards to language skills, all participants are extremely happy to reveal the many advantages of speaking Chinese, yet they all reassure me that being bilingual comes with limitations.

Throughout my whole academic career, writing in English (and particularly grammar) has not always come easy. This is one of the most apparent tensions within myself as well as my participants because language is an extremely expressive and revealing part of our identity. Therefore, when there is a limitation in our language, it becomes a noteworthy issue. The common limitation among the ABC students I interviewed is their exertion with the English language. Similar to my experience with "awkward phrasing" in my writing, participants disclose their struggles with writing, grammar, vocabulary, and unwanted accent. Nancy shares, "Sometimes you get mixed up with the grammar. In my writing or sometimes speaking too." Sarah adds, "Sentence structure is different in English." William, noticing this limitation more severely, shares, "When I write English, I have some problems. I consider English my first language, but my professor thought it was my second language because he was looking at my papers. He said, 'work on your verb agreements!'" William also shares his struggles with vocabulary. He continues, "When the professor starts using big words, like big English words, I get uncomfortable because I have never used that word before." Another limitation participants acknowledge is the possibility of an accent. For example, Jason exclaims, "Fortunately, I don't have a really thick accent. If I did, people might have a stereotype of who I am!" The stereotype Jason refers to is the assumption that he may be a foreigner, or what many participants call "FOBs." FOBs stand for people who are Fresh Off the Boat, or new immigrants. Although this is a derogatory term, participants use it casually with no offense intended. The undesired accent of new immigrants is a great cause for concern for Jason, as well as, many other participants. As a society, we

deem certain accents desirable, while ridiculing other accents. For example, as a society, we believe European accents represent status and sophistication. Yet we believe Asian accents sound harsh, ugly, and unrefined. Speaking with a thick Asian accent automatically reveals one as an outsider, or foreigner.

Everything these students have mentioned is something I can relate to on a daily basis. The grammar and sentence structure in Chinese greatly differs from that of English. The "verb agreements" William indicates are reflective of the lack of verb tense in the Chinese language. His struggles with vocabulary are similar among all the ABC students I interviewed because of our lack of exposure to English at home. Growing up, many ABC participants did not speak any English at home. If they did speak English at home, it was most likely their parents' second language. All these factors contribute to our limitations in language due to our bilingual abilities. Parallel to advantages and limitations of speaking two or more languages, the second emergent tension participants feel is sufficiency/insufficiency (within cultural communities). That is, they feel sufficient enough in English and Chinese to get by, yet never feeling sufficient enough to be the "norm."

Sufficiency/Insufficiency (within cultural communities)

I am sitting in my advisor's office, and we are discussing how to proceed with my thesis. I just finished creating my interview questions, and my advisor is reading them. We start having a conversation about what kind of role language plays in our academic careers. She turns to me and asks, "How do you feel about universities suggesting ABC students should attend ESL classes?" I respond inquisitively, "Is that what is happening

now at certain universities?" She replies, "Yes, it's a pretty controversial topic, but I would be mad if I was an ABC student and they asked me to attend ESL classes, especially if I'd been speaking and writing English my whole life." After pondering the question, I answer, "Well, as an ABC student, if a professor suggests that I attend ESL class, there must be some logical explanation for it. If the professor suggests this, it must mean I can benefit from it since my English proficiency is lacking in some way."

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

I do not believe my Chinese is as sufficient as it should be, nor do I believe my English is as sufficient as it should be. I reside in a place of limbo, where my Chinese is well spoken enough to communicate in America, but heavily accented when I go back to Taiwan. My English allowed me admission into graduate school, yet I still believe it lacks in comparison to English speakers who are not bilingual. To this day, I am still not completely confident in my English or my Chinese, resulting in a tension of sufficiency/insufficiency (within cultural communities).

Interestingly enough, none of the participants I interviewed are fully satisfied with all the languages they speak. They feel as though sufficiency in one language causes an insufficiency in another language. Most participants believe they should improve on both English and Chinese, while others who are less fluent in Chinese regret not fully learning the Chinese language. Martin explains this phenomenon, "If you're growing up and you are actually learning both languages, you can't speak both sufficiently." Non-fluent Chinese speakers who find their English perfectly sufficient are disappointed in themselves for being Chinese, but not speaking Chinese. Veronica confesses, "I wish I

was at least bilingual, so I could at least identify or take part in my culture more." On the same note, Martin says, "When I talk to my grandparents, I feel ashamed because I can't communicate with them very well. I always feel bad because my sister speaks Chinese more than me."

Others who are fluent Chinese speakers, believe there are insufficiencies in all the languages they speak. Alan, who is fluent in English and Chinese articulates, "I'm 80% comfortable with English." Alan came up with 80% because, recently, he took an admissions test and received an 80% on the English portion. Not only is his confidence in his English skills deteriorating, he is less confident in his Chinese. He states that classmates who are from China/Taiwan is "going to be a better Chinese person than I am because I was born here [in the U.S.] and I didn't have anyone to practice Chinese with." Having a similar experience is Cynthia, who is fluent in Chinese, but not literate. She confides, "People expect you to know a lot. When people find out that I can't read or write in Chinese, they are snooty. Chinese parents are like, 'oh you can't do it?' And they look down on it." Facing the same challenges as Cynthia, Sarah explains, "I'm supposed to know Chinese. If you were Chinese, you were supposed to speak Chinese or go to Chinese school. But my dad didn't send me to Chinese school so my Chinese is really bad, so they make you feel bad." The rest of the fluent Chinese speakers describe their Chinese as "choppy," "broken," "bad," and "not as good as it can be." When I asked them to describe their English, they express many of the sentiments as they did in the limitations of being bilingual, such as confusion with grammar, and diction.

A good majority of the participants equated having insufficient language skills with being an insufficient person in their culture. For example, Veronica does not feel as though she "identifies or takes part" in her culture at all because she doesn't speak Chinese. Alan believes that others who are more fluent in Chinese or who are born in China/Taiwan will be "better" Chinese people than he is. Therefore, his whole worth as a "Chinese person" is based on how well he speaks the language. Likewise, Cynthia feels as though she is "looked down on," specifically by Chinese parents, because she is not literate in Chinese. Therefore, she says she feels inferior to what a Chinese person is supposed to be. Since I noticed that insufficiency in the Chinese language also equates to insufficiency as a Chinese person, I asked some of my participants if they would be completely American if they did not have any qualms with their English. With a few exceptions, most of the responses suggested that Chinese people can never be fully American. This is because many ABC students believe the term "Americans" is synonymous with "white people" or what Cynthia endearingly refers to as "beach Barbies." As William states, "You feel like you're between two different cultures. I mean, you're not fully Chinese and you're not fully American. You're always trying to make up for what you lack in both sides, I suppose." William represents the voices of most participants when he explains how he feels perpetually outside of the Chinese norm and outside of the American norm. This brings us to our next point of tension, which is conformity/defiance. That is, conformity to the norm, or defiance from the norm.

Conformity to/Defiance against (the norm)

I am sitting in my seat, waiting for class to begin. I glance over at the clock. The clock is noticeably off, so I turn to a classmate sitting next to me, "Hey do you know what time it is?" I ask. "10:01" he responds, "The professor is officially one minute late." "Hey, you look kind of familiar" he says to me. Not really knowing if that is his version of a come-on, or if he really does think I look familiar, I bury my face in my book. With my eyes transfixed on the book I'm not really reading, I respond, "Oh, really?" trying my hardest to appear disinterested. "Yea, I do know you. Are you the Filipino girl I met at that party?" he asks. I quickly reply, "Oh, no. That's definitely not me. I'm not Filipina." To which he inquires, "What are you?" Having been asked this question many times, I tell him, "Guess." To my surprise, he superficially assesses, "You are too dark to be Chinese, Korean, or Japanese. You are obviously not Filipino. Maybe you are Vietnamese. Or, maybe you are mixed since you don't look like any specific ethnicity." After being artificially judged by my appearance, I glaringly retort "Well, your observations are not correct. I'm Chinese. Full Chinese." "Really?!" he exclaims, "I would never would have guessed that. You don't really look Chinese." Before I have an opportunity to ask him what exactly he means by that comment, the professor walks in, apologizing for being tardy and starting class. I roll my eyes as I divert all my attention away from my classmate.

***

Having preconceived notions about what a certain ethnicity should or should not look like is not particularly uncommon. But, I still found my classmate's comment

judgmental, stereotypical, and presumptuous. It made me feel excluded and outside of the "norm" (or his perceived norm) of what Chinese people should look like. On the surface, his comment seems innocuous, but it builds on an issue I already have about my appearance. Ever since I was little, others have always questioned my ethnicity due to my darker complexion. As inconsequential as his comment should have been (after all, I didn't even know him), it still made me question whether or not I was abnormal. The reason why this stayed with me was because, ultimately, I, too, had a preconceived belief of how Chinese individuals should look and act, against which I measured myself and others. In these interviews, participants often use the term "norm." Their definition of the term "norm" slightly deviates from social scientists' definition of "social norm," as prescribed sets of appropriate behavior (Goffman, 1958, 1967, 1969; Mead, 1959, Moghaddam, Taylor, & Wright, 1993). When participants use the term "norms" they are referring to a common stereotype, misconception, or generalization. Participants consistently express their affinity or aversion to a "norm" or stereotype. These perceived stereotypes are our own personal beliefs about a certain culture that are most likely learned and reinforced by social interactions. Participants generally use the term "norm" to refer to "normal" (i.e., a "normal Chinese person or a "normal" American person). Every participant, without exception, voiced a belief that there are typical characteristics for American people, as well as Chinese people, resulting in a tension between conformity and defiance.

The tension is whether to conform to these perceived stereotypes or to defy these perceived stereotypes. Similar to my experience, William confesses a moment when he

felt excluded, "A classmate once told me that I'm definitely not a normal Chinese, and

I'm not sure what that means. But, he told me, 'you don't look like a normal Chinese.'"

Yet, he says most classmates assume he is "exotic" and eats "exotic foods" since he has

traveled throughout many parts of Asia. He doesn't mind this stereotype much because

he identifies with it. William continues, "I tell people about the snake and turtles I had in

China, snake and turtle soup. It's sweet. I've had lizard gallbladder, raw beef, raw

shrimp…" Here, William believes he is defying the normal appearance of a Chinese

person because of what a classmate said to him. Yet, he is fully embracing the

generalization that Chinese people are exotic or foreign, due to the colorful palette of

food he enjoys eating. Another stereotype participants choose to conform to or defy is

the model minority stereotype. The model minority stereotype used in an academic

context refers to the "typical" straight A, glasses-wearing, diligent bookworm Asian

student.

The model minority discourse appears throughout the interviews. For example,

Daniel provides a significant example about his need to defy this Chinese norm: "In high

school, there were always those who were more Chinese than me. They fit the

stereotypes so badly. They go to school, they have a 4.0. They go home and study all

night. I think especially within Asian culture, it's just like, you have to study. I know

I'm outside the norm." On the other hand, Daniel shares his belief in self education, by

stating, "My parents weren't so much into the studying thing, but they did want me to be

educated. My dad always had a lot of books around the house. I would go to the library

and I would borrow like 20 books at a time." Daniel defies model minority discourse in

68

terms of its academic parameters, yet he completely conforms to the Chinese belief that education is a top priority by rigorously studying books from the library.

Other participants reveal negative feelings toward the model minority discourse, especially when they do not conform to it. Jason reveals his disdain for this model minority stereotype by stating, "Everyone has this assumption about, 'Oh, you're smart. You're good at math.' But, in high school, my GPA was horrible! Now that I'm in college, it's just ingrained in me so much from past experiences that I am assuming that's what they're thinking or expecting of me." Conversely, Jason explains how he often feels as though he adheres to Chinese norms, more so than American. He articulates, "I think I'm the only student that would go out of my way to ask other students for help on a paper. Nobody else does. They just come to class, listen to the lecture, go straight home. I feel like I need a group setting. Maybe it's because I'm Chinese..." Jason defies the model minority stereotype because he feels as if he does not live up to it, yet he yearns for the collectivistic mentality of the Chinese community.

Although assumptions regarding physical attributes as well as the model minority discourse are the major defining stereotypes among ABC students, others also mention their annoyance at seemingly innocuous stereotypes regarding bad driving and being obsessed with anime. Participants frequently voice their annoyance and frustration at these stereotypes, yet they all generally believe they are trivial matters. Martin shares those sentiments by stating, "They're just jokes, nothing really serious." Like Martin, many participants do not take these matters too seriously. But, the perpetuation of these stereotypes can be harmful to one's sense of self. On a more solemn note, participants

believe one of the most arduous dialectical tensions is the ongoing process of fulfilling

and/or failing to meet various cultural expectations.

Fulfillment/Failure (of expectations)

I'm waiting in line at Starbucks about to order my usual iced tea lemonade. I'm

meeting one of my close friends to catch up. I haven't been able to see her as much as I

would like, due to my consuming graduate school schedule as well as her hectic work

schedule. She walks in and we exchange giddy greetings and hugs. We order our drinks

and find a patio table under the shade. As we settle into our seats, she asks, "How is your

thesis work going? Are you almost done?" "It's going good. I'm not quite almost done,

but getting there" I respond. "Your family must be so proud of you! You are about to get

your Master's degree!" she says enthusiastically. I sigh, "Well, my aunt has a PhD in

Asian Literature. My cousin has a PhD in chemistry and he's only 28! My other cousin

has a Master's degree from Stanford. So, I'm sure my family is proud, but I doubt they

are that impressed with me." "Wow! That's a lot to live up to. I bet your family has

really high expectations" she says.

***

Like many other Chinese families, I come from a long line of overachievers.

Some members of my family do live up to the problematic model minority stereotype.

Many of my aunts and uncles are extremely strict with their children, monitoring their

grades and SAT scores. Even though I was raised by relatively lenient parents, I

understand the pressures of not living up to certain expectations. This pressure can come

in the form of a sigh when I tell my aunt I'm attending San José State, while her son

70

attended U.C. Berkeley. It can also come in the form of a frown when I tell my uncle I have no intention of applying for doctoral programs when both his sons have PhDs. On the other end of the spectrum, I also understand the pressure of not living up to my friends' expectations. These can come in the form of an eye roll when I tell my best friend I can't go with her to a Friday night frat party because I need to study. Or, it may come in the form of a friend yelling out "lightweight!" when I refuse a shot at the bar. The tension of fulfillment/failure (of expectations) appears in all our lives.

Many participants I interviewed feel pressure to fulfill expectations from their family, friends, and within their cultural community. Since many of these expectations are contradictory, participants grapple with fulfilling certain expectations, while inevitably failing to meet other expectations. For example, Jason articulates, "It's like a war because what my parents expect out of me doesn't match up with what other students are doing." ABC students feel as though their parents, as well as members of the Chinese community, expect them to excel in school while their friends and members of the American community expect them to be more social. This tension is the basis of many of their struggles; as Kyle explains, "My parents want me to get into college, get straight A's, and get a good job. I feel like I might not be good enough to achieve all those expectations because they're so high. It makes me doubt myself... Americans are more open-minded. They want you to do what you want to do, what you love to do no matter what." Cynthia observes, "I'm taking five years [to finish college] and my dad's like, 'Uugh! Five years?! What is wrong with you?' They [the Chinese community] expect you to get As, have no life, and keep doing it until you get a PhD or be a doctor...It

71

seems like American people can balance school, work, and partying. But, people know I don't party. They're like 'go out, go out!' But, they know I'll say 'no.' American culture can multitask better than a lot of Asian culture." Sharing these opinions, Shannon states, "They [the Chinese community] expect me to be a good student, especially to study, like, for four hours a day. I can't force myself to study that long. That's a very good goal, even if I can't do it." She continues by noting that the American community encourages "you to go to parties and go out to the bar...but, I'm not old enough to drink yet." Like most participants, these examples stress the difficulty of attempting to fulfill both Chinese and American expectations, yet not fully succeeding at either. Participants do not identify themselves as straight A, overachieving students, yet they also have an aversion to the party lifestyle of many American college students. Not only do students voice their struggles with meeting opposing expectations, they also express the difficulty of facing failure when they cannot meet these expectations.

Participants iterate the term "failure" throughout the interviews when they do not meet family (or Chinese) expectations. Yet, when students do not fulfill expectations from the American community (e.g., having a robust social life, partying, etc.), they don't see that as a failure, so much as a personal choice. Participants voice their belief that failing as a student is equivalent to failing as a person. For instance, William explains, "Good grades are something I would expect. If you get good grades, you don't feel like a failure. If you fail in school, no one will want to hire you." Martin strengthens William's statement by saying, "If I wasn't in college, that would be pretty bad....I'd be a failure." On that same note, Jason describes his feelings when he went from high school straight to

a community college, "Among the Chinese community, it's like kind of taboo or looked down upon if you go to a junior college. Like, you fucked up. You failed. You fucked up because you weren't good enough to get into a UC." As much as participants attribute these pressures to their parents or family members, they individually hold onto these strong beliefs as well. Their parents' expectations have become their own expectations. Interestingly, many participants do not voice an adamant desire to fulfill social expectations, such as attending parties or partaking in nightlife activities. This may be because of the strong sense of familial obligation ABC students feel toward their parents. That is, participants continuously express how much they value filial piety and respect for elders, such that they become inclined to place their loyalty with their family's needs rather than with social needs. Although participants feel a sense of freedom and independence in college, they wrestle with the need to perform familial duties. Therefore, the last, and most prominent, dialectical tension ABC students face is familial obligation versus independence.

Familial obligations/sense of independence

I'm trying to explain to a friend why I decided to stay near home for college instead of venturing out to another state. "I cannot leave my mother and my aging grandparents. I need to take care of them like they took care of me." I tell him. My friend thinks this notion is absolutely ridiculous. He says, "You need to be independent and you can't have your family hold you back." "I understand your point of view," I begin, "but I don't agree with it."

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

In American society, being independent is a presentation of one's own individual strength. Not being "held back" is a testimony to one's endurance and competitive nature. Adhering to the beliefs of Chinese culture, I don't think I lost independence by staying close to my family. I don't think they held me back. I can still be successful and achieve my goals because helping my family is a part of my success and my achievements. Staying close to my mother means I am honoring her, and also honoring all the past generations who have made it possible for me to be so fortunate today. I am a product of not only my mother and grandparents, but all my ancestors who have paved the way for me to be here. Many things I help my mother with she can do by herself. But the fact that I am doing something to make her life a little easier, and taking care of her just like she took care of me, means I am fulfilling my duty as her daughter. Even now, I don't know how to explain this to my friend in English. I tried my best, but with language comes a set of values and ideologies that are hard to understand if someone has not lived them. I suppose certain explanations get lost in translation. The words are there, but the meaning lost. I understand this American view of success because I was raised with it at school. But, I'm afraid my friend can never fully understand my view of success with my family. I must fulfill my family obligations despite my need for independence. This tension of obligation/independence is something with which I continue to grapple.

My participants and I have the experience of living in two different cultural dimensions. We are Chinese-American. We are raised in the microcosm of Chinese culture at home while being immersed in the macrocosm of American culture outside of

our home. These two cultures have distinct, sometimes conflicting beliefs and expectations. We must fulfill our familial obligations, yet we strive for individualism and independence. Therefore, our actions oscillate between appeasing our family members and appeasing ourselves. Akin to my own personal decisions and actions, my participants ultimately have a strong desire to fulfill their familial obligations, rather than achieve their own independence. Throughout the interviews, participants voice their appreciation for their parents' sacrifice for them to receive an American education. Nancy shares, "My parents work really hard to pay for my tuition. They value education." Likewise, William iterates, "I'm really thankful for my mom. I want her to be proud of me. She tells me, 'You can go to whatever college you want, and I promise that I'll pay for it no matter how.' I don't want to be a slack-off, especially if she has to pay for it." Jason acknowledges his parents' sacrifice by saying, "The way I see it is my parents could have stayed in China. My dad could have stayed in Taiwan. But they wanted to come to America, land of opportunity...I guess when you're little, your parents take care of you. When they get older, I'll be able to take care of them. I want to make them proud." Parents play a strong role in these students' education. All participants I interviewed mention their parents' strong influence in their education. For example, Martin says, "I have to do it for my parents. A reason is to make them proud." Although each participant understands the importance of education for themselves, as well as their parents, they also share their struggle for some independence from their parents.

When it comes to individual independence, participants struggle with finding the right balance between having an active social life and obeying their parents' rules.

Interestingly enough, the female participants have much more of a struggle than male participants. Most of the male participants I interviewed articulate how their parents are much more strict with their sisters than with them. It is easier for males to gain independence than females. Nancy shares her frustrations, "My parents are so strict. I think it's because I'm the girl and the first child to go to college. They're like, 'Why do you need to go out late? Come home at 9.' I'm old enough, I've moved out. But, they still try to regulate me." On that same note, Cynthia says, "My dad's really strict. He always says, 'When will you be home? Who are you going out with?' My dad disapproves really easily. I'm 21, so I told him once, 'I'm going to get drinks because it's a friend's birthday.' And he was like, 'Drinks?! Why? You shouldn't go." Many female participants are obligated to eat family dinners on a regular basis. Sarah tells me, "When I'm at home, my grandparents would always call me to eat with them." Cynthia adds, "My dad always wants to have dinner with me. I heard (in American culture) they don't eat dinner together often, only on holidays. I think that's weird." I have a lot in common with the female participants I interviewed. We share a similar tension of familial obligation versus a need for independence.

After conversing with these participants, I realize gender plays a pivotal role in experiencing certain tensions. Although both male and female participants strive to make their parents proud by staying in school, male students struggle less for independence because their parents seem to be more lenient with them. While male participants do strive for independence due to high expectations from parents and their demand for good grades, they admit their sisters have it worse. For example, Alan says, "I guess it's a

little different with my parents because they're like, 'Do whatever you want.' Because they're not always going to be there for me." Martin tell me his parents make him chaperone his sister on her outings, yet he is able to take public transportation. He says, "If I ask for a ride, my parents will tell me to take the bus. But, my sister always has a driver." Here, gender roles play a significant part in how much ABC students struggle with certain tensions. Female students are more discouraged from having an active social life than male students. ABC students must constantly negotiate these various dialectical tensions at play. This negotiation process manifests in communicative acts that students perform. There are 5 emergent "patterns of praxis" students communicate in order to cope with these tensions.

Patterns of Praxis

American born Chinese students perform patterns of praxis to cope with the inevitable dialectical tensions that emerge when immersed in this cultural paradox. According to Baxter & Montgomery (1996), "The social reality of contradictions is produced and reproduced by the communicative actions of social actors" (p. 59). That is, we reenact and reify these tensions through communicative practices performed in the social world with various social actors. Consequently, "praxical communicative choices" can also have the power to "create 'new' dialogic realities," which allow us to comprehend and manage these tensions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 59). The authors introduce the term "praxical determinism," which can be "envisioned as a kind of communicative improvisation" students perform in order to live happily amidst these tensions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 59). In order for communicative acts to be

"praxical," we must acknowledge and embrace the presence of dialectical tensions in our

lives. Moreover, the acknowledgement and acceptance of these tensions informs our

decisions and actions. In this sense, the authors define praxis as "concrete practices by

which social actors produce the future out of the past" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p.

14). In previous studies, Baxter and Montgomery (1996), formulate eight distinct

patterns of praxis in response to the integration-separation, certainty-uncertainty, and

expression-nonexpression dialectics. These patterns of praxis include: denial,

disorientation, spiraling inversion, segmentation, balance, integration, recalibration, and

reaffirmation (pp. 60-77). According to Baxter and Montgomery (1996), these patterns

of praxis have varying degrees of "functionality;" that is, "A functional praxis response is

one that celebrates the richness and diversity afforded by the oppositions of a

contradiction and that tolerates the tensions posed by their unity" (p. 60). Dissimilar to

the authors' findngs, the emergent patterns of praxis in this thesis study all show high

degrees of functionality. During these engaging discussions with my participants, we

shared knowledge of the various communication styles we employ in order to cope and

negotiate these tensions. Thus, the emergent of patterns of praxis are: helping,

restricting, (re)appropriating, balancing, and prioritizing.

Helping

The first dialectical tension in this chapter is advantages/limitations (of

bilingualism): that is, the advantages and limitations of being fluent in Chinese.

Participants share the great joy of conversing with their family members, especially their

elders in their own dialect. This brings a sense of cultural connection and inclusion. We

also discussed the pragmatic advantages of bilingualism, such as resume boosting and career building. On the other hand, bilingualism may result in our struggles with the English language (e.g., slight accents and/or confusion in grammar, sentence structure, and diction). These result in poor grades on papers, speeches, and/or other forms of schoolwork. Although participants feel advantages as well as limitations, most believe in focusing on the positive. Explaining how to resolve this tension, participants feel the best possible outcome is to use their skills in order to help others. Having experienced this tension with language, participants voice their willingness to help others who are struggling with language proficiency. Through helping others, we are embracing a positive approach to the tensions that language may bring. Helping allows us to put our bilingualism to good use. Therefore, our first pattern of praxis is helping. Helping takes the form of translating texts or interpreting words/conversations.

Due to our bilingualism, ABC students believe it is our duty to act as translators and interpreters for those in need. Kyle explains his affinity for helping the international students in his class. He shares, "I'm always helping out. There are things that I always have to translate for them. I feel like it's an advantage because I feel like it is cool helping others out." Similar to Kyle, Jason utilizes his bilingualism to help out family members. He shares, "My mom sometimes needs help with the grammar and vocabulary. Like, if she wanted me to write a letter to her insurance company, she'll ask me to look over it and correct it." Participants explain that their willingness to help out international students stems from practicality and empathy. It is practical in the sense that we are able to speak Chinese and English; therefore, there is no reason for us not to help. We feel

empathetic because we have the personal experience of being in environments where our language skills (or lack thereof) limit our abilities to communicate as well as others.

Helping others turns the focus away from our own limitations and toward the overall advantages that bilingualism can bring. This is an extremely collectivistic way of thinking, popular in Chinese culture. We care more for the well-being and harmony of the group rather than our own individual achievements. As difficult as it was for me growing up with two languages, I always knew that being bilingual was a blessing as well as a skill. Like all blessings and skills, it should be used with a purpose, and that purpose was, and still is, to help others. From translating texts and interpreting words for my parents, to tutoring international students, helping others through language is my way of honoring my Chinese and American cultures.

Restricting

The second dialectical tension is sufficiency/insufficiency (within cultural communities). In other words, this involves feeling sufficient enough to speak a language yet not sufficient enough to be a full-fledged member of that cultural community. Just as William previously states, "You feel like you're between two different cultures. I mean, you're not fully Chinese and you're not fully American. You're always trying to make up for what you lack in both sides, I suppose." We speak Chinese sufficiently to socialize with other Chinese-speaking individuals but not sufficiently enough (due to, for example, a strong American accent, illiteracy, limited vocabulary) to be comfortable within the Chinese community. Correspondingly, we are born and raised in the United States, but we still have problems (e.g., a slight accent,

grammar, diction) with English. Even more complex is the fact that participants feel that sufficiency in one language leads to an inevitable insufficiency in another language. Perceptions of insufficiency in language commonly lead to a lack of confidence in that particular cultural community. Participants negotiate this tension by restricting their communicative acts in any given context. This pattern of praxis is restricting. Restricting refers to limiting certain communicative acts in particular contexts. According to ABC participants, restriction comes in the form of code-switching. That is, speaking and acting in different ways, depending on the context of any given situation. The purpose of performing these restrictions is to acculturate smoothly in that cultural community (Amaya, 2007).

Often encouraged by our social environments, ABC students restrict the way we speak and act depending on where we are located and who is surrounding us. Restricting our communicative acts depending on our surroundings is a form of code-switching. Participants provide examples of how they code-switch when they speak. Cynthia shares, "When I go back to Taiwan, they say I'm really quiet. I think Mandarin just sounds whiny. It's really feminine also." Cynthia describes Mandarin as "whiny" and says she sounds more quiet and feminine than she sounds when she is speaking English. These actions are indicative and constitutive of what Chinese culture values in women: femininity, demureness, and restraint (Chen, 1992). William shares his attempts at code-switching: "When I use my language, when I use my Chinese, then I feel more Chinese. If I don't use it, I feel less Chinese..." Here, William's use of language makes him more Chinese. Participants disclose the strong connection between speech acts and culture.

That is, the more they speak and act Chinese, the more they feel Chinese. Likewise, the more they speak and act American, the more they feel American. This indicates that our speech acts and our cultural environments inform one another. We cannot escape this process; we cannot have a distinctive self without social and cultural influences (Mead, 1959). Not only do participants code-switch through speech, they also code-switch through actions.

Code-switching through actions includes decision-making regarding mannerisms, clothing, and pop-culture. A majority of participants agree that they act more "Chinese" around the Chinese community. This includes being respectful to elders, polite and reticent. For example, Veronica states, "When I am with my Chinese family, I tend to act more reserved and I try to listen more." Shannon adds, "They [Chinese parents] teach me not to talk unless you have something important to say." Martin talks about the strict table manners when eating with his family: "We always think of others first. Like, never eat the last piece of food, even if you are starving." In Chinese culture, family members gather around a large table and eat everything "family style." This means having all the main courses in large dishes, served at the center of the table. Each member of the family collectively eats from those plates. Since everybody is sharing, the "last piece" is always reserved for our elders. Aside from code-switching to fit into the Chinese community, ABC students must code-switch to fit into the American community as well.

ABC students describe acting more "American" around the American community as acting more outgoing, talkative, and social. Kyle provides examples of how he fits in: "At school, I am social and I guess open-minded. I guess that's American because

Americans like to 'try anything.'" Participants also describe being "American" as attaining certain material goods, such as certain clothing brands. William cites clothing as presentation of his American self. He claims, "I guess I can dress more American to feel more American." Many participants view material consumption as a palpable American quality. William further explains, "The American thing to do is to spend. You always need to buy trendy stuff. When they go out of style, you have to go shopping." Many other participants describe being "American" as the way you "present yourself." Sarah feels more American when she dines out at fast-food restaurants and eateries such as "McDonald's." For the most part, participants had a hard time describing this specifically, but assured me they can tell (immediately) an individual is American just by looking at him/her.

Although code-switching may feel "natural," as if it were an innate instinct, it isn't. Code-switching is a learned process that is reenacted with a purpose. The purpose is to ensure my sense of belongingness, to feel as much like an "insider" as possible. I code-switch every day, depending on my surroundings. It has become such a skill that sometimes I don't even realize I do it. Code-switching is a form of social survival.

(Re)Appropriating

The third dialectical tension ABC students face is conformity to/defiance against (the norm). Participants hold the belief that there are qualifiers for being a "normal" Chinese person or a "normal" American person. As Chinese-Americans, we believe we deviate from what others consider "normal" because of our multicultural background. A tension exists between the need to conform to and the need to defy a certain "norm." For

83

example, participants feel the pressure to conform to the model minority stereotype, yet ultimately must defy it due to its unattainable expectations. In order to cope with this tension, the interviewees and I share how we manage to appropriate these stereotypes in a healthy way. Thus, the third pattern of praxis is appropriating, or reframing the meaning of certain cultural stereotypes or assumptions.

Participants cope with Chinese stereotypes, specifically the model minority stereotype, by re-appropriating their terms and expectations. Even though none of the students identify themselves as typical model minority students (such as having straight As, studying hours every day, and excelling in math) we all value education and stress its importance. Fulfilling the model minority stereotype is an unreachable and unrealistic goal. Students become rightfully frustrated at feeling as though they must meet those standards. Yet, most participants re-appropriate these standards in ways that are reachable and realistic to them. An example of this is when Jason provides a productive outcome in response to the model minority stereotype. He shares, "They [classmates] think I've got like a 4.0 or something. They probably think it's easy for me to get good grades when it's not. So, I organized this study group for the midterm and it helped everyone, including myself, out a lot." Similar to Jason's re-appropriation method, many other participants indicate how the model minority discourse can result in positive outcomes. For example, Martin says he is pretty good at math and doesn't mind others asking him for help. Jason and Martin reappropriate the model minority stereotype and reframe it into a positive outlook. Others find the model minority stereotype can also be a healthy motivation for being studious.

Most students re-appropriate the model minority discourse in a positive way, yet a few other participants have a very different approach. Re-appropriating the model minority discourse somewhat differently is Sarah's approach. She explains, "When I took pre-cal, I asked the teacher if he could explain something on the board, and he just looked at me weird, like, 'you're Chinese, why don't you know this?'" According to Sarah, this particular professor would pick on Asian students in class to answer all his questions. As a strategy, Sarah and her Chinese friends would speak to one another in Chinese to get the answers if they didn't know it. She says, "A group of us would always be getting the answers from everybody in class, and he wouldn't understand. He just thought we were asking each other for a pencil or something." Congruent with Sarah's clandestine behavior, other students also confess to situations in which they would speak Chinese to their classmates to get answers to tests or assignments without the teacher knowing. In this case, the participants also view this stereotype positively because teachers do not suspect "model minorities" to be dishonest or devious in any way.

Re-appropriation of the model minority discourse, as well as other Chinese stereotypes reframes its negative and oppressive implications. That is, students can be empowered instead of suppressed by these impractical and over-generalized standards.

Balancing

The fourth emergent tension, according to ABC participants, is fulfillment/failure (i.e., fulfilling to meet certain cultural expectations, while failing to meet others). Having to meet cultural and social expectations is one of the most difficult aspects of having a multicultural identity. Our conversations reveal how ABC students find the need to

fulfill expectations from parents to be diligent, hard-working students in their academic lives while trying to fulfill expectations from friends to be engaged in an active social life. Most participants associate succeeding in academic life as fulfilling expectations from the Chinese community (i.e., from family members, specifically parents). They associate having a robust social life as fulfilling expectations from the American community (i.e., from friends, specifically Caucasian friends). Because this tension causes much strife, participants articulate a need for a balance among these expectations. The fourth pattern of praxis is balancing, or distributing equal amounts of time and energy for achieving each cultural expectation.

ABC students achieve this balancing act in various ways. Most stress the importance of needing time to work and play. One way students balance expectations is to find social outlets within an academic setting (e.g., joining the Greek system and/or clubs). This way, they can enjoy a social life (i.e., go to parties and social dinners), while still in an academic setting. Kyle had a difficult time explaining the definition of fraternity to his father. He says, "Like, I'm trying to explain I just joined a fraternity. But, he doesn't understand because, in Chinese culture, there is no such thing as a fraternity in school. So, I just told him it was a brotherhood type thing." Here is an example of Kyle trying to fulfill his father's expectations of concentrating on school, while achieving a social life through extra-curricular activities within the university. Shannon explains her involvement with the International House (I House), which is a place to "raise cultural awareness and acceptance among peers." She describes I House as a sorority-like dormitory with many international students as residents. They have

social events, parties, and dinners all oriented toward cultural awareness. Even though the I House is located on the SJSU campus, this is a place where Shannon is surrounded by friends and enjoys being social. Many other clubs participants join in order to achieve an active social life include athletic clubs, department clubs and cultural clubs.

Other participants use a more individualistic approach to balancing work and play. This approach involves setting timelines and schedules. For example, students give themselves an allotted time to do homework, then an allotted time for social events. In other words, students will do homework, and then reward themselves with a night out. Daniel explains, "I've always worked better under pressure, so I put things all to the last minute. But, I get it together." After he finishes, he explains, "Then, I'll go and have a cold beer." Like, Daniel, William reveals, "If I do homework the entire day, I need to do something to revitalize myself. I want to do all my work, and then go have my fun." Martin, on the other hand, who also balances his schedule, puts play before work. He explains, "Sometimes, I put having fun first, and do homework at night. It's a bad strategy, but it's still a balance." In all these cases, students are well aware of the importance of both work and play; therefore, they all devote enough time and energy to both areas. This way, they fulfill expectations as best as they can.

To me, having an active and healthy social life is worth not achieving a 4.0. Throughout my academic career, having friends to go out with a couple of nights a week ensures my sanity. It provides me with a sense of catharsis, knowing that I worked hard on an assignment and now I can reward myself with a night of fun. Like Martin says,

"You have your own balance of work and play." As long as it truly is a balance, this pattern of praxis is crucial to one's well-being as a student.

Prioritizing

The last dialectical tension that surfaced in our interviews is obligation/independence. ABC students struggle with familial obligations as well as the desire to accomplish independent goals. For the most part, participants believe fulfilling familial obligations represents honoring their Chinese culture and excelling in the role of Chinese son/daughter, while achieving individual accomplishments represents the mantra of the American dream: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Again, this notion of the collectivistic versus the individualistic causes a considerable point of tension within the ABC community. Similar to the strategic balancing act ABC students must perform, participants must prioritize in order to attain a harmonious balance between familial desires and self desires. The last pattern of praxis is prioritizing. Prioritizing involves choosing the values that students treasure the most, and acting on behalf of those values.

The main difference between balancing and prioritizing is this: When students balance time and energy between work and play, they do so in order to be as productive as possible. Therefore, there is a pragmatic outcome of completing homework while meeting social needs. Prioritizing is less about balancing time and energy for a specific outcome, and more about being true to oneself and performing communicative acts in such a way as to represent that. An example of this pattern of praxis is the value of filial piety. Across the board, students make it a key point to acknowledge the value of respecting elders and being extremely invested in their parents' well-being. At the same

time, students express their value of friendships and romantic relationships. When these values conflict with one another, students must prioritize and choose which value should hold more weight.

During our conversations, many participants disclose their yearning for a "typical American college lifestyle." This involves dorm-life, frat parties, and a greater sense of freedom. Yet, they feel that they cannot achieve this college lifestyle due to family obligations. For many participants, this means attending regular family dinners despite previous social engagements. Cynthia provides an example, "Whenever I say, 'My dad wants to have dinner with me.' They (friends) will say, 'Didn't you guys just have dinner?!' I'll be like, 'Yea, I did. We're having dinner again. What's wrong with that?!'" Here, Cynthia explains how her friends do not understand her obligation to have dinners with her family on a consistent basis. The act of sharing a meal with our family in Chinese culture is extremely meaningful. The presence of each family member and the company shared is what matters the most. Also, there are so many cultural implications involved, including seating arrangements (always allowing your elders to sit first), proper table etiquette (always serving your elders first), and (of course) the dishes being themselves. Because a family meal in a Chinese household is so significant, participants make family events a top priority.

Many participants find it odd that their non-Asian classmates and friends do not live by these obligations. To explain this phenomenon, Martin clarifies, "In American culture, friends come first. If you have a scheduling conflict between a family gathering and hanging out with friends, friends would come first. The American side of me wants

to go out with friends more." Martin explains that the significance of friendships in American culture is greater than in Chinese culture. When he is faced with a scheduling conflict, he must evaluate both commitments and decide which one is more important at that time. Ultimately, his decision always swings toward his family commitments. He further explains, "My mom would say, 'We have dinner tomorrow, and then always makes me cancel [with friends].'" Like most participants, Martin believes he should highly regard family obligations.

Sharing similar beliefs to many of the participants I interviewed, I believe in the deep connection between family and culture. Our families are a direct tie to our culture. Honoring our family is equivalent to honoring our Chinese culture. From our family interactions, we learn our own ancestry and history. We acknowledge the collaborative effort involved in granting us our position here in this country. Family is our top priority because we credit them with our success. With all the sacrifices they have made for us to be here today, we honor our culture by honoring our family.

I truly had the privilege of conversing with 11 delightful American born Chinese students who are experiencing and coping with dialectical tensions in their lives; the same tensions that I continue to experience and cope. In the last chapter of this thesis, I conclude with how I can apply these findings to the communication studies discipline, as well as within the classroom.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

As I complete the last stages of thesis work, I reflect on what this study means to me. I reflect on the joyous, yet arduous journey this has been for me. This study places dialectical theory within a cultural context in order to formulate a better understanding of how dialectics have shaped my own, as well as each participant's, multicultural identities. After engaging in very enlightening conversations with 11 American born Chinese college students, I believe we not only achieved a better understanding of our multicultural identity negotiation process, we accomplished an important research goal: situating theory in relation to practice. In order to integrate theory and practice, we integrate "ways of knowing with habits of being" (hooks, 1994, p. 43). That is, consistent with dialectical theory, my participants and I are social actors creating change through joint action. On more than one occasion, participants said to me, "I never thought about this before," or, "This is really making me think." I am delighted to inspire them to think about their cultural identities in new ways because each of them inspired me to think about my own cultural identities in vastly different ways. Shifting and reframing the way we understand this phenomenon is the first step in generating social change.

The introductory chapter of this thesis study describes the path that has led me to investigate the dialectics of cultural identity negotiation. This final chapter concludes with how the findings of this investigation address each research question and inspire a more promising future. A future where our student selves are not isolated entities, but identities enriched with cultural influence. As ABC students, we must be reluctant to

polarize our cultures. Instead, we must learn how our multicultural identities are congruent with our education. In other words, how our cultural wisdom can manifest in productive and transformative achievements in academia. We can apply our multicultural knowledge in the classroom to engender multivocality and democracy.

How Findings Address Research Questions

RQ1: How do ABC students communicatively express or perform multicultural identities in the classroom?

In my graduate seminar, my professor divides the class into groups. Each group consists of three to four students. I am very familiar with my two group members. In groups, our professor asks us to engage in a writing activity and complete a handout entitled, "Socially constructing selves through the communication perspective." The handout asks us to define our "approach to life" and aspects of our lives that makes us "happy, satisfied, energized and alive." After my group members and I diligently complete our writing activity, it is time to share what we have written. I volunteer to share, "My approach to life is to be thankful and appreciative for what I have, to count my blessings, and to make my loved ones happy. What make me happy, satisfied, energized, and alive is spending time with loved ones." My group member asks, "When you say 'loved ones' who do you mean?" "Family and friends," I reply. "Your family is such a huge part of who you are, Teresa. You bring your love of family to class. And, it really shows in your work" my group member says.

***

92

The purpose of this writing activity was to illuminate how we socially construct our selves through communicative acts. We learn and create our "approach to life," or our decision and sense-making process through communication with others. The way I communicatively express myself is a product of cultural, social, and personal influences. These influences shape my sense of self. I inevitably bring my "love of family to class" because of my strong sense of loyalty to and connection with my family. Brought up with the value of filial piety, and collectivistic ideologies from my Chinese culture, this "love of family" bleeds into how I present myself in the classroom. Similarly, the participants I interviewed apply certain cultural values within the classroom.

Implications within the Classroom

The first research question seeks to better understand how participants communicatively make sense of their Chinese culture and American culture, specifically within the classroom. That is, what does each culture mean to them? What is the process it takes for them to comprehend each culture? After having a (tentative) understanding of cultures, how do they perform them in the classroom? These findings support Hall's (1976) claim that culture is a learned process through communication. The findings show ABC students have an extremely personal and familial attachment to Chinese culture. Similar to my experience in class, they hold onto their values and ideologies, which bleed into their academic work. On the other hand, students express more distance regarding American culture.

When speaking about Chinese culture, all participants reference their families, traditions, and ideologies. Therefore, they perform their Chinese culture through being

close with their families, practicing certain traditions, and upholding certain ideologies (beliefs and values). For example, in the classroom, students respect their elders by obeying the teacher, not talking back, and remaining quiet in the classroom. This creates a greater power distance between teacher and student. When many professors highly regard participation in the classroom, many ABC students are at a disadvantage. The respect for authority students believe they are showing may actually do them a disservice. In order to address this issue, teachers and students both need to take part in initiating change.

When I was little, before attending elementary school, my mother taught me the importance of respecting authority. She encouraged me to only speak when spoken to, and avoid eye contact at all costs. My mother grew up in Taiwan, and this was how she learned to behave as a student. As a student growing up in America, I knew our academic worlds were drastically different. I had to make an effort to conform to an American way of behaving. Today's ABC college students must take into account the differences between Chinese values and American values. This may mean understanding the difference between respecting authority within a Chinese context and within an American context, and how to perform accordingly. Teachers, on the other hand, may want to reframe the concept of participation within the classroom. This may be in the form of establishing a low power distance by overtly encouraging students to speak (i.e., specifically making a point in class that voicing one's opinion is not at all disrespectful). Initiating this change within the classroom not only builds an inclusive environment among all students, any may potentially decrease the risk of marginalizing any voices.

Although, as bell hooks (1994) reminds me, I must be cautious of "a shallow emphasis on coming to voice, which wrongly suggests there can be some democratization of voice wherein everyone's words will be given equal time and be seen as equally valuable" (p. 186). Because minimizing one's voice, also minimizes one's sense of self; the classroom ought to engender "the recognition of the uniqueness of each voice...[because] associating theses voices with personal experience makes us more acutely aware of each other" (Amaya, 2007; Anzaldúa, 2007; Hong Kingston, 1977; hooks, 1994, p. 186).

In the findings, students express more distance regarding American culture. Most students consider themselves Chinese. A few consider themselves Chinese-American or Asian-American. Interestingly enough, none of the participants considered themselves solely American, even though they were all born in this country. Having an American nationality does not guarantee full acceptance as an American. In other words, according to Espiritu (2008), Asian-Americans have succeeded in this society according to white standards (i.e., having lucrative careers and salaries), but can never be full participants in white society (pp. 124-125). When I ask why they don't consider themselves only American, participants reference their physical features that mark them racially as Chinese. As Cynthia states, "I felt kind of awkward in the comm classes because everyone was like beach Barbie." This is an example of how cultural identity negotiation plays out in the classroom. Here, Cynthia refers to "beach Barbie" as the majority of her racially white classmates. She felt awkward because she was one of the few non-white students in class.

Cynthia's experience is a microcosm of the racial divide in college classrooms. ABC students strongly associate cultural identity with racial identity. Therefore, an inconsistency between race and culture can cause the feeling of awkwardness and separation. Cynthia is American by nationality, and Chinese by ethnicity; however, her American-ness is obfuscated by her physical features. Racial identity completely affects cultural identity negotiation by creating a noticeable, yet often tacit segregation in the classroom. In order to create a change for the better, students and teachers must work together to address this issue.

In order to promote a culturally/racially inclusive classroom, teachers must take an active part in openly communicating about the prevalence of cultural/racial diversity in our lives. Apart from undergraduate classes specifically geared toward intercultural communication, I do not recall many in-depth discussions of cultural/racial implications. It is easy to gloss over many cultural/racial issues due to the false notions of equality in the classroom. According to hooks (1994), "there has to be an acknowledgement that any effort to transform institutions so that they reflect a multicultural standpoint must take into consideration the fears teachers have when asked to shift their paradigms" (p. 36). This means shifting the way we understand our pedagogical choices and being conscious of the fact that "no education is politically neutral" (hooks, 1994, p. 37). In other words, choosing to teach one theorist over another is a political decision that reinforces certain cultural ideologies while silencing others. As a researcher, I want to further investigate how racial constructs affect our cultural identities in greater detail, specifically, how racial constructs afford differential access to cultural communities. This investigation

will grant me greater insight into the racial divide that still exists today with college classrooms. With inherent politics within a multicultural classroom come challenges students must face. These challenges often derive from the existence of tensions between balancing and negotiating our cultural identities in relation to social expectations.

RQ2: What are the dialectical tensions due to the expression or performance of different cultures?

"Thank you for participating in this interview, Kyle. I really appreciate it," I tell one of my participants. "No problem, Miss Teng," he replies. Kyle is one of the students in my Comm 20: Public Speaking class who also happens to an ABC student. "Please call me Teresa," I tell him as we are walking to my office to conduct the interview. We engage in some small talk to make the walk less awkward. What I thought was small talk actually turned out to be a very fascinating realization. "I have to call you Miss Teng-you're my teacher!" he says. I smile, signaling that I completely understand. "So, what are you writing again?" Kyle asks. "I am writing a thesis. In order to graduate with my Master's degree, I need to complete a thesis study," I respond. He looks at me, somewhat shocked, "So you're a student here, too?" I nod. "That's cool. You're like, one of us...but not." We both start laughing. "That's a very interesting way to put it, Kyle. But, I guess you're right."

<div align="center">***</div>

In class, Kyle has always called me Miss Teng, while other students prefer to call me Teresa. As his teacher, he does not address me by my first name as a sign of respect and humility. Raised with the same notion of high power distance among authority

figures, I definitely identify with this. But, when Kyle finds out I am also a student, this power distance is somewhat blurred. As he says,, "You're like one of us...but not..." I am his fellow student, yet I am also his teacher. For the rest of the semester, I notice that he struggles to make sense of our teacher/student relationship. This struggle is an example of a dialectical tension that formed. Through our conversation, we established a paradox with uncertain expectations. As a teacher, I did not know if I lost credibility. After our interview, Kyle called me Teresa for the first time in class. Even though I asked him to address me in this way, he was only able to do so after he learned about my student identity. The interaction with Kyle represents how prevalent dialectical tensions are in our lives, including our academic lives. Because Kyle and I are both American born Chinese students, we had similar expectations of the relationship dynamic between teacher and student. Yet, this was disrupted when the power distance blurred. We experience dialectical tensions in relation to our social expectations.

Implications within the Classroom

The second research question specifically addresses how students negotiate the emergent dialectical tensions multicultural students face. The findings show that the tensions are advantages/limitations (of bilingualism), sufficiency/insufficiency (within cultural communities), conformity to/defiance against (cultural norms), fulfillment/failure (of expectations), and familial obligations/sense of independence.

The common thread between all theses dialectics is the fact that they are constituted in social interaction. Consistent with Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) assumptions of "contradiction," "change," "praxis," and "totality," as well as Mead's

(1959) notion of the development of self through social interaction, participants

acknowledge the significance of societal influences on their sense of self. For example,

an advantage of bilingualism is the ability to communicate with other Chinese speaking

individuals. However, a limitation of bilingualism is the perception of grammatically

incorrect English from teachers. That is, students are aware of this advantage or

limitation due to interaction with others. Similarly, the other dialectics are defined by our

own and others' expectations or interactions. This means that, within the classroom,

every individual plays a part in the construction of our cultural identities and sense of

self.

From this study, I learned that as a teacher I can directly affect each student's

sense of self. As a student, I can directly affect each classmate's sense of self. They may

experience tension due to interactions with me, as well as their classmates. Cultural

identity negotiation is communicated with, through, and between individuals. Not too

long ago, I casually complimented one of my students on his accent. This particular

student was from India, and he had a slight Indian and British accent. I now know that

saying something to the effect of, "I like your accent!" might have a different effect than

I had initially intended. This compliment may have fed into a series of tensions this

student must face regarding his articulation, speech, and language. As Baxter and

Montgomery (1996) state, comprehending our dialectical experiences is neither positive

nor negative, but necessary for social change. (p. 8). Yet, now I am more aware of how

powerful one single speech act can be on the basis of cultural identity negotiation.

In each one of my classes now, whether it is a class I am teaching or a class I am taking, I am aware that there are perpetual contradictions created in every interaction. Negotiating these contradictions or dialectical tensions is such an enlightening learning process for me. I encourage students experiencing multicultural identities to embrace these tensions and explore them in their work. I started writing about my multiculturalism as an undergraduate college student. I noticed that there were inconsistencies and discrepancies between Chinese and American cultural expectations. Without being able to name this discovery, I relied on writing to help me document everything I was feeling. Writing is a transformative act that allows us to gain insight into new ways of knowing. For other students, this may take the form of art, music or performance. There is no way of controlling others' expectations of us, but we are able to appreciate the intent and meaning behind these cultural expectations. Whatever their outlet, I strongly encourage expressing these tensions heuristically in order to better understand this process. This new way of thinking and new way of being is what Amaya (2007) calls "radically rewriting" our cultural identities (p. 195). Radically rewriting ourselves in response to the dialectical tensions we face lead to the performance of patterns of praxis.

RQ3: What are the coping strategies or "patterns of praxis" in response to these tensions?

Noticing a pad and pen on my nightstand, my mother asks, "Is that your journal?" I used to keep a diary when I was a little girl, writing out all my childhood hopes and dreams for the future. "No, it's so I can scribble down notes whenever I think of

something important. Like ideas for my thesis or readings for an assignment," I respond. "You are so much like your grandfather! That's exactly what he does. He writes every day," my mother informs me. My grandfather started writing poems on a daily basis when my grandmother passed; it is his way of communicating with her. "Do you know what he plans on doing with his poems?" I ask my mother. "Nothing. They're just for him. Writing is his way of coping... his way of healing...his way of expressing thoughts he doesn't want to say. It brings him happiness," my mother explains.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

All my narratives in this thesis take place within an academic setting except for this one. Each autoethnographic account references a time in the classroom or on campus when I gained a greater sense of clarity (or complexity) about my lived experiences. This narrative, however, depicts a scene in my home- a scene that tremendously shapes how I am as a student and as a researcher. The significance of this scene is that it reveals a "backstage" look into how I connect my cultural values to my work as a student. When my mother explained the purpose of my grandfather's poems, I realized that I had the same purpose in writing this thesis. Writing is my grandfather's way of coping with the confusion brought on by loss. My mother says, this is "his way of coping...his way of healing...his way of expressing thoughts he doesn't want to say." But, most importantly, "it brings him happiness." The happiness that writing brings my grandfather is the knowledge that he is keeping my grandmother's memory alive. In other words, he is honoring their life together, their love together. These are my grandfather's "praxical communicative choices."

Implications within the Classroom

The goal of the third, and final, research question is to elicit the ways ABC students initiate change through communicative acts in response to tensions. For the most part, we all have reasons for communicating in the manners that we do. According to Baxter and Montgomery (1996), "praxical communicative choices" can "create 'new' dialogic realties," in other words, our choices bring about social change (p. 59). For my grandfather, writing reframes loss as a captured memory. Writing allows him a different, and more hopeful, "way of entering the world" (Goodall, 2000, p. 21). Whether change stems from extreme or trivial cases, we learn to navigate our lives in response to life occurrences. Influenced by my grandfather's writing, I am beginning to understand that this thesis in itself is a pattern of praxis.

As I situate myself in this study, I understand how this writing process has created "new dialogic realities" for me in my comprehension of multiculturalism. The purpose for this thesis is to honor the multicultural identity I have. This means communicating in such a way that makes meaning of the path that has led me here today. As a young Chinese-American woman, there has been a long line of individuals who have paved the way for me. This writing process rewrites and reconstructs my own cultural identities. My writing is relational; I am "writing for an audience [I] care about. [I] am invested in them, because [I] am hoping that what [I] write makes a difference to them and that it makes some kind of contribution. [I] want [my] words to matter to [my] audience" (Goodall, 2000, p. 192). Participants I interviewed voiced a similar desire to honor their parents and elders who have made it possible for them to obtain an American education.

The common thread between these patterns of praxis (helping, restricting, appropriating, balancing and prioritizing) is their high functionality; participants hope to embrace the dialectical tensions to create a positive outcome. That is, they choose communicative acts that will make their parents proud, as well as achieve their own happiness.

The dialectical tensions ABC students face in relation to their multicultural identities may cause confusion and uncertainty. The patterns of praxis participants perform are a response to these tensions- a response in order to achieve a positive change. When participants help other international students, this goes beyond the mere act of translation or interpretation. Helping others honors the history and ancestry that has enabled them to be American born Chinese college students. When participants tell me helping others stems from practicality and empathy, they acknowledge the hardships that their parents and elders went through in order for them to have an acculturated life in this country. It would be remiss of them not to serve others with their bilingualism. Restricting their communicative acts given their context is a sign of respect for that cultural community. Similarly, reappropriating certain stereotypes or preconceived notions can empower and motivate students to excel in school. Parallel to the act of helping others, students reframe certain negative cultural stereotypes (e.g., model minority stereotype) to uphold the value of education that their families instill in them. The last two patterns of praxis, balancing and prioritizing are acts that promote happiness and well-being for participants.

When ABC students perform these patterns of praxis in class, they understand the purpose it serves for themselves, their families, and their cultures. Being an American

born Chinese college student is a blessing we feel we should not take lightly. This study

has taught me that the ways each of us communicates in the classroom serves a greater

purpose. The purpose is to honor the intricate links between family, ancestry, culture,

and history that grants us our seat in the classroom. ABC students are promoting social

and cultural change within the classroom when they are aware of these links, when these

links manifest in their academic work.

<div align="center">Strengths and Limitations of this Study</div>

The greatest strength of this study is that, as a researcher, I am deeply invested in

this holistic and heuristic process. This process has been extremely personal and

meaningful to me. Not only do I situate myself in this study, I truly appreciate the 11

participants I have gotten to know. I set out to explore these individuals' subjective

realities, valuing their experiential knowledge. With engaging, in-depth, dialogic

interviews, I gain a sense of participants' lived experiences through their own authentic

and honest voices. I am less concerned with the factual occurrence of each participant's

experience, and more concerned with their interpretations of that experience. I recognize

the meaning-making process involved in ABC students' cultural experiences as the

nucleus of all communicative acts.

Although some limitations may include sample size or generalizability, I did not

set out to make broadly or authoritatively generalizable claims about the experiences of

Chinese-American students. I consider each individual unique and distinct from others

and each experience contingent on a given context. One implication of this study

however is that future research regarding dialectical tensions should attend to multiple

possible cultures (e.g, age, ability, gender, or sexuality) in identity negotiation. Exploring the emergent dialectical tensions and patterns of praxis from a cultural and gendered context would be fascinating. For example, gender has such significant, inextricable, and distinct roles in Chinese and American cultures; future research in this vein should expand and nuance our understandings of multicultural identity negotiation within communication studies.

Summary

I was fortunate to have the opportunity of meeting and conversing with these American born Chinese San José State University students. Through these conversations, in conjunction with my autoethnographic accounts, we sought out to collaboratively address the three research questions for this study. The first research question explores the ways in which ABC students communicatively express or perform their multicultural identities in the classroom. The findings show participants have personal affiliations with Chinese culture, performing Chinese values and ideologies within the classroom. Participants associated American culture with greater distance. They perform American culture through consumption and pop culture. The significance of these cultural performances is that they can play out in the classroom, potentially causing varying interpretations of power distance, as well as racial/cultural segregation.

The second research question delves into the emergent dialectical tensions due to multicultural identities. The emergent tensions are advantages/limitations (of bilingualism); sufficiency/insufficiency (within cultural communities); conformity to/defiance against (the norm); fulfillment/failure (of expectations); and familial

obligations/sense of independence. Every individual in the classroom plays a part in constructing and reconstructing these dialectics. Social interactions within the classroom always consist of emergent tensions; therefore, we are all agents for social change.

The last research question investigates the patterns of praxis ABC students perform in response to the dialectical tensions. These communicative performances include helping, restricting, (re)appropriating, balancing, and prioritizing. These patterns of praxis serve the purpose of honoring our parents and elders who have paved the way for us, as well as, helping us achieve a sense of well-being and happiness. The most meaningful goal for this thesis is to achieve a greater understanding of multicultural identity negotiation among ABC students in order to strive for social change. I know this goal has been achieved whenever we (my participants and I) continue to inquire into the significance and implications of multiculturalism.

<div align="center">***</div>

My grandfather walks toward me as I am typing on my computer. "Hi Grandpa," I greet him. "Still up?" he asks. I nod, "I'm working on my thesis." "What is it about?" he questions. "My experiences as a Chinese-American, growing up with two cultures," I reply. "Can I help?" my grandpa offers. "You already have," I say with a smile. "I'm proud of you," he says, walking back to his room and sipping his tea.

In this thesis study, I am honoring my past, appreciative of my present, and hopeful for my future as an American born Chinese college student. That is, I honor my ancestors, elders, and parents who have made it possible for me to obtain an education in the United States. I appreciate all my fellow ABC students who are presently

experiencing the richness and beauty of multiculturalism. I am hopeful for the future of this discipline, hopeful that future research will explore more in-depth the significance of multicultural identity negotiation in academia.

REFERENCES

Almeida, E. P. (2004). A discourse analysis of student perceptions of their communication competence. *Communication Education, 53*(4), 357-364.

Amaya, H. (2007). Performing acculturation: Rewriting the Latina/o immigrant self. *Text and Performance Quarterly, 27*(3), 194-212.

Anzaldúa, G. (2007). *Borderlands la frontera: The new Mestiza.* (3rd ed.,). San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books.

Baxter, L. (2004). Dialgoues of relating. In R. Anderson, L.A. Baxter, & K.N. Cissna (Eds.), *Dialogue: Theorizing difference in communication studies.* Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Baxter, L. A. & Montgomery, B.M. (1996). *Relating dialogues & dialectics.* New York: The Guilford Press.

Bochner, A.P., Ellis, C., & Tillmann-Healy, L. (1998). Mucking around looking for truth. In B.M. Montgomery & L.A. Baxter (Eds.), *Dialectical approaches to studying personal relationships* (pp. 41-62). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Burrell, G. & Morgan, G. (1979). *Sociological paradigms and organizational analysis.* London: Heinemann.

Chae, H. S. (2004). Talking back to the Asian model minority discourse: Korean-origin youth experiences in high school. *Journal of Intercultural Studies, 25*(1), 59-73.

Chen, V. (1992). The construction of Chinese American women's identity. In L. F. Rakow (Ed.), *Women making meaning* (pp. 225-243). New York: Routledge.

Crawford, L. (1996). Personal ethnography. *Communication Monographs, 63*(2), 158-171.

Edwards, C. & Harwood, J. (2003). Social identity in the classroom: An examination of age identification between students and instructors. *Communication Education, 52*(1), 60-65.

Espiritu, Y. L. (2008). *Asian American women and men: labor, laws, and love.* Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc.

Fassett, D. & Warren, J. (2007). *Critical communication pedagogy.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Freire, P. (2007). *Pedagogy of the oppressed: 30th anniversary edition.* New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.

Fujimoto, E. (2001). Japanese-ness, whiteness, and the "Other" in Japan's internationalization. In M. J. Collier (Ed.), *International and Intercultural Communication Annual, XXIV; Transforming communication about culture: Critical new directions* (pp. 1-24). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Goffman, E. (1958). *The presentation of self in everyday life.* Edinburgh, UK: University of Edinburgh.

Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual.* Chicago: Doubleday/ALDINE.

Goffman, E. (1969). *Strategic interaction.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.

Goodall, H. L. (2000). *Writing the new ethnography.* Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

Gudykunst, W. B. & Kim, Y. Y. (1984). *Methods for intercultural communication research.* Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE.

Hall, E. (1976). *Beyond culture.* Garden City, NY: Anchor/Doubleday.

Hall, E. (1981). *Silent language.* New York: Anchor/Doubleday.

Harris, T. M. (2003). Impacting student perceptions of attitudes toward race in the interracial communication course. *Communication Education, 52*(3/4), 311-317.

Hong Kingston, M. (1977). *The woman warrior: Memoirs of a girlhood among ghosts.* NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom.* New York: Routledge.

Johnson, J. R. & Bhatt, A. J. (2003). Gendered and racialized identities and alliances in the classroom: Formations in/of resistive space. *Communication Education, 52*(3/4), 230-244.

Kramarae, C. (2005). Muted group theory and communication: Asking dangerous questions. *Women and Language, 28*(2), 55-62.

Kwong, P. & Miscevic, D. (2005). *Chinese America: The untold story of America's oldest new community.* New York: The New Press.

Lindlof, T. R. & Taylor, B. C. (2002). *Qualitative communication research methods.* (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Lu, X. (2001). Bulcultural identity development and Chinese community formation: An ethnographic study of Chinese schools in Chicago. *The Howard Journal of Communications, 12,* 203-220.

Lustig, M. W. & Koester, J. (2006). *Intercultural competence: Interpersonal communication across cultures* (5th ed. ,). Boston: Pearce.

Madison, D. S. (2005). *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Martin, J. N. & Nakayama, T. K. (1999). Thinking about culture dialectically. *Communication Theory, 9*(1), 1-25.

Mead, G. H. (1959). *Mind, self and society.* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Moghaddam, F. M., Taylor, D. M. & Wright, S. C. (1993). *Social psychology in cross cultural perspective.* New York: W. H. Freeman and Company.

Moon, D. G. (1996). Concepts of 'Culture': Implications from intercultural communication research. *Communication Quarterly, 44*(1), 70-84.

Mortenson, S. T. (2006). Cultural differences and similarities in seeking social support as a response to academic failure: A comparison of American and Chinese College Students. *Communication Education, 55*(2), 127-146.

Olmsted, A. P. (1998). Words are acts: Critical race theory as a rhetorical construct. *The Howard Journal of Communications, 9,* 323-331.

Ponterotto, J. G. & Pedersen, P. B. (1993). Minority identity development. In J. G. Ponterotto & P. B. Pedersen (Eds.), *Preventing prejudice* (pp. 39-62). Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

Rich, S. & Davis, L. (2007). Insights into the strategic ways in which two bilingual children in the early years seek to negotiate the competing demands on their identity in their home and school worlds. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 15*(1), 35-47.

San José State University. (2009). *SJSU facts and figures 2007-2008.* Retrieved May 1, 2009, from San José State University. Website: http://www.sjsu.edu/about_sjsu/facts_and_figures/factsfigures/index.htm.
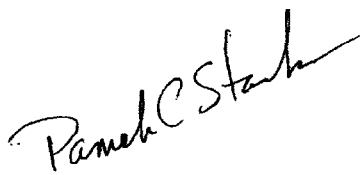
Sereno, K. K. & Mortenson, C. D. (1970). Foundations of communication theory. New York: Harper & Row.

Shi, X & Lu, X. (2007). Bilingual and bicultural development of Chinese American adolescents and young adults: A comparative study. *The Howard Journal of Communications, 18,* 313-333.

Shi, X. (2006). Gender, identity and intercultural transformation in second language socialization. *Language and Intercultural Communication, 6*(1), 2-17.

Souto-Manning, M. (2007). Immigrant families and children (re)develop identities in a new context. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 34*(6), 399-405.

Starkey, H. (2002). Language education, identities and citizenship: Developing cosmopolitan perspectives. *Language and Intercultural Communication, 7*(1), 56-71.

Ting-Toomey, S. (1991). Intimacy expression in three cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 15,* 29-46.

Ting-Toomey, S., Gao, G., Trubisky, P., Yang, Z., Kim, H. S. Lin, S. L., Nishida, T. (1991). Culture, face maintenance and styles of handling interpersonal conflicts: A study in five cultures. *International Journal of Conflict Management, 2,* 275-296.

Ting-Toomey, S. & Korzenny, F. (1991). *Cross-cultural interpersonal communication.* Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

Wood, J. (2004). *Communication theories in action: An introduction.* (3rd ed.) Canada: Wadsworth.

Wong, W. (2006). Understanding dialectical thinking from a cultural-historical perspective. *Philosophical Psychology, 19,* (2), 239-260.

Yin, J. (2005). Constructing the Other: A critical reading of The Joy Luck Club. *The Howard Journal of Communications, 16,* 149-175).

Yin, J. & Miike, Y. (2008). A textual analysis of fortune cookie sayings: How Chinese are they? *The Howard Journal of Communications, 19,* 18-43.

Zhang, Q. (2007). Family communication patterns, and conflict styles in Chinese parent-child relationships. *Communication Quarterly, 55*(1), 113-128.

APPENDIX A
Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

To: Teresa Teng

From: Pamela Stacks, Ph.D.
        Associate Vice President
        Graduate Studies and Research

Date: May 18, 2009

The Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board has approved your request to use human subjects in the study entitled:

"How American Born Chinese College Students Negotiate their Multicultural Identities in the Classroom: An Interpretive Study"

This approval is contingent upon the subjects participating in your research project being appropriately protected from risk. This includes the protection of the anonymity of the subjects' identity when they participate in your research project, and with regard to all data that may be collected from the subjects. The approval includes continued monitoring of your research by the Board to assure that the subjects are being adequately and properly protected from such risks. If at any time a subject becomes injured or complains of injury, you must notify Dr. Pamela Stacks. Ph.D. immediately. Injury includes but is not limited to bodily harm, psychological trauma, and release of potentially damaging personal information. This approval for the human subject's portion of your project is in effect for one year, and data collection beyond May 18, 2010 requires an extension request.

Please also be advised that all subjects need to be fully informed and aware that their participation in your research project is voluntary, and that he or she may withdraw from the project at any time. Further, a subject's participation, refusal to participate, or withdrawal will not affect any services that the subject is receiving or will receive at the institution in which the research is being conducted.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (408) 924-2427.

Protocol #S0902161

cc.   Deanna Fassett   0112

APPENDIX B
Letter of Consent

Agreement to Participate in Research

Responsible Investigator: Teresa Teng
Title of Protocol: How American Born Chinese College Students Negotiate their Multicultural Identities in the Classroom: An Interpretive Study

1. You have been asked to participate in a research study investigating how American born Chinese college students negotiate their multicultural identities in the classroom.

2. You will be asked participate in 1 interview (approximately 2 to 3 hours long) with Teresa Teng, an SJSU graduate student, at times, dates and locations that are mutually convenient: these discussions will be audio-taped.

3. While you are participating in this study, you may choose to reflect on personal experiences that are challenging or uncomfortable. You may enjoy having the opportunity to share your experiences as an American born Chinese college student.

4. Although the results of this study may be published, no information that could identify you will be included.

5. You will receive no monetary compensation for participation in this research study.

6. Questions about this research may be addressed to Teresa Teng, (408) 924-5388. <teng.teresa@yahoo.com>. Complaints about the research may be presented to Dr. Dennis Jaehne, Department Chair, Department of Communication Studies, (408) 924-5360 Questions about research subjects' rights, or a research-related injury, may be presented to Dr. Pamela Stacks, Associate Vice President, Graduate Admissions and Program Evaluations. 408-924-2427.

7. No service of any kind, to which you are otherwise entitled, will be lost or jeopardized if you choose to not participate in this study.

8. Your consent is being given voluntarily. You may refuse to participate in the entire study or in any part of the study. If you decide to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time without any negative effect on your relations with San José State University or with any other participating institutions or agencies.

9. At the time that you sign this consent form, you will receive a copy of it for your records, signed and dated by the investigator.

•   **The signature of a participant on this document indicates agreement to participate in the study.**

•   **The signature of a researcher on this document indicates agreement to include the above named participant in the research and attestation that the participant has been fully informed of her or his rights.**

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____
Investigator's Signature   Date

115

APPENDIX C
Interview Guide

Interview Guide for ABC College Student interviews

RQ 1: In what ways do American born Chinese college students communicatively express or perform their multicultural identities in the classroom?

- What is your name? Or your preferred pseudonym?
- How old are you? (What year in college)
- Are you first-generation Chinese American? (The first generation to be born in the United States). If so, what is/are your parents' country/ies of origin?
- Are you bi/multi-lingual? (Fluent in one or more Chinese dialects). If so, what languages do you speak?
- Do you refer to yourself as Chinese, Chinese American, American, Taiwanese, Cantonese, etc. ?
- What does being Chinese mean to you? Please explain.
    o Who taught you about Chinese culture?
- What does being American (born in America) mean to you?
- Can you please define American culture? Please explain.
    o Who taught you about American culture?

RQ 2: What are the dialectical tensions due to the expression or performance of different cultures?

- Do you think being bi/multi-lingual has its advantages?
    o Disadvantages? Why? Can you provide examples?
- Given that you are bi/multi-lingual, how confident are you speaking and writing English?
- Do you have any qualms about your English compared to non-bi/multi-lingual speakers? Please explain.
- Do you have any qualms about your Chinese compared to native-born Chinese speakers? Please explain
- Do you know any other Chinese classmates/friends that do not speak Chinese, or are reluctant to speak Chinese?
    o How do you feel about that?
    o Can you relate? Why or why not?
- In most of your classes, are you one of the few or one of the many Chinese students in your classrooms?
    o How does that make you feel?
    o Does that affect your performance as a student? How so?
- What are the typical racial demographics of your professors?
    o How does that make you feel?
    o Does that affect your performance as a student? How so?
- Have you ever felt that you were treated differently by professors or students because you are Chinese?

- o If so, please provide examples.
- Do you relate more to other ABC's more than native-born Chinese individuals in the classroom? Please explain.
- Please share an experience when there was/were (a) moment/s in the classroom when you identified with one of your cultures over another?
- Have you ever been deemed the "expert" or "voice" of culture due to your Chinese background in the classroom? How does that make you feel? Please provide examples.
- Please describe a time in the classroom when being Chinese was particularly apparent or noticeable to either yourself or others.
- Please describe a time in the classroom when being American was particularly apparent or noticeable to either yourself or others.
- Have you experienced a time when bringing awareness to your culture inside the classroom was uncomfortable for you? Please explain.
- Have you experienced a time when bringing awareness to your culture inside the classroom was a positive experience for you? Please explain.
- You experience a Chinese culture and American culture. Do they ever contradict or conflict with one another? If so, in what ways? Please provide examples.
- Do you experience a cultural gap between you and your parents? Please explain.
- Do you feel there are any conflicting ideologies between you and your parents due to a cultural gap?
-

RQ 3: What are the coping strategies or "patterns of praxis" in response to these tensions?

- What is your first language? What language are you MOST comfortable speaking? Why?
- Is language an important factor to you? Why or why not?
- What language/s do you speak with your parents?
  - o Siblings?
  - o Friends? Why?
- Do you ever speak Chinese to other Chinese classmates?
  - o Why or why not?
  - o Please provide an example of when you spoke Chinese in the classroom.
  - o Please provide an example of when you spoke English to a Chinese-speaking classmate.
- Are there times when you code-switch between the two languages? Please provide examples.
- Do your mannerisms differ between the languages you speak? Please provide examples.
- Please list 5 traits that best describe you.
  - o How much are those traits influenced by your Chinese culture? Please explain and provide examples.

118

- o How much are those traits influenced by your American culture? Please explain and provide examples.
- Please list 5 of your most important roles (i. e., sibling, child, significant other, worker, student, etc.).
  - o How much are those roles influenced by your Chinese culture?
  - o How much are those roles influenced by your American culture?
- How would you describe yourself as a student?
- How would others describe you as a student?
- What are some expectations associated with being a Chinese college student within the Chinese community?
  - o Do you agree/disagree with them?
  - o How does that make you feel?
  - o Do they conflict with your own expectations?
- What are some expectations associated with being an American college student within American community?
  - o Do you agree/disagree with them?
  - o How does that make you feel?
  - o Do they conflict with your own expectations?
- If you could change something (anything) about being ABC, what would it be? And why?
- Do you have anything to add?

<center>THANK YOU.</center>