

Parental School Choices in Market-Oriented School Systems:

Why Middle Class Asian Immigrants Self-Select into

Specialized Academic Programs

by

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses racial segregation in schools by examining the self-selecting patterns of middle class Asian immigrant parents in a public non-charter school district who enrolled their children in specialized academic programs. This phenomenological study focused on the educational history and the decision-making process of school choice in a sample of 11 Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant parents; a majority of them were identified as Chinese mothers. This study was conducted to answer the research questions: (R1) How do the parents' past experiences play a role in their perception of specialized academic programs and the decision-making process of selecting a school? (R2) What kind of informational networks or sources are used to make school choice? (R3) What are parents' notions of academic achievement or success for their children? (R4) How do parents' perceive specialized programs after engaging in them? This study sought to understand the relationship between the parents' own educational experiences and their negotiation of school choice for their children by collecting data through interviews, focus groups, and artifact documents. This study found that (1) the competitive conditions of the parents' educational experiences attributed to their sociocultural belief of education as social mobility which was a significant factor in their selection of an advanced program and expectations of high academic achievement; (2) mothers identified school reviews from friends as the most important information they obtained when they made school choice; these reviews took

place in their coethnic social networks in Chinese language schools that offered their children heritage language development, academic, and nonacademic-based extracurricular classes; and (3) parents indicated that school choice is a continuous evaluative and comparative process. Overall, the study highlights the participants' bimodal acquisition of school advantages for their children in market-oriented school systems and the roles parents play in establishing cultural norms in making school choice. In return, these norms have depicted the participants in the model minority role, which leads to the perpetuation of the racist stereotype of all Asians as high achievers. This study has presented a multi-layered perspective of how middle class Chinese and Vietnamese American immigrant parents capitalize on specialized academic programs.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Kevin Padilla. The unconditional love that you have blessed me with throughout these past three years have given me the strength and encouragement to pursue my dreams. You have dedicated yourself as the primary caretaker of my overall well-being on days that turned into weeks, months, and years so that I would be able work freely on my research. I am forever grateful for your support in making this dissertation into our dream come true.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As a child, I distinctly remember experiencing my early educational career as one of the few minorities at my elementary school. Day after day, I longed to find someone at school who shared my distinct ethnic physical features with hopes that they could possibly understand my Vietnamese language and heritage. Decades later, I found myself in the same predicament, working as a classroom teacher: I was an Asian American teacher without any students that resembled her ethnicity or cultural identity. Considering that I worked for the largest school district in the city, and one that had a growing Asian American population, I started to wonder where all the children were and quickly learned that many of them were enrolled in specialized programs within the district. Why were the programs so appealing to Asian American families? How did they find out about them? What made them choose that particular program over the regular academic curriculum that I was teaching? I could not help but reflect upon my own refugee parents and the distance they kept from the school system while I was growing up. I compared their experience to the Asian American parents that were actively seeking out educational opportunities for their children by making choosing a school rather than using the existing system. A few years later in a doctoral program, I found myself engaging in literature that gave multiple perspectives of the Asian American experience in the educational

school system, and this literature served as a gateway to this dissertation. This research study investigated how middle class Asian American families are self-selecting into specialized programs by examining Asian American immigrant parents and their decision making of school choice.

Background

The *choice and free market* of public schools in states such as Arizona provides the community with options for parents and students in seeking out the most beneficial type of education that is consistent with their educational needs and expectations. The development of the charter school system was to assume the responsibility of an alternative route in increasing the quality of education in America by providing parents with more choices. However, the amount of socially distinctive schools in the nation has been a part of a persistent conversation which examines academic and racial segregation implied to school choice. “The rhetoric of school choice positions parents and students as consumers of schooling; it implies that all parents equally informed, politically connected, and capable of securing for their own children in the best education” (Barlett et al., 2002, p.1). Theorists, such as Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) have also questioned if the freedom and autonomy that is given to educational systems to enforce its own standards and hierarchies are an example of the demands of the economic system which legitimizes social class reproduction by transmitting its hierarchies into academic hierarchies. Studies that address this notion of segregation in

charter schools have closely examined key components in the different aspects that parents take into consideration when selecting a charter school (Barlett et al., 2002; Garcia, 2008, Kleitz et al., 2000; Teske & Schneider, 2001; Schneider et al., 1998; Weiher & Tedin, 2002). The components that drive school choice are the most significant factors in how non-charter public school systems have responded to this new market of free charters by offering specialized academic programs.

The fear that parental choice in charter schools has increased segregation in the charter school system has been examined in various ways. In one charter system, Weiher and Tedin (2002) examined the possibilities that parents sort their children based on school preferences that are correlated with race and ethnicity. The results showed that after parents make school choice, students from all racial and ethnic groups enrolled in charter schools with higher populations of students that share their same racial and ethnic background. However, research done by Schneider and colleagues (1998) found that there was a difference in race and class within household preferences for school choice but not enough data to conclude that there were systematic differences in preferences of parents by race and class. Consequently, racial segregation studies in charter schools have incorporated the parents' perceptions of their school and the components of how they are making their school choice but there is a lack of research that

uses the qualitative research approach to learn how certain factors are utilized in the decision making of school choice.

Often times in educational research, belief systems and expectations of educational behaviors and achievement of Asian American students and their families have been associated with the possession of similar components of the educational experiences of European families (Sy & Schulenberg, 2005). However, I have found that it is most convenient for educational studies to identify the commonalities between Asian Americans and the dominant class when addressing factors related to academic achievement. This notion of Asian American academic achievement in combination with sharing dominant class characteristics allows for the perpetuation of Asian Americans as the *model minority*. This stereotype depicts all Asian American students as academically successful, problem-free, studious minorities. "The model minority stereotype maintains the dominance of Whites in the racial hierarchy by diverting attention away from racial inequality and by setting standards for how minorities should behave" (Lee, 2009, p.7). The misrepresentation of the Asian American population in educational research by the perception of all Asian Americans as one panethnic race compromises the existence of the variability amongst different Asian ethnic groups. As a result, studies involving Asian American parents and how they negotiate their students' future opportunities may not be

accurately captured in studies without identifying their ethnic group differences.

Statement of the Problem

Research indicates that the market-oriented educational system in Arizona has increased racial and academic segregation in public schools, yet there are limited amounts of qualitative studies that address the factors that lead parents to make segregated school choices in non-charter school systems. In addition, Asian American subgroups are rarely represented in studies that revolve around parental school preferences that attribute to segregated school conditions. Hence, there is little information on why some Asian American subgroups isolate themselves into certain types of schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the self-selecting patterns of middle class Asian American families in specialized academic programs. This was done by examining Asian American immigrant parents' decision making of school choice in one of the largest school districts in the state of Arizona. All names of participants, programs, schools, and town in this study are pseudonyms.

Four questions guided the study:

1. How do past educational experiences of middle class Asian American immigrant parents play a role in their perception of

specialized academic programs and their decision-making process when selecting a school for their children?

2. What kind of informational networks or sources do middle class Asian American Immigrant parents use to choose a school for their children?
3. What are middle class Asian American immigrant parents' notions of academic achievement or success for their children?
4. How do middle class Asian American immigrant parents perceive specialized academic programs after having their children participate in them?

Significance of the Study

The goal of this study was to provide greater depth about specific Asian American ethnic groups that participate in school choice. While there have been studies done on school choice, none have focused completely on the Asian American population. Highlighting the cultural and socioeconomic factors that play a role in school choice will extend the discussion of inequitable schooling of Asian American subgroups and minority students. The long-range goal of this study was to provide more information to the larger body of research that addresses the topic of self-selecting patterns and racial segregation in specialized academic programs in market-oriented school systems.

Delimitations of the Study

According to the APAZI Asian American and Pacific Islander Community Survey (2006), more than 50% of the Asian American population in Arizona is comprised of Chinese Americans, Filipino Americans, and Asian Indian Americans. Therefore, this study acknowledged the unbalanced distribution of Asian American subgroups in the state of Arizona and viewed the Chinese and Vietnamese parents in this study as a small sample within a larger population of the *Asian alone* category of the U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). In addition, the schools and district highlighted in this study is comprised of mostly middle class families, which is not representative of the low-income communities in Arizona. Therefore, the demographic setting of this study limited the opportunity for investigating the range and variability of how Asian American immigrant parents in different social classes negotiate schooling for their children in market-oriented school systems.

Conceptual Framework

Cultural Capital Theory

Pierre Bourdieu (1986) developed a theory of capital that gives us structure to our social world, which provides constraints on or may govern the chances of success for practices (p.46). Bourdieu's development of cultural capital served as a theoretical hypothesis to explain the unequal

academic achievement of children from differing social classes. Bourdieu (as cited in Lareau, 2000), suggested that the cultural experiences in the home influence how children adjust to school and academic achievement.

Bourdieu and Passeron believed that within the social sciences, in order to develop meaningful explanations, “isolable properties variations which must be understood as elements in *structure* and moments in a *process*” (1977, p.87). Bourdieu and Passeron also described that it is essential to distinguish the relationship between structure and process:

The educational process of differential elimination according to social class (leading, at every moment, to a determinate distribution of competencies within the various categories of survivors) is the product of the continuous action of the factors which define the positions of the different classes with regard to the school system, i.e., cultural capital and class ethos. (p.87)

In this study, the structure and function of the market-oriented school system enabled the researcher to investigate the process of decision making through the identification of cultural capital in middle class Asian American immigrant parents. The cultural capital of Asian American immigrant parents could serve as factors that define the different classes in the school system. Bourdieu (1986) theorized that three forms of cultural capital exist: the embodied state, objectified state, and the institutionalized state. In relation to this study, the embodied state of cultural capital could be

described as the dispositions of Asian American parents' belief systems and cultural practices prior to immigration into the United States and the negotiation of those ideas into their perspective of education for their student in the United States. He continued to explain that cultural capital in the objectified state held characteristics that could only be defined by the relationship with cultural capital in the embodied state. The objectified state of cultural capital within this study could have been evidenced by the conscious or subconscious cultural parenting practices that leads to the transmittal of cultural capital in the form of extra-curricular activities in music or the arts (music or art lessons, museum trips, cultural experiences). The last form of cultural capital, the institutionalized form, is the objectification of cultural capital in the form of academic qualifications. During the course of this study, cultural capital in the institutionalized form may have been substantiated by the educational expectations of Asian immigrants for their children. Bourdieu (1986) explains the institutionalized form of cultural capital:

By conferring institutional recognition on the cultural capital possessed by any given agent, the academic qualification also makes it possible to compare the qualification holders and even to exchange them. Furthermore, it makes it possible to establish conversion rates between cultural capital and economic capital by guaranteeing the monetary value of a given academic capital. (p.51)

Therefore, discourse relating to parents' expectations of their children receiving academic degrees or professional jobs in this study could serve as evidence of cultural capital in the institutionalized form. The investigation of Asian American immigrant parent choices in education within the three states of cultural capital and those particular components described above may support cultural transmission and social reproduction within specialized academic programs in market-oriented school systems. The significance of cultural capital transmission and its relationship to economic capital is expressed in the following statement by Bourdieu (1986):

The transmission of cultural capital is no doubt the best-hidden form of hereditary transmission of capital, and it therefore receives proportionately greater weight in the system of reproduction strategies, as the direct, visible forms of transmission tend to be more strongly censored and controlled. (p.49)

He also states that the linkage between economic and cultural capital is established through the mediation of the time needed for acquisition. The essence of time between cultural and economic capital within this study could be specific to the time students are engaged in their academic program that possibly adheres to the dominant class educational values and system. Using the French educational system as their example, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) believed the following:

The system has been able to find in the external demand for mass-produced, guaranteed, interchangeable “products” the opportunity to perpetuate – while making it serve another social function related to the interest and ideals of other social classes – the tradition of competition for competition’s sake. (p.148)

Although this study focuses on the ideological ideas and ways that Asian American immigrant parents may have utilized their cultural capital to transmit cultural capital to their student in all three forms (embodied, objectified, institutionalized) within the educational system, the significance of the market-oriented ideas in the educational system according to cultural capital theory provided the foundation for the perpetuation and reproduction of social classes. Therefore, this study examines data that may have supported cultural capital transmission within the dominant class educational system as an example of social class reproduction. This was done by dissecting the variation of the cultural and educational experiences of Asian American parents and how it related to their decision making of school choice.

The Process of Commodification in Education

Stephen Ball’s (2004) exploration of the *process of commodification in education* served as an extension to explain the context of the specialized programs in this study. The competition-based market of education in this study provided the conditions for the commodification of education, by

assigning economic value to something that was not considered in economic terms in the past. Bourdieu (1986) explained the significance of *cultural capital theory* in the development of human capital by faulting economists in the way that they measure the relationship between the rates of profit on educational investment and on economic investment. According to Bourdieu, economists only take into consideration scholastic investment in terms of monetary investments for profits in their measurement (cost of schooling, cash equivalent of time dedicated to study). Bourdieu (1986) expanded on the relationship between educational investment and cultural capital:

Furthermore, because they relate scholastic investment strategies to the whole set of educational strategies and to the system of reproduction strategies, they inevitably, by a necessary paradox, let slip the best hidden and socially most determinant educational investment, namely, the domestic transmission of cultural capital.
(p.48)

The present market of the educational system in the commodification process supports Bourdieu's belief (as cited in Lareau, 2000, p.7) that "schools draw unevenly on the social and cultural resources in the society." Hence, each social field in the process of commodifying education was used as a guideline to address how parents may have utilized, transmitted, and reproduced cultural capital to in the educational school system. The

relationship between Ball's commodification of education and Bourdieu's cultural capital theory was described in the following three social fields:

1. *Childhood and Parenting:*

The commodification of education in relation to childhood and parenting includes the idea that "parents are expected to act as 'risk managers'; 'committed and opportunistic actions' are required to ensure the best for your child in relation to an increasingly competitive and unpredictable future and resulting dilemmas about how to act for the best" (Ball, 2004, p.7). According to this study, the fear of being a risk-taker or the faulted parent in making unsound school choices may affect how Asian American immigrant parents make school choices. This could have been documented by the commonalities found within the specialized academic environment and educational tools presently used and those that were once a part of the parent's own schooling. The comfort of knowing that since the parents found success in the same type of learning environment, then it can be expected that their own children will do the same. This type of belief system and parenting practices also takes form in the embodied state of Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital theory.

2. *Social relationships in education*

The commodification of education in relation to social relationships in education could have been identified by the ever-growing popularity of measuring academic achievement and the emphasis on test

scores. "It is how one values human performance in the form of metrics rather than the intrinsic worth as a person" (Ball, 2004, p.7). This perception was examined in regards to Asian American immigrant parents' notions of academic achievement in relation to their consumption of specialized academic programs. Cultural capital in the objectified state may have been evidenced by the ways Asian American immigrant parents engaged in extra-institutional patterns of parenting practices that influence academic achievement.

3. Knowledge

The commodification process in relation to knowledge could have been supported by the ways Asian American immigrant parents acknowledged competition in the educational market by how they perceive other programs or schools. By doing so, this could have been perceived as a conscious effort in how they determined the best route their children to attain academic success. Therefore, the underlying motive of Asian American parents' expectations of their children attaining academic degrees and professional occupations through school choice may have been examples of cultural capital in the institutionalized state.

This study believed that Asian American immigrant parents must possess cultural capital before in engaging in education through these social fields. Here lies the opportunity for Asian American immigrant parents' cultural capital to engage in the commodification process, which then

eventually has the opportunity to transform into economic gains. During the course of this study, if evidence was found that Asian American immigrant parents' expectations of student learning and purpose of education is to develop as economic capital as the final result, then we must take into consideration the social relations and implications of these types of parental expectations in the present state of education.

Relative Functionalism

The idea that Asian American immigrant parents decision-making process of school choice and its relation to their perceptions of academic success under the notion of *relative functionalism* could have been supported by studies that focused on Asian American parental involvement in their students' education, which is discussed in the literature review portion of this study. Relative functionalism considers Asian cultural values that acknowledge the problems of achieving in non-educational areas that are not a linear outcome of educational performance (Sue & Okazaki, 1990). Therefore, this study outlined the Asian cultural values documented by the contributing factors that Asian American parents believed to be indicators of academic success as a practice that may have supported relative functionalism in school choice. This was done in attempt to evidence how Asian American parents acknowledged relative functionalism in their decision making of school choice. The argument made by Hirschman and Wong (1986) that "Education was a channel for social mobility of Asians,

partly because they were frozen out of some sectors of the economy” may continue to hold relevancy in the Asian American perspective of education as a means for social mobility in the study.

Charter School Specialization Theory

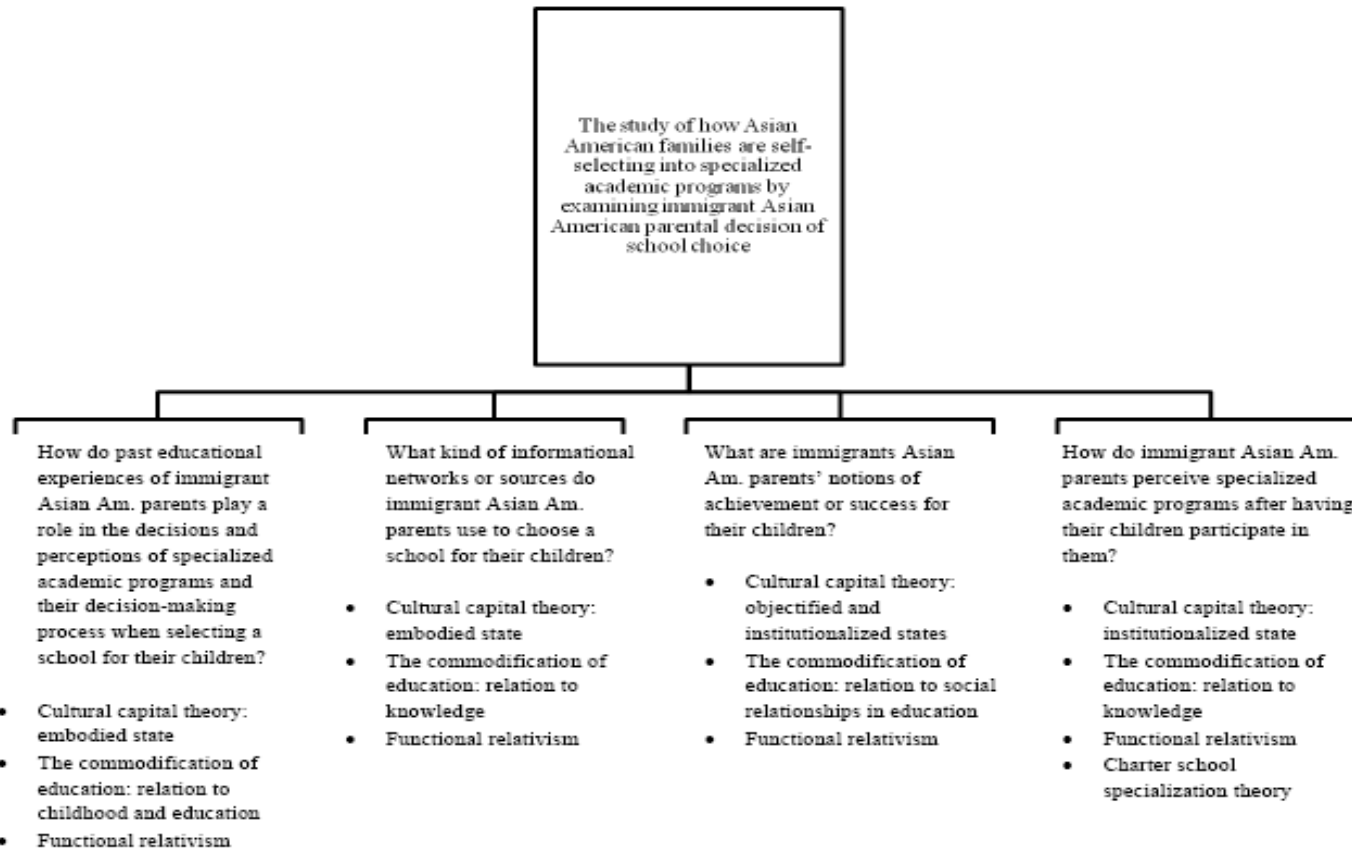
Lastly, charter school theories pertaining to parent choice are used to exemplify how the middle class advantage in education has affected educational decisions in the production and consumer side of non-charter public education. The aspects of this process also served as a guideline to address how specific Asian American groups utilize their culture capital in a dominant class educational system. This provided a further understanding for the context in how Asian American parents in this study make educational decisions for their student in the Cholla School District. Results from this study were also examined for relevancy to the *charter school specialization theory*. The basis of this theory is that parents who share common social, economic, and cultural backgrounds are consistent in making similar school preferences and choices for their children (Garcia, 2008). By means of this theory, this study sought to group or refute the notion that the Asian American community in the Cholla District identifies itself with similar social, economic, and cultural backgrounds of parents who engage themselves in educational practices. This information may support the presence of the *charter school specialization theory* which specifically states charter schools and specialized programs offered in non-charter public

schools in Arizona share more similarities with charter school programs than traditional public school programs. The consistency with which parents make school choices may lead to the segregation of students with similar demographics. This process perpetuates the idea of segregated schools; as a result, Garcia refutes the charter school specialization theory as a strong argument for charter schools advocates. In this regard, the theory suggests that “segregated schools, then, can be explained as the logical consequence of like-minded parents making decisions based upon a shared set of criteria to enter a specialized charter school” (Garcia, 2008, p.8). If the only difference between charter schools and non-charter public schools in Arizona is funding and various regulations, then the entire public school system in Arizona should be considered as a market-oriented, school choice environment. As a result, the conditions of the market-oriented school environment in Arizona perpetuated the cultural transmission and reproduction as a medium for economic capital within our schools. Figure 1 presents the four research questions and its relation to the theories in the conceptual framework.

Figure 1

Research Questions Aligned to Theories in the Conceptual Framework

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Chapter Summary

This study is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 presented an introduction to the study and an overview of the market-oriented school system in Arizona, which serves as avenue for racial and academic segregation to occur in education. The inclusion of Asian American immigrant subgroups that chose to enroll in segregated schools will provide a different perspective to how parents negotiate school choices in this study. The significance of this study may have implications for school and district administrators, educational researchers as well as policy makers for a continued examination of the affects of schools of choice and the disproportionate number of student populations that benefit from them. In addition, a conceptual framework based upon cultural capital theory and other theoretical notions developed the lens, which this study uses to understand the self-selecting patterns of Asian American immigrant parents in specialized academic programs.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature in relation to the market-oriented educational setting and middle class Asian immigrant participants to be examined in this study. Chapter 3 explains the methodological framework for the qualitative research methods that guides the collection of the data. Chapters 4 and 5 presents the study's significant findings by analyzing the data in the in-depth interviews, focus groups, artifact documents, and field notes. In addition, these chapters seek to answer each

of the four research questions through an analysis of the relationships between the findings and theories in the conceptual framework of this study. Chapter 6 concludes this study by discussing the implications of the research and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter Introduction

It is important to emphasize that the research problem in this study addressed the self-selecting patterns of Asian American families into specialized programs as a group and not by the efforts or choices made by the students themselves. The focus on the context of this study provides a direct channel to uncovering evidence of how racial or social segregation may be occurring in market-oriented school systems such as Arizona. However, “there has been relatively little empirical research making the case that the competition produced by choice will improve the quality of schooling in traditional public schools” (Hess, Maranto & Milliman, 1998, p.2). Therefore, this study is not interested in taking a position in the multi-layered discussion of how charter school movements affect quality education. Instead, this study uses charter school research to highlight the segregated conditions and its impact on the practices of non-charter public schools to further understand the Asian American immigrant parental practices in making school choice. The competitive conditions of the free market of education in Arizona is perceived in this study as a factor in the ways Asian American immigrant parents make school decisions.

The first part of the literature review provides a brief historical overview of the relationship between school choice and racial segregation in

the U.S. educational system. Next, studies done in free choice markets document the responses of parents and non-charter school systems. This provides a clearer picture of which factors have influenced parent decision making in a market-based competition setting. The final portion of the literature review discusses the factors that may influence how some Asian American parents exercise school choice by reviewing the history of Asian American academic achievement, different variations of cultural capital, parenting practices of Asian American, and the role of immigration status and theories related to the minority school experience.

The History of School Choice

One of the earliest accounts of providing school choice in our educational history, which contributed to the charter school movement, appeared in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1840, Governor William Seward of New York proposed to the state legislature that Catholic schools become part of the current state school system (Spring, 2005, p.104). The Catholic community supported his proposal and requested the Board of Alderman of New York to grant access to common school funding to support their religious schools (Spring, 2005). The justification for the use of these funds was the need to establish an alternative school system due to anti-Catholic sentiment and teachings in common schools. This particular event provides historical insight into the earliest attempts to provide alternative educational systems in the United States, which has influenced the more current forms of

publically funded, school choice options. Teske and Schneider (2001) found that “other forms of choice began in the 1960’s with magnet schools, alternative public schools, intradistrict public choice, and interdistrict public choice” (p.609). In addition, Teske and Schneider believed that the “most recent and most controversial reforms are charter schools and vouchers” (2001, p.609). As a way to offer more choice in the academic curriculum, the Cholla School District in this study developed alternative programs such as the traditional program and the gifted program.

Schools of Choice and Desegregation

The marketization of education can be found in school systems that celebrate the idea of *choice* in schooling in the form of vouchers, charters, or magnet schools (Barlett et al., 2002). In the early beginnings of school choice, magnet schools and programs were developed and sometimes referred to as “alternative schools” or “schools of choice” which were originally created to attract students of different backgrounds into segregated urban schools (Ilg & Massucci, 2003). The term *magnet* gained popularity in the 1970’s when policymakers used the term to draw students, parents, and educators towards the new design and implementation of desegregation (Goldring & Smrekar, 2002). After the federal courts accepted that schools could use magnet schools as a method of desegregation in *Morgan v. Kerigan*, the number of magnet schools dramatically increased, especially in urban school districts (Goldring & Smrekar, 2002). Contrary to

urban myth, the establishment of magnet schools did not have the sole purpose of providing alternatives to students who were not successful in regular education public schools. Instead, magnet schools intended to promote racial diversity while improving scholastic standards by providing a range of programs to support students' individual talents and interests (Goldring & Smrekar, 2002). Those in favor of creating an educational marketplace of schools believe that this perpetuates competition among schools, which leads to academic improvement in school systems. This study reflects this notion by presenting academic attainment as the result of parental choice and how school choice encourages educational systems to operate in a customer service satisfaction based foundation by responding to the needs and wants of their community; as a result, the process of commodifying education to certain racial and ethnic groups that engage in school choice.

In contrast, other parents that do not participate in school choice are represented in Kozol's (2005) research of racial segregation and the inequitable conditions that our urban schools face. The perception of magnet programs in urban areas have been documented by Black and Hispanic students who have expressed to Kozol that they did not even think they had the right to enroll their students in racially desegregated schools in their own school districts. This study attempted to document the ethnic and cultural differences of Asian American parental voices in education in the

identification of specific ethnic groups that are currently exercising school choice; thus leaving clues to other ethnic groups that may not perceive the same choice in the educational school system.

It has been recognized that urban school districts are the most common educational systems that provide parental choice in student education through magnet schools and programs. According to the U.S. Department of Education, 53 percent of large urban districts include magnet schools as part of their desegregation plans (Goldring & Smrekar, 2002). Changes in the racial balance in urban school districts have relied on the efforts of magnet schools with U.S. Supreme Court rulings such as *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg* in 1971 which authorized school officials to consider race in their admission policies (Goldring & Smrekar, 2002). However, U.S. Supreme Court rulings thereafter such as *Adarand Constructors, Inc. v. Peña* in 1995, ruled that under the Fourteenth Amendment, magnet school admissions policies must be racially neutral and school districts may declared “unitary,” whereas a federal court has ruled that a district has made efforts and have operated under good faith with desegregation decrees (Goldring & Smrekar, 2002).

These court rulings may have taken desegregation efforts of magnet schools into the questionable notion of school districts using discriminatory practices in magnet schools under a system that is unfair by denying students’ specialized curriculums based on race. With magnet admissions

policies adhering to the ruling above, “As a result,” says Pollitt, these programs and these schools end up as “disproportionately white enclaves” often sited in a larger school that is “almost entirely minority and largely poor” – “oasis of comparative privilege in a desert of deprivation” (Kozol, 2005, p.137). Instances were noted by Kozol (2005) in urban cities in which the more ample elementary schools have admissions policies, such that only *savvy parents* are able to prepare their students for enrollment. This study has presented itself by observing not White enclaves but Asian American enclaves of students enrolled in specialized programs. The development of this study questioned if the Asian American immigrant participants in the research would be considered savvy parents. This question provoked this study to identify the ethnic and socioeconomic parent profiles to determine the subgroups of Asian Americans immigrants that are possibly participating in school choice as savvy parents. This would also suggest the existence of cultural capital and further understanding of how it is utilized by specific groups of Asian American parents in the educational school system in this study.

Schools of Choice in Arizona and Segregation

The large free choice market of education in the state of Arizona created a competition-based market that affects all stakeholders. After studying how four Arizona school systems responded to charter competition, Hess, Maranto, and Milliman (2001) concluded that districts respond in

different ways including “curricular reform, changing leadership, vilifying charter competitors, and the attempt to absorb those competitors” (p.1102). This supports the notion of a competitive market-based school system, which may have prompted non-charter school districts to offer specialized curriculums to meet the needs of their community. As a result, parent responses in this study were reviewed for the presence of the educational phenomena of the *back-to-basics* movement.

The educational approach of teaching the *foundations of learning* was developed in the 1970s as a North American social movement to imply formal equity in the treatment of each child in the classroom of schools that had court mandated desegregation responsibilities (Morgan & Robinson, 1976; Rosenholtz & Cohen, 1983). However, Rosenholtz and Cohen (1983) emphasized that the structure of the program provides a narrow view of the curriculum, which perpetuates racists’ beliefs about the intellectual capacity of minority students. In addition, a study by Arsen, Plank, and Sykes (1999) on two school choice policies in Michigan that were implemented through charter schools and inter-district student transfers found charter school systems lacked in school innovation by using more *traditional* forms of instruction. It is believed that the back-to-basics movement has found its path back into the current educational school system and continues to appear in educational research as a curriculum alternative. Hess, Maranto, and Milliman (2001) documented a similar account of the back-to-basics

phenomena occurring in another suburb of Arizona. By the requests of a disgruntled group of parents, a back-to-basics for-profit charter opened “Fundamental Elementary” and almost instantly, enrolled a third of the district’s elementary enrollment. This led the school district in their study to respond in several ways, including the development of a gifted program. The back-to-basics model of education in one of the two schools in the current study contains the highest Asian American student enrollment of all the elementary schools in the district. Traditional School’s counterpart called the Gifted School in this study is also a specialized program, which has the next highest enrollment of Asian American students.

According to a study done by Garcia (2008) on how parental school choices affect the degree of racial and academic segregation in charter schools, student enrollment data showed that back-to-basics schools were the most segregated charter schools in Arizona and played a significant role in the segregation conditions of elementary charter schools. In another study, Crew and Anderson (2003) discovered that charter schools in the state of Florida were more racially and ethnically segregated when compared to traditional schools. However, Crew and Anderson’s (2003) study did not indicate that the Asian American population was included in their measurement. In addition, an ethnic/racial composition study done by Cobb and Glass (1999) compared over one hundred Arizona schools with surrounding traditional public schools. The results confirmed that in Arizona

charter schools, “the often-mentioned claim that schools of choice have the propensity to sort students along ethnic and racial lines” (Cobb & Glass, 2000, p.8). Although the back-to-basics program in this proposed study is not a charter school, it has enrolled a significant number of Asian American students from within and outside the district. The development of this study considered how it could explain the self-selecting patterns of Asian American families into a specialized program with a history of high White enrollment.

The charter school specialization theory has been used as an explanation for segregation in charter schools by insisting that parents from similar social, economic, and cultural backgrounds share the same preferences, resulting in enrolling their children with those that share the same background (Schneider et.al, 1998; Garcia, 2008). Henig’s study (1996) involving transfer requests in Maryland discovered that White and minority parents both chose schools with a higher percentage of their racial group. However, Renzuilli and Evans (2005) found that by analyzing data, academic quality was not the primary explanation of White enrollment in charter schools but rather dimensions of it – such as safety, resources, and teacher quality. This study attempted to identify the ethnic and socioeconomic profile of Asian immigrant families along with parents’ descriptions of school preferences to determine if the charter school specialization theory held relevancy to non-charter specialized programs.

Education as a Commodity

The Consumers

The fear that parental choice in a free market of education has increased social stratification has been examined in various ways. Annette Lareau (2000) has explored how parents who are part of a given class culture draw upon their own specific resources and knowledge of schooling to help their children, which results in increasing inequality. Resources and knowledge that have been socially embedded in networks that parents rely upon can be explained through aspects of the *grapevine knowledge* (Ball & Vincent, 1998). The grapevine knowledge or *hot* knowledge can be characterized in terms of rumor, rather than gossip and is often seen as more reliable than other *cold* sources of information such as information provided by schools (Ball, 1987). Ball and Vincent's study also found that the attainment and interpretation of the grapevine knowledge varies at each level within the middle class. The cultural capital of professional middle class parents enable them to seek out detailed and informational cold knowledge in lieu of the grapevine knowledge whereas semi-skilled worker parents of the middle class utilized the grapevine knowledge as a strong influence in their decision making process of choosing schools. The presence and utilization of these networks in making school choices may also be considered a descriptor of Kozol's (2005) savvy parents. The influences on parents' school choices have been deemed in past studies to be indicators of

which factors are most important in school selection, but studies have not been conducted to examine the decision making process of school choice.

According to Stephen Ball, “parenting is also increasingly experienced in response to both policy and economic changes as a ‘risky’ business” (2003, p.7). The risk and uncertainty produced by the market has led many parents in the southeast valley of Arizona to choose an education for their child that may mock their own traditional experiences in education. This study investigates the possibilities of how parents are using cultural capital as a route in seeking out back-to-basics curriculums that will decrease the risk of their children obtaining an unacceptable education. It appears as though parents are seeking out curricular approaches that occurred in their own educational experience, over twenty to thirty years ago, but is now considered the innovative approach to education for their own children. Some educators would argue that the back-to -basics model lacks innovation in curricular and teaching approaches but is perhaps innovative in the way, it is being marketed in the ‘choice and free market’ of schools.

The Producers

The decision makers in the continuance of thriving specialized education programs range from the classroom teacher to the members of the governing board. Brantlinger (2003) has studied class divisions in education, specifically in regards to the middle class members of the education community. Through interviewing middle class parents, Brantlinger

revealed—or exposed--the liberal and democratic façade parents portrayed to the community. In relation to education, parents made school choices based on self-interest, informational networks, and social class distinctions. The social class distinctions noted in the interviews is summarized as using a medium of social comparison. Ball and Vincent (1998) describe this medium as appearing in words as *like us*, *others*, and *not like us* in a market-oriented school system. Teachers, principals, district administrators, and governing boards all share a common interest in providing education to students but differ in the ways in which to provide equality in education to their community. Brantlinger (2003) states that studies provided in *Dividing Classes* has led her to conclude that the “affluent professionals speak a liberal rhetoric, but their actions reflect conservative neoliberal ideology” (p.189). This conclusion supports the notion of how the middle class advantage may have influenced the structure of the free market of *choice schools* in Arizona, which presents the opportunity for self-selecting patterns of Asian immigrants to emerge.

The Middle Class Advantage

Brantlinger’s study (2003) of middle class educational professionals found that parents of the White middle class Americans were also contributors to stratified school structures by the way they negotiate and rationalize the school advantage. Caudill and Du Vos’s (1956) work with studying academic achievement by Japanese Americans in Chicago noted that

although Japanese American and White middle class behavior are similar in many aspects of life, there are significant differences in the motivations of such behavior. Caudill and Du Vos state that “the psychological motivations of Japanese Americans may occur within different cultural matrices, therefore, their success in regards to middle class American standards in education and occupation should not be in an indicator that they are motivated by dominant class values and goals” (1956, p.1108). Furthermore, studies that examine Asian cultural values, belief systems, and parental practices as factors in explaining high achievement of Asian Americans indicated the variability of these forces in different Asian ethnic groups (Alva, 1993; Kao, 1995; Sue & Okazaki, 1990). This next section of the literature review presents studies that discuss the relevant historical and cultural components that play a role in the academic achievement of Asian American groups in the United States.

Educational Attainment of Asian Americans in the U.S.

Historical Trends

A study by Hirschman and Wong (1986) analyzed and interpreted the structural conditions that may have played a positive role in the educational attainment of Asian Americans, in spite of societal discrimination. By examining historical trends in educational attainment of Asian Americans using census reports, their findings on the following Asian ethnic groups are as follows:

- Japanese Americans have not been at an educational disadvantage. They have either maintained or exceeded educational parity with Whites.
- Native-born Chinese Americans were at a disadvantage in the late 19th and early 20th century. However, there was an increase in educational attainment for Chinese Americans who were in schooling in the 1920s. The youngest cohort of native-born Chinese Americans (1935-1944) exceeded far ahead of Whites through high levels of college attendance.
- Filipino Americans were the smallest sample examined in this study. There was an increase in educational attainment of 2.5 years for those that were born within 1915-1934 in Hawaii. However, a small decline was seen in the rest of the U.S. with further investigation needed due to the small sample size in the study.

Hirschman and Wong interpreted the trends in Asian American educational attainment through the effects of immigration and early settlement conditions. One of the explanations of high achievement trends in Chinese and Japanese Americans was the implementation of restrictive immigration policies that allowed only highly selected and educated Asian

immigrants to enter the United States. Thus, Asian American parental practices may have incorporated the expectation of parental education as the minimal level of educational attainment for the following generations.

Ogbu's (1998) *cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance of voluntary or immigrant and involuntary or nonimmigrant minorities* and the different perceptions of educational opportunities by each group help substantiate the high educational attainment trends found in Hirschman & Wong's study (1986). Ogbu's theory described the Chinese and Japanese American population in Wong and Hirschman's study as voluntary minorities. Therefore, the high levels of educational attainment in Hirschman and Wong's 1986 study of voluntary minority students can be explained by the ways in which voluntary minorities share positive attitudes and verbal commitment to the school with their parents' and communities (Ogbu, 1974,1998). These types of attitudes and perceptions could then be characterized as behaviors that may possibly support academic attainment and achievement within the immigrant population in this study.

Forms of Social Mobility

Another important factor Hirschman and Wong (1986) noted in the educational progress of second generation Asian Americans was the economic progress of their parents through the creation of jobs in the trade and services within their ethnic community. Therefore, Chinese and Japanese Americans perceived educational attainment as a part of a

reciprocal relationship, resulting in occupational advancement. A study done by Sue and Okazaki (1990) suggested a similar explanation to the high academic achievement of Asian Americans. They concluded that although culture is a significant factor in academic achievement, the consequences to society has limited the ways in which Asian Americans can seek achievements in other non-academic areas such as sports, entertainment, and politics. Furthermore, Sue & Okazaki proposed the concept of relative functionalism as a way to explain high levels of Asian American achievement. Relative functionalism “considers the problems of achieving in non-educational types of endeavors – those that are not a clear and direct outcome of educational performance” (Sue & Okasaki, p.913).

Examples of educational attainment as a form of social mobility were evidenced in Chao’s study (1996) of Chinese and European mothers’ beliefs about the role of parenting in school success. The study revealed that European mothers emphasized the importance of the process of learning, whereas, Chinese mothers were highly concerned about the process and outcome of obtaining academic skills. Although the specialized programs the current differ in teaching and learning philosophies, it maintains all the components of what could be considered a marketable specialized program. In adopting such distinct approaches to the academic curriculum, these specialized programs were perceived as offering educational performance as a clear and direct outcome of participation in such a program. Interviews

with Asian American immigrant parents in this study examine the notion of relative functionalism by focusing on past cultural educational experiences of immigrant parents and its relation to predisposed expectations of academia. This study also examined the ways in which Asian American immigrant parents could have perceived distinct components of specialized programs as tools in attaining upward mobility in society.

Cultural Variations of Parental Practices

Cultural differences in Asian American groups have challenged the idea of “parental involvement” in the traditional sense of demonstrating explicit participation in school activities. Research has found that Asian American parents usually do not participate by being in direct contact with their child’s schools, when compared to other races (Chao, 1996; 2000; Huntsinger et al., 2000). For example, Mau’s study (1997) that compared Asian immigrants, acculturated Asian Americans, and White Americans’ perceived parental education expectation, involvement, endeavors, and achievement suggested that the more parents participated in school functions and volunteered at school, the less likely Asian American students were to perform well, whereas the White American students were more likely to perform well. In their study, Sue & Okazaki (1990) support the characteristic of Asian American parents as having direct relationships with their children’s schools by confirming that Asian American parents scored lowest on parental involvement measures but their students had the highest

grades. Kao (1995) evaluates the *model minority* stereotype by examining how background variables, family context, home educational resources, and student characteristics affect math and reading grades. One significant difference the results revealed was that Asian American parents dedicate more in educational resources than Whites, despite similar family income. Additionally, Kao found that certain Asian subgroups utilized their resources differently to promote academic performance. The Pacific Islander population, who were shown to have been educationally disadvantaged, demonstrated low grades, test scores, and aspirations when compared to all other Asian subgroups and Whites in the study, exemplifies this difference in outcomes by ethnic groups.

In addition, a study by Chao (1994) addressed past literature that focused on the *authoritative* parenting styles of Chinese parents by suggesting that "concepts of authoritative and authoritarian are somewhat ethnocentric and do not capture the important features of Chinese child rearing, especially for explaining their school success" (p.1111). Instead, the researcher introduced a Chinese parenting style termed as *chiao shun* combined with *guan*, to explain the differences between educated middle class Chinese and European American mothers' parenting styles in relation to high student achievement. Chao described the term *chiao shun* as "the idea of training (i.e. teaching or education) children in the appropriate expected behaviors" and cited Tobin, Wu, and Davidson's study (1989) in *guan* as the process of consistent

monitoring and correcting expected student behavior (p. 1112). This concept of training is influenced by Confucian principles that are embedded into Chinese culture and traditions which differentiate the Chinese immigrant's and European American mothers' ideologies of school success. Therefore, this study acknowledged the different sociocultural contexts of how Asian immigrant parents make school choices by investigating their educational experiences outside of the U.S. and the roles this experience plays in the decision-making process of selecting a school for their children. In addition, this study sought a better understanding of cultural capital transmittal through parenting practices that directly affects academic achievement. Extracurricular activities and experiences in music or the arts were perceived as evidence of cultural capital in the objectified form.

While the studies discussed above showed significant cultural differences in engaging in student academic achievement, a study by Julian et al. (1994) reported more similarities than differences found in parenting attitudes, behaviors, and involvement with White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian American families when the socioeconomic status variable was controlled. Goyette and Xie (1999) also included socioeconomic and academic ability factors in their study to explore if certain Asian American groups have higher expectations than Whites. Their analysis confirmed that all Asian American groups had higher expectations than Whites but the higher expectations of groups that were well assimilated into American society are leveraged by

socioeconomic and demographic factors. Mau's (1997) study also confirmed that socioeconomic status, homework, and educational expectations of parents were positively related to students' academic achievement regardless of race. The current study addressed the assimilation component in relation to having high expectations by the inclusion of the immigrant descriptor in the population researched. This may provide evidence of the ways that some Asian American immigrant parents are using their pre-existing cultural capital to negotiate school choice for their children in the U.S. educational system along with their social class status. The different variations of how Asian American subgroups negotiate education in the studies discussed above have strengthened the belief that identifying subgroups and socioeconomic profiles of participants in this study might portray more accurate picture of the diverse ways that Asian American immigrant parents perceive their students' future opportunities.

Asian American Immigrant Parents

The significance of immigration status and how it affects parents' perceptions of academic achievement was introduced earlier in the literature review by Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance (1977). In the classification of voluntary minorities and non-voluntary minorities, immigrants in this study would be considered voluntary minorities because of their willingness to move to the United States (i.e., Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and Filipinos); whereas, involuntary minorities

are those that did not have a choice (African American slaves, American Indians). Refugees, migrant workers, undocumented workers, and binationals (i.e., Cambodians, Hmong, and Vietnamese) are not usually considered in either category because their move was forced in order to flee war or other crises (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). The theory describes involuntary minorities as performing poorly in schools and voluntary minorities as doing well by the way they perceive schooling in the following terms: (a) the role of how they strive to attain social mobility; (b) the extent of trust in the school and the extent to which those that control it can be trusted to provide them with the 'right education'; and (c) how the schooling process affects their minority cultural and language identities, depending on how and why they came to the U.S. (Ogbu & Simons, 1994). In addition, voluntary and nonvoluntary minorities' perception of their incorporation into society, cultural differences, and treatment they received in the U.S. influence their beliefs about (a) the role of education and credentials in striving for attaining education for social mobility; (b) how they are treated in school; and (c) crossing cultural and language boundaries or learning the culture and language of the dominant culture in the school setting (Ogbu & Simmons, 1994).

Ogbu (1974) conducted a study, which identified Chinese, Japanese, and Mexican American students as experiencing problems in school due to their limited skills with the English language in the 1930s. However, Ogbu

discovered that Chinese, Filipino, and Japanese students performed considerably better than Blacks and Mexican Americans in the same schools by the late 1960s and 1970s. By referencing comparative studies done on minority education, he concluded that some minority groups do better in school, in spite of language and cultural differences from the dominant group in the schools (Ogbu, 1987). By classifying minority groups into voluntary or involuntary minorities, “the different categories call attention to different histories of the people who make up the larger category referred to as minorities,” which Ogbu used to explain why some minorities experience success in the educational school system, while facing similar cultural and language barriers as other minority groups (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p.164).

In 1994, Ogbu & Simons conducted one of the largest scaled quantitative studies to test his cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance, which included student surveys, ethnographic interviews with parents, students, and community leaders, classroom observations, families, communities, and school records. The study reported that voluntary minorities, especially Chinese Americans, believed that education was an important pathway to finding success in society and were less concerned about issues of prejudice and discrimination. They also showed evidence of agreeing to conform to societal norms to attain success, without any fear of crossing cultural boundaries that may negatively affect their social identity. In contrast, data from African Americans in this study suggested

contradictions to their beliefs and their stated behavior and is identified as ambivalent. The indecisiveness of African Americans, as portrayed in the quantitative data in Ogbu & Simon's study, supports the decision for this proposed study to focus on the qualitative approach to obtaining information about parents' beliefs and expectations of schools.

Kao and Tienda (1995) evaluated the relationship between generational status and academic performance in immigrant groups to provide further understanding of the presence of assimilation as a beneficial factor of academic achievement. The study found that native-born youth of immigrant parents have the best conditions to perform academically because of their mothers' higher aspirations for their children's English abilities as well as their own. The study also discovered that high achieving Asians have immigrant parents and that the academic performance of third generation or higher Asians was not better than Whites. Thus, the rearing of high achieving Asian American students is believed to have an affiliation with the parental practices of immigrant parents and parental immigrant status is more influential when compared to immigrant status of youth in determining academic performance. However, it is important to note that the influence of generational status on academic achievement differed by race and ethnic group. Therefore, consideration of the diversity of the ethnic Asian groups that exist in the United States and the variation of immigrant parental

practices in those cultures were recognized in this study in the identification of specific Asian subgroups in the study.

The Model Minority Myth

This study believes it is important to discuss the function of the studies presented in the literature review. It is evident by the availability of resources during this study that many researchers have attempted to seek explanations for a better understanding of the high academic attainment and achievement levels of Asian Americans. The large body of evidence on what is considered a positive research problem subjects all Asian subgroups into a mono-ethnic race. This poses a significant threat to Asian subgroups in the U.S. who do not share the same historical experiences and trends in the educational system, such as Southeast Asians. Most of the studies discussed in the literature review indicated that there were various Asian ethnic groups included in their study, which sometimes accounted for different findings. However, allowing those subgroups to remain hidden and oppressed by the high academic achievements of other Asian groups perpetuates the model minority in educational research. Stereotyping Asian Americans as the model minority, groups all Asian ethnic groups into a homogenous, problem-free population.

A study done by Lee (1994) highlighted the differences in attitudes, experiences, and the variability of academic achievement within specific Asian subgroups by emphasizing the cultural experiences and life changes

with which the students were presented. These accounts of Southeast Asian students in Lee's study, debunked the validity of research that depicts all Asian American students as perceiving similar identities and school opportunities as the model minority. Lee believes that "Asians were once again used as hegemonic devices to support notions of meritocracy and individualism. The sad irony, however, was that even while Asians were being used by the mainstream press to support dominant-group interests, Asian immigrants were abandoned in their time of need" (1996, p.8). An examination of the ways Asian American parents make decisions for their children in this study may allow the possibility of other factors such as social class advantages and disparities within certain Asian American subgroups to be exposed. Possible evidence of social class advantages within Asian groups in this study would reiterate the discourse that Lee presented on the absent voices of the Asian American perspective in research by identifying those that are engaging in the educational school system through choice. This study had the potential of the identification of dominant characteristics of subgroups within the Asian American population that engage in school choice and who are in pursuit of high achievement and its relation to the model minority role.

Chapter Summary

The review of the literature addressed the history of racial segregation in U.S. educational systems in relation to school choice. Consequently, studies on parental school choices highlighted the market-based competition school setting in this study. Furthermore, studies on Asian American academic achievement, parenting practices, and the position of immigration status provided different interpretations of how cultural capital is applied in school systems. Therefore, this study uses the conceptual framework in Chapter 1 along with information from the literature review to examine the factors that lead middle class Asian American immigrant parents to self-select into specialized academic programs.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

This qualitative study was grounded on an emic phenomenological approach to interviewing. According to Rossman and Rallis, “phenomenological is the study of participants’ lived experiences and worldviews, which considers the shared experiences as holding structure and essence” (2003, p.190). My identity as a first generation Asian American provided me with an emic understanding of the shared experiences of how Asian American immigrant parents make school decisions and notions of academic achievement or success. This has allowed me a deeper understanding of Asian American parental perceptions of academic achievement and the tools they utilize in the process of educational attainment. This study also used standardized, open-ended qualitative interviews to focus on the various elements that constitute phenomenological approach to investigate the self-selecting patterns of Asian American students into specialized academic programs (Rossman & Rallis, 2008).

According to Seidman, features of the in-depth, three-interview series of phenomenological interviewing allows “people’s behavior to become meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them and without context there is little possibility

of exploring the meaning of an experience” (2006, p.16). This study used Seidman’s three-interview series model to develop questions in the order of the participant’s life history, details of experience, and reflection of the meaning. Citing Seidman in response to the different ways that his research team tried variations of the three-series interview model, declared “we conducted interviews one, two, and three with him all in the same day with reasonable results” (p.22). Therefore, the decision to utilize the three-interview series model within two interviews was made in hopes of increasing the chances of obtaining a larger sample to identify subgroups in the Asian American population within the study. This allowed this study to establish the context of the participant’s educational experience and reconstruction of educational decision making in the first interview and the reflection of the decision making process of school choice and educational attainment in the follow-up interview. The results of this research design was rationalized by what Seidman describes as following the governing principles of designing interview projects, which is one that is done in a rational process that is both repeatable and documentable. For the purposes of this study, the three-interview series interviews are identified as in-depth interviews to signify the modification of using two interviews instead of three.

This study also considered the significance of selecting parents that have been involved in schools and the roles they have played in social class

advantages (Lareau, 2000; Brantlinger, 2003). However, these studies did not include Asian American parents and the wide range of parental involvement practices related to ethnic races. Studies that have focused on Asian American parental involvement have documented common ways that Asian American parents have taken an indirect approach to parent involvement and practices at home (Chao, 1996; 2000; Sy, 2006). In addition, identification of parents as immigrants to the United States provided information to examine Asian American parents' experiences of education outside of the United States. This was an important factor in the study of cultural capital and cultural perspectives in making school choice decisions as an immigrant minority. Determining parents' immigration classification as voluntary or involuntary provided further information to the different ways ethnic communities perceive opportunities in school structures and academic achievement, as evidenced by Ogbu's (1994) theory approach to minority school achievement.

The interviews of the school and district administrators acknowledged the special considerations when given access to an expert in the field of education. According to Rossman and Rallis, "these are individuals considered influential, prominent, or well informed, or all three, in an organization or community and are selected on the basis of their expertise in areas relevant to the research. Valuable information can be gained from these participants because of their positions in social, political,

financial, or administrative realms” (2003, p.192). This study believed that the responsibilities of the school or district administrator encompassed all the areas above due to the nature of the educational school system serving as multiple functions in our society. Therefore, the opened-ended interview questions in this study addressed the experiences of administrators with Asian American parents in relation to how they engage in school choice and the specialized academic program.

The two focus group interviews in this study provided data and observations of the interaction between Asian American immigrant parents and discourse in regards to educational attainment and school choices for their children. Rossman and Rallis states that “the interaction among the participants is the critical characteristic of this type of interviewing” (2003, p.193). The open-ended and simple questions facilitated in the focus group interview allowed this study to gather different points of views of participants with similar ethnic group identities and school choice.

The traditional program handbook, gifted program brochures, an informational presentation, and school websites were used as material culture to document the program philosophy, curriculums guidelines, and program rules. According to Rossman and Rallis, “material culture, whether written or actual objects, provides the researcher with insights into actions and their meanings in a setting” (2003, p.303).

The Cross-sectionality of the Role of the Researcher and Researcher's Biases

The role that I played as the researcher in this emic phenomenological study was also grounded on the conceptual framework of cultural capital theory by Bourdieu (1986) and his theoretical reflection of research practices in the social science field (1997). Rossman and Rallis (2003) describes the *subjectivist* role as using the lived experiences of people to better understand and highlight marginalized voices within the study. It is the belief that the lived experiences of those that are studied are the core of the project of inquiry. On the other hand, *objectivists'* assumptions believe that there is a reality that is separate from the human cognition and that the social sciences are responsible for unveiling the facts and processes that secure that reality. In order to address my role as the researcher in the design of this study, I took into consideration Bourdieu's (1977) stance on the limitations of using a subjectivist or objectivist approach to research, evidenced by the following statement:

The knowledge we shall call phenomenological sets out to make explicit the truth of primary experience of the social world, i.e. all that is inscribed in the relationship of familiarity with the familiar environment, the unquestioning apprehension of the social world which, by definition, does not reflect on itself and excludes the question of the conditions of its own possibility. The knowledge we

shall term objectivist (of which structuralist hermeneutics is a particular case) constructs the objective relations of practice, i.e., in particular, primary knowledge, practical and tacit, of the familiar world. (p.3)

The opposition of both the subjectivist and objectivist approach emphasize Bourdieu's interpretation of the limitations of assuming one or the other. Therefore, Bourdieu would believe that the phenomenological approach to this study would need to consider Calhoun, LiPuma, and Postone's (1993) interpretation of his theory of practice:

Objectivism (especially structuralism) depends on understandings and orientations it does not make explicit even to itself and how a version of subjectivism (associated with Sartre, but also, more generally, with phenomenological approaches) neglects to explore adequately the objective social conditions that produce subjective orientations to action. Neither of these positions can adequately grasp social life. (p.3)

It is Bourdieu's argument that social life "must be understood in terms that do justice to both objective material, social, and cultural structures and to the constituting practices and experiences of individuals and groups" (Calhoun et al., 1993, p.3). By reflecting upon Bourdieu's perception of the limitations that exist within a subjectivist and objectivist role in the practice of research, I developed the conceptual framework, literature review, and methods

section of this study as an attempt to address both viewpoints. In this study, the initial subjectivist inquiry of how Asian American immigrant parents' lived experiences and decision making of school choice was investigated to explain the self-selecting patterns in specialized programs through the objectivist structural conditions of the market-oriented school system. However, my belief in the role of life chances and the nature of human agency in the educational attainment of minority populations in the United States led me to perceive my subjectivist assumptions as the more dominant approach in which I analyzed and presented the findings in this study.

The relationship between the people that was studied in this research and my reflection as the researcher displays a cross-sectionality of the identities and roles that I have assumed prior to and throughout this study. As a child of Chinese and Vietnamese refugee parents, the experiences that I have observed and participated in throughout my life played a significant role in the emic understanding of theories that pertain to the minority experience in education discussed in this study. For example, a critical self-revelation that occurred during the course of my doctoral studies was how I identified with the *New Wavers* in Lee's study (1994) of Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cambodian students' opposition to the model minority role in education. However, the comfort that the *New Wavers* experienced as a community in learning English as a second language and existing in a bicultural world together in school was not something that I was afforded, unlike the rest of

my extended family that lived in California. In addition, my opposition to the model minority role did not have significant negative affects to my academic performance due to the consistent verbal encouragement of my parents in pointing out that if I went to school and received a good education, I would not have to work long hours in a laborious assembly line job, like they had to. Social mobility in my family relied upon my academic performance in school and the ways that I responded to those opportunities that arise from it.

Over the next decade of schooling, my marginalized voice grew stronger by reflecting upon the disconnect between my identities and the academic curriculum I experienced in the school system. In the past, the cultural symbols that I brought to my teachers in hopes of creating a meaningful relationship between the student, teacher, and curriculum had failed. Although I had no further hope for myself in creating those bonds and connections to the curriculum during my own educational career, I did not give up the idea of it being a standard practice of teaching for when I entered the teaching field. I beheld a future of education where I, as the teacher, would be aggressive and purposeful in utilizing students' cultural capital and their funds of knowledge as a necessity in teaching and learning together as a community. In my current role as a school administrator, my primary responsibility entails the identification of the marginalized student voices in my school and assisting all stakeholders in providing a relevant learning environment to those students. Therefore, I believe that in studying those

that are participating in dominant class educational systems will lead to a better identification of those students who are not.

Furthermore, I had taught in a regular primary classroom in a school that offered a dual-track program; parents chose between the regular or the back-to-basics type, traditional academic curriculum. When this study started, I held a school administrative role in the Gifted School. It was believed that these experiences provided a deeper understanding of the context and curriculum at the Traditional and Gifted School by the interaction with administrators, teachers, students, and community.

Research Setting

This study took place in one of the largest non-charter public school district in the state of Arizona. All names of participants, programs, schools, and town in this study are pseudonyms. The interviews in this study were conducted in a suburb called Cholla Town, a southwestern city with a population of approximately 250,000 people. Between 1990 and 2000, Cholla Town was the seventh fastest growing city in the United States. The town is home to a handful of prevalent semiconductor companies, the presence of which may have assisted in the migration of skilled and professional Asian American workers and their families from the bordering western state. In 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau also determined that the medium household income in Cholla Town was \$58,416, with 6.6% of the population living in poverty, well below the national average of 11.3%. Therefore, student

enrollment in the two schools and in the school district to be highlighted in this study is drawn from a large population of middle class families residing in Cholla Town. In addition, Table 1 presents the racial demographics of Cholla Town.

Table 1

Cholla Town's Demographics by Race in 2009

Race	Residents
Total	242,522
White alone	191,833
Hispanic or Latino	54,118
Black or African American alone	10,461
Asian Alone	16,221
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Alone	346
Some other race alone	12,599
Two or more races	8,281
Two races including Some other race	2,023
Two races excluding Some other race, and three or more races	6,258

Note. From 2005-2009 American Community Survey by the U.S. Census

Bureau.

The Cholla District is the largest school district in the eastern part of the county, consisting of 29 elementary schools in 2010. The back-to-basics school called the *Traditional School* in this study had the highest enrollment of Asian American student enrollment in the past three or more years. In addition, the remainder of schools with the largest Asian American student population contained a gifted program. The gifted program in the elementary grades was distributed throughout some schools in the district. Although the gifted classrooms are self-contained, they are located within schools with regular academic programs such as the *Gifted School* in this study. The Cholla District's enrollment database confirmed that the Traditional School and Gifted School were one of the top five elementary schools with the highest enrollment of Asian American students.

IRB Approval

Following the development of Chapters 1 through 3 of this study, I successfully defended my proposal and comprehensive exams for this study. My application to the Institutional Review Board of Arizona State University was approved as *Exempt Research* prior to conducting interviews. As noted on the IRB document approval, the protocols and information recorded in this study cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects (APPENDIX B). Therefore, a formal meeting with the associate superintendent of the Cholla School District overseeing the elementary schools within the district granted me access as a school administrator to the

enrollment database with the cooperation of the Gifted School and Traditional School Principal. Appendix C documents the permission obtained to conduct this study on the Gifted and Traditional School campuses.

Research Participants

The research participants in this study included 19 middle class Asian American immigrant parents that have enrolled their student(s) at the Gifted School or Traditional School prior to the 2010-2011 school year. A purposeful criterion sampling of participants were taken from a school enrollment database from the Gifted and Traditional School. I used my role as an administrator in the Cholla District and my rapport with the school community to consult with the principal, prior to solicitation for Asian immigrant participants. The principals acted as liaisons by calling parents with me on the phone to solicit for participants. The phone calls were made at random starting from the beginning of the student list, which was organized in alphabetical order by last name. For the purposes of this study, Gifted and Traditional School parent participants had to meet the following criteria for this study: (a) participants and their student must be Asian or Asian American; (b) one parent must be an immigrant to the United States; and (c) student(s) have not been enrolled in a specialized program, prior to their enrollment in the traditional or gifted program. This same process was also used for solicitation of participants for the focus group interviews.

In addition, four school administrators were asked to participate in the study. Two participants are principals or administrators at Traditional School and one principal of the Gifted School. The fourth participant holds a district administration role with the responsibility of overseeing the entire gifted program in the Cholla School District. As a school administrator in the same district, I had contact with all four administrators before in the past. Interviews took place on the Gifted and Traditional School campuses. The interviews focused on the experiences of the administrators in the specialized programs by a discussion of Asian American parental involvement and tensions relating to their expectations to the academic curriculum.

Instruments

Qualitative interviews following Seidman's (2006) in-depth, three-part interview model was used to guide the standard, open-ended questions to participants. All interviews were audiotaped by a voice recorder and files were transferred to a password protected USB flash drive. The files were sent out for professional transcription within 24 hours and audio recordings were deleted, immediately after transferring them to the USB flash drive. Translation services were offered but not requested by any of the participants.

Data Collection Methods

Procedures

Participants for individual and focus group interviews were contacted by telephone and were scheduled on their school campus. Contact with parents on the telephone allowed me to confirm if the participant was comfortable with being interviewed in English. In addition, participants were asked if they had immigrated from a country in Asia and were asked to identify their country of origin to satisfy the participant requirement for this study. The duration of the in- depth interviews took place within a 90 minute framework. Upon completion of each interview, I sought additional leads on other Asian American immigrant parents from the same school that would be willing to participate in this study and was able to obtain two participants for the focus group interviews.

Phase 1: Individual Interviews

Parent interviews were used as the primary method for data collection in this research and provided detailed information about their own educational histories and perspectives of making school choice. The in-depth interviews in this study were conducted as two separate interviews. The first interview used Seidman's (2006) three-part interview model. The second follow-up interview allowed the researcher to seek additional data to expand on or clarify the responses of the participants. The principals in this study provided a complete enrollment list of Asian American students and

the parents who contained the Asian American descriptor in their demographic profile. Prior to calling the potential participants for this study, both the Gifted and Traditional Principals reviewed the list of students and parent names to identify any active members of the school community. Both principals and I agreed upon reaching out to those parents who may have had relationships with school personnel to increase the chances for obtaining participants. During this process, it was apparent that both principals were more familiar with the students than their parents. For example, the Gifted School principal recognized a few students on the list but she confirmed that she had not had a significant amount of contact with their parents in the past. In addition, the Traditional School Principal did not recognize any of the parents on the list and identified only one student by name, due to a student discipline problem from the previous year. Therefore, potential participants were contacted by phone at random, according to alphabetical order and individual parent interviews were scheduled. After the initial in-depth individual parent interview, I scheduled a follow-up interview with each parent to extend on the data that was collected and to clarify ideas and concepts that were discussed to triangulate the data and themes that presented itself in the first interview. According to Rossman and Rallis, "follow-up questions take the interview to a deeper level by asking for more detail" (2005, p.185).

The limitations of the individual interviews included the time restrictions of parents' work schedules, childcare obligations, and various other commitments. Most of the interviews revolved around the times when parents dropped their students off for school or immediately after work. Therefore, some discussions were limited to the time each parent had available. A significant occurrence: parents continued to show interest and engaged in further conversation after the audio recorder was turned off. It was apparent that participants were more comfortable with revisiting their answers and often expanded on what questions they thought were interesting or significant during the interview. The formality of being audio recorded could have made parents uncomfortable when engaging in an unstructured conversation during the interview. In this regard, collecting data during informal moments such as these could possibly be explained by Seidman's (2006) perspective of how it may be easier for an interviewer to build rapport during the interview process when there are shared assumptions from common backgrounds. However, Seidman notes that the limitation to this situation would be the obstacle of the interviewer allowing to enough distance from the interviewee "to enable them to ask real questions and to explore, not to share, assumptions" (p.100). Keeping this obstacle in mind, I was cognizant of my replies to the participants during these informal discussions and used probing questions to reaffirm the interest I had by listening and engaging in the after-discussion. Immediately

after the participant left the room, I used my recollection of the after-discussion with six of the parents and wrote down notes to include in the data collection.

Phase 2: Expert Interviews

Interviews with four administrators were scheduled with ease when compared to parent interviews. Solicitation for the interviews was based upon professional relationships I have had with all four participants. In order for the participant to gain insight into this research, I spent a considerable amount of time to explain the rationale behind the development of this study. All of the participants were engaged in thoughtful discussions about their experiences and perceptions of the Asian American community within their school. Prior to the interviews, both the Traditional School Principal and Administrator raised their concern of the limited amount of experiences and interaction they have had with Asian American parents in their school community. These concerns could have possibly been derived from the fact that they had only been school leaders at Traditional School for one year. Rossman and Rallis states that elites or experts “respond well to inquiries about broad topics and to intelligent, provocative, open-ended questions that allow them the freedom to use their knowledge and imagination” (2003, p.192). With this understanding, I utilized the Gifted School principal and director’s professional expertise in the *member*

checking strategy to discuss the themes that emerged through parent interviews to increase the validity of the research.

Phase 3: Focus Groups

Group interviews with three people were conducted at both Traditional School and Gifted School. The focus group allowed me to play both roles as the interview facilitator and as an observer. I followed Rossman and Rallis's (2003) description of setting an open environment so that individual similarities or differences in attitudes and beliefs may emerge through the interaction during the discourse. None of the members in the focus group had existing relationships with the other members. However, it was observed that some parents recognized each other through their children being in the same class or grade level.

Phase 4: Document Artifacts and Field Notes

During the study, I obtained a copy of the Traditional School Policy and Procedure Manual, which outlined all of the components of the traditional program, philosophy, curriculum instruction, and student and parent contracts. This manual is offered on their school website and is open to the public to view. In addition, I made contact with the Gifted Program director and obtained an informational gifted program multimedia presentation along with program brochures. During the interviews, I wrote personal notes to outline participants' responses in the interviews along with conversations that continued after the audio recorder was turned off. These

documents served as a supplement to the interviews and allowed me to triangulate the data from the parent interviews. In addition, the documents also provided a deeper understanding of parents' educational values and needs and how schools are distributing their program information within the community as material culture. The documents were collected in relation to the research questions, conceptual framework, and literature review of this study. Data were then coded according to the themes and subthemes that emerged from the in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, and artifacts. Table 2 presents how the data were collected and organized in the four analyst-constructed categories, which are discussed in further detail in the data analysis section of this chapter.

Table 2

Data Collection according to Categories

Category	Data collection
How the lived experiences of the parent's own account of their educational experience hold significance in identifying the cultural components that relate to their current expectations of their specialized program of choice	Parent interview questions: #6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 23, 24 Expert interview question #1 Artifact and document collection Field notes
The process and arrival of making school choice by identifying how cultural capital manifests itself in the decision making process in a new culture	Parent interview questions: #4, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 Expert interview questions: #2, 3, 5 Artifact and document collection Field notes
The parent's reflection their satisfaction or tensions within the specialized program due to school choice and the educational needs of their children for the present and future	Parent interview questions: #25, 26 Focus group questions: #10 Expert interview question: #4 Artifact and document collection Field notes
How the parent rationalized the underlying expectations of academic achievement through enrolling their student in a specialized academic program	Parent interview questions: #27, 28, 29 Focus group questions: #11, 12 Artifact and document collection Field notes

Confidentiality

When participants were contacted by telephone, the principals identified themselves and I identified myself as the Gifted School Administrator who was conducting research as an Arizona State University doctoral student. At the time of the initial contact, I explained how I received

the participant's information from the school enrollment database along with the purpose and procedures of the study. Before each interview, I reviewed the purpose of the study, obtained their verbal permission, and gave them the information letter as shown in Appendix B. I also advised them that all names of participants, programs, schools, and town in this study will be used as pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

I approached the interview texts within each area of Seidman's (2006) three-part interviews with an open mind to seek what meaning and structures emerged from the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Focus group interview responses and discussions were also reviewed during this process to provide more information in regards to the decision making of school choice and perceptions of education and school choices. The data condensation phase of this study resulted in a reduction of the data from the interviews in order to synthesize the texts into manageable elements (Seidman, 2006). Rossman and Rallis (2003) state that most qualitative studies include a mixture of indigenous and analyst categorizations, which, in this study, was a combination of inductive and deductive analysis. This approach allowed the interpretation of the data open to indigenous categories that may emerge through the analyst-constructed preliminary categories (Rossman & p.283). During this phase, I interpreted the data and extracted parent responses from the interviews that I believed were

interesting and significant and assisted my understanding of the analyst-constructed categories from the review of literature. The following four analyst-constructed categories were presented previously in Table 2 of this study:

1. How the lived experiences of the parent's own account of their educational experience hold significance in identifying the cultural components that relate to their current expectations of their specialized program of choice.
2. The process and arrival of making school choice by identifying how cultural capital manifests itself in the decision making process in a new culture.
3. The parents' reflection on their satisfaction or tensions within the specialized program due to school choice and the educational needs of their children for the present and future.
4. How the parents rationalized the underlying expectations of academic achievement through enrolling their student in a specialized academic program.

Seidman (2006) describes the interpretation of the data as an aspect of the winnowing process: winnowing allows the researcher to acknowledge the data by placing judgment and meaning on the text being read. Each category were used primarily to assist in the data condensation phase of this study within the theoretical framework of this study. However, responses

were not coded under the analyst-constructed categories to allow the opportunity for indigenous themes to emerge from the data. In addition, the utilization of the analyst-constructed categories assisted in the data analysis of the findings in Chapters 4 and 5 of this study.

Four themes and subthemes were identified within the data in the categories. Responses were then color-coded, according to its relation to each theme. Next, data within each theme were reviewed for subthemes. The responses were color-coded according to themes, whereas subthemes and related recurring words were given a alphanumeric code. Table 3 represents how the data were coded under each theme, subtheme, and reoccurring words.

Table 3

Key words, Coding, and Themes

Theme	Subtheme	Code	Key words		
Asian American parent's history of educational attainment	Ethnic and social class profile	1	bachelors	degree	owned
			business	education	parents
			Chinese	masters	university
			college	middle class	working class
	Competitive educational conditions and high stakes testing	2	college	homework	study
			choice	money	test
			choose	pass	tier
			education	private	tuition
			exam	public	tutoring
	government	score	university		
	Immigration as social mobility	3	a way out	degree	job
			chance	education	life
			competition	fight	more
The Asian American middle class advantage	Extracurricular education	4	art	help	math
			Chinese	instruments	museum
			church	language school	tutoring
			class	library	vacation

Table 3 (continued)

Theme	Subtheme	Code	Key words		
	The advanced academic program	5	academically advanced Asian attention better best	compared curriculum different discipline gifted other class	other kids other schools regular same talented
A community-based network of mothers making school choice	Informal knowledge	6	after church before school charter school circle of moms friends group of moms	group of parents heard it's good language school parent review parties	said they like trust
	Formal knowledge	7	email computer internet	website tour teacher	test scores ranking called school

Table 3 (continued)

Theme	Subtheme	Code	Key words		
Education as a commodity	Competition and school choice	8	advanced	competition	right
			best	excelling	stress
			behind	pressure	test scores
			charter schools	higher	top ranking
			choose	ranking	
	An ideal	9	math	education	job
	model of		college	good	society
	education		degree	happy	university

Rossman and Rallis emphasized that in phenomenological inquiries, the tradition focuses on people’s storytelling as an “important means for representing and explaining personal and social experiences” (2003, p.98). After the data was coded under the themes and subthemes, I used the concept mapping strategy in order to organize and crosscheck the subthemes to review how it related to one another. Concept mapping is described by Rossman and Rallis as a data analysis strategy to brainstorm the important ideas that recur by using a graphic organizer to assist in how they are related with each other (p.284). As a result of concept mapping, it appeared that alternative headings and subheadings would capture a more detailed structure to the presentation of the findings. Therefore, the themes and

subthemes in the data guided the development of the related headings in Chapters 4 and 5 in this study.

In addition, artifacts from the traditional and gifted programs reviewed as material culture to search for patterns in the educational philosophy of participants' lived educational experiences and the ones that they seek out for their children. Rossman and Rallis (2008) believes that qualitative researchers often use material culture to supplement observing and interviewing for a better understanding of the different aspects in the social worlds they study. The process of analyzing material culture allowed me to infer meaning into the artifacts and place judgment on the relevancy material culture holds in supporting, elaborating, or contradicting the interpretations of the data. Throughout this process, material culture was used to identify textual representations of evidence of cultural or social class values and themes from the interviews. Artifacts and documents were also coded under the four themes and subthemes. The incorporation of material culture in data analysis may have provided clarity to how cultural capital and dominant class values are represented in specialized academic programs.

My interpretation of the data entailed a reflexive process, which formed detailed descriptions to enhance the story of Asian American immigrant parents' experiences of making school choice. Rossman and Rallis describes the interpretation process of using Kvale's (1996) identification of "three contexts of interpretation": participants, commonsense, and

theoretical understanding as a way to frame and tell the story of the decision-making of Asian American immigrant parents in different perspectives (p.288).

Validity of the Study

According to Seidman, the three-part interview structure incorporates features that enhance the accomplishment of the validity (2006, p.24). The interview structure “allows for validity by placing participants comments in context” (p.24). Seidman also states that validity can be found in the final goal of the process of the three-series interview by allowing interviewees to understand how our participants understand and make meaning of their experience and for themselves, as well as to the interviewer (p.24).

Furthermore, the following strategies were used to enrich the credibility of the study:

Triangulation includes multiple sources of data, multiple points in time, or a variety of methods to build the picture of the investigation (Rossman & Rallis, 2008). I began this study by investigating the enrollment of Asian American students in the Cholla District to confirm the high percentages of enrollment in specialized programs. I conducted an extensive literature review on theoretical perspectives, historical data, theoretical and empirical studies related to this study as an ongoing resource to utilize during the data analysis. I have also included artifacts from the traditional and gifted curriculum to serve as material culture to support my interpretations of the

interview texts. I consulted with multiple investigators, such as my chair, committee advisors, and colleagues to review my findings.

Participant validation or member checks allowed me to “take emerging findings back to the participants for them to elaborate, correct, extend, or argue about” (Rossman & Rallis, 2008, p.69). I explained the participant validation strategy to the four expert interviewees as a way to strengthen the validity of the study. I also explained the process of participant validation and asked them to ask questions or comment on my findings and interpretations from their individual interview.

Peer debriefers or critical friends are person(s) that served as an intellectual ‘second eye’ when I chose to “modify design decisions, develop possible analytic categories, and build possible explanations for the phenomenon in this study” (Rossman & Rallis, 2008, p.69). My committee members, along with three colleagues in my doctoral program, engaged in discourse in relation to the findings of my study along with reviewing drafts of reports.

A Community of practice “engages in critical and sustained discussions with valued colleagues in an environment of trust so that my emerging ideas can be shared” (Rossman & Rallis, 2008, p.69). This was evident by the discourse between the two doctoral program colleagues and me during the research process. I scheduled monthly meetings with one of the three colleagues,

which ensured a reasonable amount of time for thoughtful discussions relating to the proposed study.

Limitations of the Study

A general limitation that was found in this study was the breakdown of demographic information in Cholla Town and the Cholla School District's enrollment database. Both datasets included the South Asian population within the Asian American category. It is important to note in the literature review section of this study, ethnic differences within the Asian American category were highlighted accordingly to the results of the study. However, some of the studies were not consistent and explicit in the identification of South Asians as included or separated within the Asian American group researched.

In addition, the small sample of Chinese and Vietnamese participants within this study may also serve both as a limitation and focus to better understand the decision making process of school choice of middle class Asian American immigrant parents. The limitation of this study is the random exclusion of all other Asian ethnic groups, other than Chinese and Vietnamese parents. This is due to the inability to sort enrollment data by ethnic groups within the school database. The lack in sorting capabilities within the enrollment database also raised the concern of the identification of other Asian ethnic groups also represented in specialized academic programs. Another limitation was that only one Vietnamese immigrant

parent was represented in the study, due to a random sampling of Asian American parents enrolled in the Gifted School. However, data from the Vietnamese immigrant parent interviews were included in the analysis to enhance the similar history of educational attainment, social class status, and decision making of a specialized academic program of the Chinese immigrant parents in this study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Chapter Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore a sample within the Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant parent population that enrolled at least one child into one of two specialized academic programs. This study sought to clarify the self-selecting patterns of school choice by researching the life history of the study's parents along with their current experiences and perceptions of education within their community. The results of the study will provide a better understanding of the profiles of Asian American parents who engage in school choice while contrasting them with parents who do not. A possible extension of this study could add to the discussion of equitable schooling in the United States for all ethnic and social classes.

The data were collected from field notes, 11 in-depth interviews, four expert interviews, five artifact documents, and two focus groups consisting of eight parent participants who were not included in the individual in-depth interviews. The data were initially analyzed by categories and then coded by themes and subthemes. The goal of this chapter is to highlight the connections between the participants' past educational experiences and their decision-making process regarding school choice. The presentation of the findings and results of this chapter will start with a description of the setting and demographics of the Gifted and Traditional Schools in this study. This information will provide a

better understanding of the context of the Cholla District as a system of schools of choice. Next, the sample of participants included in this study will be discussed along with identifying their school selection and some demographic information. The findings and results section of this chapter will present and analyze the data in relation to the themes of the literature review and theories in the conceptual framework in the following research questions:

1. How do the past educational experiences of Asian American immigrant parents play a role in their perception of specialized academic programs and their decision-making process when selecting a school for their children?
2. What kind of informational networks or sources do Asian American immigrant parents use to choose a school for their children?

The interpretation of the findings in relation to the research questions proved to be a complex process due to the interrelatedness of themes, subthemes, and theories in the conceptual framework. Therefore, this chapter will use headings and subheadings guided by the themes in the findings to organize this chapter. The first research question will be addressed under the headings: ethnic and social class profiles and the traditional education of the past and present. The second research question will be presented under the heading: a community-based network of school choice.

Setting and Demographics of the Gifted and Traditional Schools

According to Cholla Town's official website (n.d.), the municipality was originally an agricultural town, developing into a sector of the high-tech industry over the past two decades. The Arizona Department of Commerce reported that over 75% of Cholla Town's 30,000 manufacturing employees are in high-tech fields; the national average is 15%. It is possible that many of the manufacturing companies employed skilled or professional workers; as a result, those jobs attributed to the high occupancy of middle class families in Cholla Town. To support this notion, Cholla Town reported on its website (n.d.) that their average household income in 2004 was \$71, 456. Furthermore, the 2005-2009 American Community Survey from the U.S. Census reported that the *Asian alone* group is the second largest minority group living in Cholla Town (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). The 16,221 residents in the Asian alone group did not reflect the 346 people in the category of *Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander alone*.

In addition, few of the 29 elementary schools in the Cholla District contain Title 1 programs; the two schools in this study are not Title 1 Schools. The Department of Education distributes extra funding to Title 1 Schools to implement school wide supplemental programs to assist low-income students as well as assisting schools to meet their educational goals.¹

¹ Retrieved from <http://ww2.ed.gov/programs/titleparta/index.html> United States Department of Education, Title 1, Part A.

Title 1 monies are granted to schools in which at least 40% of their students are considered low-income; this status is determined by data about free and reduced lunches. Although Asian Americans are the second largest minority group in Cholla Town, they make up a small 4% of the overall population of low-income families in the district in contrast with the dominant Hispanic group within this low socioeconomic status group. Therefore, the sample of participants in this study is not representative of all Asian American families in the Cholla District.

The Traditional School program. The Cholla District responded to the growth in its community by opening their first back-to-basics type traditional school in the fall of 2002 as a result of the strong interest from parents who were looking for a parochial-like, structured educational environment for their children. Since then, four additional elementary traditional schools and one traditional junior high have been opened and continue to operate with full enrollment, some with long wait lists. The traditional elementary school in this study had the highest population of Asian American students, kindergarten through sixth grade.

The main program components of traditional schools include a direct-instruction approach to teaching and a phonics-based approach to teaching reading. The expectations of the physical environment in traditional classrooms include desks that are positioned in straight rows facing the teacher as the center of instruction. The traditional curriculum teaches students at an accelerated pace, at least one grade level above in math and reading, beginning at kindergarten.

Parental involvement is a requirement in the traditional program and is articulated in a parent contract. Parents must agree to dedicate at least five hours of volunteer work in the classroom or school per year.

The Gifted School program. The second specialized program examined in this study is the gifted program. The gifted program was designed in 1978 in the Cholla District as a strategy to address the academic needs of gifted students (Gifted Program director, personal communication, August 25, 2011). The program uses a state approved intelligence test to evaluate students in the following categories: linguistic, spatial, and logical-mathematical areas (Cholla District, 2011). Once a student displays above-average results in one of the categories, parents have the option to put their student into the gifted program, which operates under separate guidelines, curriculum standards, and expectations that are separate from a majority of the other Cholla District's schools.

The structure of the gifted program allows students to master core academic areas at an accelerated rate with the appropriate depth and complexity for gifted learners while developing their inquiry skills through interdisciplinary studies. Teachers are expected to address different learning styles to develop students' critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem solving skills while addressing concepts, themes, and issues fundamental to the core academic disciplines. The gifted program also emphasizes the need for students to gain proficiency in communicating abstract and complex ideas, relationships, and issues. This study will focus on one of the Cholla District's schools featuring the

the gifted program. The school to be highlighted in this study has seven, self-contained classrooms dedicated to the gifted program and will be referred to this study as the Gifted School.

When this study was proposed in the spring of 2011, enrollment data from the 2010-2011 school year showed that the Traditional School had the highest enrollment of elementary Asian American students in the Cholla District, while the Gifted School had the third highest enrollment. At the time of this study, I held an administrative position at the Gifted School, which contained two types of academic curriculums: the gifted program and a *regular academic curriculum*. The regular academic curriculum is described as a nonspecialized academic program and is not defined by specific academic programs or teaching methods. The regular academic curriculum encompassed a more conventional approach to elementary education and can be found in a majority of the elementary schools in the Cholla District. In addition, this study and some of its participants used the word, *regular*, to indicate those who engage in this type of regular curriculum (i.e., regular teachers). In this setting, Cholla's gifted classrooms were located in approximately less than seven regular elementary schools that hosted the gifted program. Table 4 presents a ranking of the top five schools with the highest enrollment of elementary Asian American students in the Cholla District, along with their demographic information.

Table 4

Cholla School District's Top Five Highest Asian American Student Enrollment in 2008-2010

2008						
School	Program Type	Asian Am.	White	Black	Hispanic	Am. Indian
Traditional School	Traditional	15%	72%	8%	3%	0%
Elementary School 1	Gifted/Regular	13%	70%	4%	10%	0%
Elementary School 2	Gifted/Regular	13%	73%	3%	9%	0%
Elementary School 3	Gifted/Regular	12%	66%	7%	12%	1%
Elementary School 4	Gifted/Regular	12%	54%	7%	24%	0%
2009						
School	Program Type	Asian Am.	White	Black	Hispanic	Am. Indian
Traditional School	Traditional	17%	69%	4%	7%	0%
Elementary School 2	Gifted/Regular	15%	69%	3%	10%	0%
Gifted School	Gifted/Regular	14%	63%	5%	13%	3%
Elementary School 1	Gifted/Regular	14%	70%	5%	8%	1%
2010						
School	Program Type	Asian Am.	White	Black	Hispanic	Am. Indian
Traditional School	Traditional	21%	66%	4%	7%	0%
Elementary School 3	Gifted/Regular	15%	63%	5%	14%	1%
Elementary School 2	Gifted/Regular	15%	69%	4%	9%	0%
Elementary School 5	Traditional	13%	55%	7%	21%	0%
Elementary School 1	Gifted/Regular	13%	71%	5%	8%	0%

Description of Participants

This study included 19 parents in the in-depth and focus group interviews and focused on the in-depth interviews as the main source of data. A majority of the parent participants were educated middle class Chinese mothers. The ethnic and social class profiles of the 11 participants in the in-depth interviews were found to be a subtheme of the findings and are described in the following participant descriptions. In addition, the demographic profiles of the 11 participants in the in-depth interviews are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Demographics of Participants in the Study

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Country of origin	Social class status prior to immigration to the U.S.	Social class status presently in the U.S.	Present level of education
Specialized Academic Program of Choice – Gifted Program						
Chow	F	Chinese	Hong Kong	Middle class	Middle class	Masters
Hue	F	Vietnamese	Vietnam	Middle class	Middle class	Bachelors
Lee	F	Chinese	China	Working Middle class	Middle class	Masters
Ning	F	Tibetan-Chinese	China	Affluent middle class	Middle class	Some college
Wen	F	Chinese	China	Middle class	Middle class	Masters
Specialized Academic Program of Choice – Traditional Program						
An	F	Chinese	Hong Kong	Middle class	Middle class	Masters
Ching	M	Chinese	China	Working Middle class	Middle class	Doctorate
Liu	F	Chinese	Taiwan	Upper middle class	Middle class	Bachelors
Mei-Ling	F	Chinese	Taiwan	Middle class	Middle class	Bachelors
Rong	F	Chinese	Hong Kong	Middle class	Middle class	Bachelors
Yun	F	Chinese	China	Working Middle class	Middle class	Doctorate

An

An is from Hong Kong and immigrated to the U.S. as a young woman. She completed her bachelor's degree at a private college in Utah and married her Chinese American husband. In 2004, they moved to Cholla Town from the San

Francisco Bay Area. Her husband currently works as an engineer for an aerospace company that is located approximately ten miles from their home. An is between 35-50 years old and is a stay-at-home mother to her two daughters.

Ching

Ching is from mainland China, where both of his parents had blue-collared jobs in factories. He immigrated to the United States on a student visa to pursue his Ph.D. at a university in Texas. In 2004, Ching acquired a job in cancer research and moved to Cholla Town with his wife and children. Ching is approximately 40 years old and travels nearly 50 miles each day for work.

Chow

Chow is from Hong Kong, where her father owned and worked at a company and her mother was a homemaker. Chow also had two older siblings, who worked and contributed to their middle-class family income. In the 1980s, Chow was encouraged by her family to immigrate to the United States to increase her chances of being admitted to college. Soon after Chow earned her master's degree from a university in Utah on a student visa, she relocated to Cholla Town to be with her Chinese immigrant husband. Now in their 40s, Chow's husband works for a large semi-conductor company in Cholla Town and she works in higher education at the local university. Through her job, Chow works very closely with the weekend Chinese language school that is held on the university's campus.

Hue

Hue was born in Vietnam and lived in Ho Chi Minh City with her parents and two siblings until her late twenties. During that time, her father was a medical doctor and the sole income provider for their family of five. Hue attained her bachelor's degree and worked as an elementary teacher and school administrator. Around 1990, she married her Vietnamese immigrant husband, who lived and worked as an engineer at a semiconductor company in Arizona. Shortly after their wedding, she was granted a green card with her husband as her sponsor and immigrated to the United States. Hue is currently 55 years old and works in her own child daycare business.

Lee

Lee is from a small town in China and the daughter of a railroad worker and homemaker. While in China, she obtained her master's degree in computer science in Beijing and worked as a computer programmer. Lee and her husband immigrated to the U.S. after he received a job offer in the material science field in Virginia. Since then, they have moved to Cholla Town for her husband's job and she currently works at a child daycare center. Lee is also in her late 30s-40s and has one son.

Liu

Liu is from an upper middle class family in Taiwan and has two older siblings. Her father was a manager for a textile company and her mother was a businessperson in the insurance industry. Liu attended tuition-based private

schools until the age of nine, when she and her family immigrated to the United States. Her parents believed that moving to the United States would provide more opportunities for her older sister to grow as a talented pianist and perhaps gain admission into Julliard. Liu has lived in Arizona ever since and holds a master's degree. She also currently works in management at a large defense company and is in her late 30s-40s. In addition, her husband is a prominent staff member of a church that has a long-standing history with the local university and Chinese American community.

Mei-Ling

Mei-Ling came from a middle class family in Taiwan. Her father had a white-collared job at an energy company and her mother was a housewife. In her early adulthood, Mei-Ling decided not to attend college so that she could continue to work her lucrative full-time job. In 1990, she used her profits from the stock market to immigrate to the U.S. to obtain a bachelor's degree and to be with her husband while he finished his master's degree. Mei-Ling is approximately 46 years old and is a real estate agent and homemaker at the present time.

Ning

Ning was born in Tibet to a large affluent middle class Chinese family. Both of her parents were business people and raised a family of nine children. In addition, her family used their financial resources to seek refuge in several different countries that were less impacted by the regime of the Chinese communist leader, Mao Zedong. After one year of college in Taiwan, Ning

immigrated to the United States to relieve herself from the strict conditions and expectations that her family imposed on her. Ning is now divorced from her Caucasian American ex-husband and shares joint custody of her two daughters. She is in her 40s and working as a hair stylist in Cholla Town. She is the only participant in this study that does not have a college degree.

Rong

Rong is from Hong Kong and her father worked a professional job at the bank. Shortly after Rong's parents divorced, her mother remarried to an American citizen. As a result, Rong and her family immigrated to the U.S. while she was still in elementary school. Rong and her husband, who is a medical doctor, relocated to Arizona after finishing college in the San Francisco Bay Area. She currently works from home for an energy company and is between 30-40 years of age.

Wen

Wen is from a populous city in China, where her parents worked professional jobs. She and her husband were college students in Beijing at the time of the Tiananmen Square protests. Due to the violent outcomes of the protests and the political state of China, she and her husband immigrated to the U.S., after they obtained their bachelor's degrees, in search of freedom in a democratic country. Wen was the first of the couple to immigrate in 1993 and her husband followed the next year. Wen is in her 40s and currently works as a computer software engineer.

Yun

Yun is from a small village in mainland China, where her parents worked laborious jobs. She obtained her master's degree at a university in China and pursued her Ph.D. in a college in southern Arizona. She currently is in her early 40s and works as a hydrologist in a company that is approximately located more than 25 miles away from her residence in Cholla Town.

Focus Group Participants

The eight additional parent participants in this study in the focus group interviews were all Chinese immigrant parents. All of the participants were mothers, except for one father who was in the Gifted School focus group interview. Their ages ranged in between 30-50 years old.

Expert Interview Participants

The expert interviews in this study were conducted with four administrators from the Cholla District. The principal and administrator from the Traditional School represented the traditional specialized academic program in this study. The principal and director of the Gifted School represented the gifted specialized academic program. Each administrator had spent over 10 years in education, with the longest amount of time identified as 20 years. All but one of the administrators in this study was female, and the only male expert participant was the Traditional School administrator. In addition, the administrators are between 40-50 years old.

Findings and Results

Ethnic and Social Class Profiles

A majority of the participants (17 of 19) in the in-depth and focus group interviews were born in a region governed by the Republic of China and experienced the Chinese educational school system. The participants in this study identified their ethnicity as Chinese, except for one parent, who stated she was Vietnamese. In addition, all of the participants experienced their childhood with two parents and at least one sibling in the home. Although most of the participants described their families growing up as middle class, their parents' occupations ranged from laborers to doctors and business owners. At the time of the in-depth interviews, all of the participants (11 of 11) identified themselves as middle class. In addition, a majority of the participants belonged to nuclear families, consisting of one spouse and at least one child. Only one parent in the study was a divorcee, while the other 10 participants remained married to their original spouse.

The in-depth interviews in this study revealed that all of the Gifted and Traditional School parents were identified as being part of an educated Chinese and Vietnamese American middle class. Although Asian Americans are the second largest minority group in Cholla Town, district enrollment data from the 2010-2011 school year showed that only 4% of the low-income elementary student population in the district were Asian Americans. In addition, the Traditional School had the smallest population of low-income elementary

students in the district. Therefore, the middle class status of the small sample in this study represents the majority of Asian American families in the market-oriented school system in Cholla Town.

The identification of their middle class status could be interpreted by Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital theory as the dominant social class in the Gifted and Traditional School. Bourdieu explained the application of his theory in the following statement:

The notion of cultural capital initially presented itself to me, in the course of the research, as the theoretical hypothesis which made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes by relating academic success, i.e., the specific profits which children from the different social classes and class fractions can obtain the academic market, to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions. (1986, p. 47)

Bourdieu's statement highlighted the study's focus on the social class advantages that parents possess when making school choices in market-oriented public school systems. Along with other theories in the conceptual framework and relevant research, this chapter seeks for a better understanding of how the participants' educational experiences in the Republic of China and social class practices guides their decision-making process of making school choices.

The Traditional Education of the Past and Present

Strict school conditions. The study found that all of the Gifted and Traditional School parents (11 of 11) in the in-depth interviews described their own school settings in China and Vietnam as strict and structured environments. Students were required to wear uniforms, and desks were positioned in straight rows, facing the front of the room. In most cases, classrooms consisted of 40 to 50 students in each classroom with one main teacher or rotating teachers, according to the subject. A Traditional School parent named Yun (personal communication, August 23, 2011) described student behavior as “very highly disciplined.” A few of the participants mentioned that teachers used corporal punishment as a means to discipline students. Another Traditional School parent named Mei Ling (personal communication, August 22, 2011) offered a reason for the rigid school environment when she said:

We had a one [*sic*] teacher that had to deal with at least 45 to 55 students. Just one teacher, no assistants at all. And in most of Asian countries [*sic*] at my age, the elementary school was pretty organized. When I say “organized” that is very strictly as a student. They do not ask parents to do a lot of things. School will watch your homework, do a lot of assignments and watch your behavior. So, one teacher can deal 45 to 55 students and we had to go to school around 7:00 [a.m.]. (Mei-Ling personal communication, August 22, 2011)

Mei Ling's statement explained that schools in Taiwan required scrupulous student behavior to assist in classroom management for teachers. Many of the participants also shared that teachers were expected to communicate with parents only during general conference times or if they were concerned with a student's academics or behavior.

A majority of the Traditional School parents (8 of 9) identified the strict behavioral expectations, use of uniforms, and a disciplined approach to the curriculum as important factors in enrolling their student in the traditional program. During a focus group meeting, three parents from the Traditional School agreed that sending their students to school in uniforms was a component of the program that they liked. Prior to enrolling her child at the Traditional School, one participant named Liu (personal communication, August 16, 2011) identified that one of the most important pieces of information she gathered from the school website was that the program encompassed a rigorous academic curriculum and "the more stricter standard of conduct expectations. The uniform was definitely a plus, having my oldest being a girl [laugh]."

In the Traditional School focus group, all of the parents consistently used the term *foundation* or *foundational skills* to describe what they liked about the traditional program and how it met their goals for their children. One member named Tao (personal communication, August 28, 2011) defined the term foundational skills for the group and explained why she chose the Traditional School for her child:

Foundational skills are more into the good habits of learning. It's good studying habits, the good habits of doing homework, good habits of knowing that there is a standard, like an expectation placed on you. And the effort to reach it. And then also, I think the habit of being given guidance at the same time. Because I think I feel like I come from...I love the traditional setting because it reminds me so much of my childhood education. (Tao personal communication, August 28, 2011)

In this statement, Tao made a connection between her own educational experiences and those offered by the Traditional School. Furthermore, she signified the importance of good habits in relation to study skills.

Curricular practices. According to the in-depth interviews, all of the Gifted and Traditional School parents (11 of 11) described their own educational experiences of learning the curriculum through a combination of drilling, memorization, repetition, and recitation of passages from textbooks. Yun (personal communication, August 23, 2011) explained that when she was in school, memorization was used as a strategy for young students to comprehend information, explaining, "That is a way to kind of force learning, you know. You have to keep memorizing it, you know, the longer you do it, eventually your head, it sticks" (personal communication, August 23, 2011).

In contrast, a Gifted School parent named Ning (personal communication, June 13, 2011) described her experience as *dead learning* and said:

You jam it in your brain. If you don't know it, you just memorize it. You don't need to know how it could [*sic*] became. You just memorize it if you have to do it. I don't believe in that. I believe that you need to tear apart, show me where this go, where that go. (Ning personal communication, June 13, 2011)

Ning shared her view on the way memorization was used in her education as a stagnant approach to learning. In addition, she rejected the idea of forced learning and wanted instead to have analytical skills emphasized, which differentiates the Gifted School from the Traditional School in their use of instructional strategies.

Additional findings that supported how Traditional School parents were satisfied with the back-to-basics approach to learning were enhanced by an artifact review of the Traditional School student manual. These data highlighted the ways in which the Traditional School parents' preferred curricular approaches that were similar to how they were taught in China. The manual (Cholla District, 2010) revealed that the math curriculum utilized a basic facts program: "The mathematics basic facts program shall be taught to the mastery level using drill, repetition, and memorization to achieve appropriate accuracy and speed." The student manual (Cholla District, 2010) also listed a variety of homework activities, which included the "drilling and practicing specific skills" and "memorizing material to be recited in class." Despite this match between the Traditional School curriculum and the parents' own schooling experiences, the Traditional School parents (0 of 9) interviewed in this study did not identify the

learning process of drilling, memorization, and repetition as an important factor in choosing a school program for their children. Neither, however, did the same parents indicate any dissatisfaction with the program.

Although a majority of the Gifted School parents identified social aspects of learning as important factors in their selection of the specialized program, a few participants (2 of 5) expressed a need for more basic math instruction, repetition, and practice as a detractor to their current overall satisfaction with the program, specifically in the area of math.

I like [the program], but some of the basics is a problem...they need to practice more. They learn a lot, but, you know, sometimes they didn't practice more enough after, you know, but after a few months, they forgot. You know, math, I think math, you know, you need to practice more. (Lee personal communication, June 13, 2011)

While expressing more overt appreciation for the positive aspects of the Gifted Program, another parent, Chow, echoed Lee's strong belief in the need for more practice and memorization.

I think it is wonderful that the kids do not have to spend a lot of time on homework, and the kids are given a lot of freedom to do the things that they enjoy doing, but I feel that sometimes it is nice for them to get a packet in the beginning of the week and they should continue on—especially kids of younger age—continue to practice the multiplication table, some of the basic things that will be very useful for them in life.

Some of those things, unfortunately, have to be memorized, and I did ask my kids to memorize the multiplication table, and I think it was very helpful to them. So, there are things that, I think, unfortunately will still have to go back to the very traditional method. (personal communication, August 31, 2011)

The tensions described in these statements accentuated the Gifted School parents' needs of a traditional approach to teaching math to their children. In this regard, the methods used in their own educational experiences in China played a role in their perception of quality math instruction. Moreover, their concerns presented a contradiction to the gifted program's philosophy of developing students' math skills through inquiry-based instruction which deemphasizes the use of drilling and memorization as effective instructional tools for student learning.

The Gifted School principal also named math as a top concern of her Asian American parents, but she also pointed out a few other concerns that emulated the parents' own words:

They are probably concerned with making sure that their child is above grade level. They like the ranking; they are quick to tell what position their child might be ranked among other students...they want to make sure that they are challenged and they want to make sure—I would tell you that they have a little possibility of [a] more global look at things. They are certainly geared towards the science and math, the technology pieces, those are all—they want to know what that science curriculum is, what that

math curriculum. I would tell you the number one [thing] they want to know about [is] math, and they want me to know that their child excels in math, and they want to make sure that we can meet that need. (personal communication, July 13, 2011)

The Gifted School principal's statement exemplified how participants in this study perceived ranking systems in education as significant and opportunities for high achievement in quantitative and technological content areas. The high academic achievement and math was a recurring topic throughout the interviews and will be discussed in further detail in the findings.

The relationship between the past educational experiences of parents and factors they deemed as important in selecting a specialized academic program for their child were analyzed as a subconscious effort made by the parents, which led them to view traditional modes of learning as suitable for their child. Bourdieu's cultural capital theory (1986) might explain the underlying reasons why parents selected an academic curriculum based on their own experiences of a traditional education. In addition, the subconscious effort made by parents in the decision-making process exemplifies the embodied state of cultural capital, which can also be seen in many of the findings to be presented in this study.

The significance of homework. The data revealed that a majority of the Gifted and Traditional School parents (10 of 11) remembered large quantities of homework assigned on a daily basis in their own educational experiences. In an in-depth interview on August 16, 2011, a traditional school parent named Rong

described homework in Hong Kong as “very extreme; I remember. It was long hours. As soon as you got out of the school, you probably pretty much spend the rest of the afternoon, evening, doing homework.” Another Traditional School parent named Ching (personal communication, August 19, 2011) remembered that he did not even attempt to play after school because of his heavy homework load. Ching continued to explain that he thought the amount of homework given to students currently in schools had increased and said, “I think the competition is getting worse compared to where we were.”

Despite the Gifted School parents’ selection of a curriculum with dissimilar pedagogies than the traditional program, more than half of the Gifted School parents (3 of 5) identified homework or more basic math practice as an area for improvement. On the other hand, the Traditional School parents (0 of 6) did not express any dissatisfaction with the homework requirement in their back-to-basics program. A Gifted School parent named Hue (personal communication, June 6, 2011) described her experience with confronting her child’s teacher regarding this concern:

Our expectation is she has a lot of projects. She can explore herself to the [sic] project and to create whatever she can do, because she is very creative. But one thing I’m a little bit disappointed and my husband is very, very disappointed [is] that she doesn’t have enough homework. She played too much at home. So, we did complain that with her teacher, and she explained to us that some parents call her at home, call her back

[asking], “Why you have too much homework, my son didn’t have time to do it...And now, you complain that your daughter doesn’t have enough homework, so, I don’t know.” (personal communication, June 6, 2011)

Hue’s statement emphasizes the majority of the Gifted School participants’ beliefs of homework as an integral part of their children’s education, as opposed to an extension to their learning. In addition, the teacher’s comparison of the differing parental views of homework illuminated the shared educational values of the Chinese and Vietnamese Gifted School parents in how they perceive large amounts of homework as being beneficial for their children.

Furthermore, in both expert interviews of the Gifted School (2 of 2), the principal and director described homework as one of the tensions between their Asian American parent population and the school’s philosophy. This finding insinuated that parents in this study engaged in the common cultural practice of placing high value on homework. During a conversation on July 15, 2011, the Gifted School principal stated that throughout her tenure, there were consistent complaints from Asian American parents about the lack of homework. The principal gave her point of view in a light tone:

Oh, that is always kind of a little bit of a joke. They want more; they seem to feel that homework is a very important thread of supporting their students, and it does not even necessarily have to be deeper, which is one of the things that we always talk about—teachers do not just give more homework for the sake of homework. That does not seem to be an issue

with them as much as it might be [Asian American parents do not share the same view on homework as teachers]. Some of our other [minority] populations, they really like the fact that their students are focused and have that [amount of] homework. (personal communication, July 15, 2011)

The director echoed these experiences in her response to the question, “What kinds of tensions have you seen or experienced with Asian American parents [in the gifted program]?”:

I would say that one thing—more homework. There has been a little bit of a shift in that through the years, I think, but for a while, it was hard to communicate that children do not need to do 60 problems of the same thing, or we do not spend a lot of time on handwriting practice in the program, and that shift to educate parents that were trying to look for a different kind of thinking. (personal communication, August 25, 2011)

The Gifted Program director acknowledged the mismatch between her Asian American parents’ expectations of the program and indicated that they were not easily convinced of the gifted program’s progressive approach to student learning. This statement also supported earlier findings that a majority of the Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant parents in this study preferred traditional modes of learning for their children.

The middle class profiles of the participants allowed them to engage in a traditional educational school system in their native country, which helped them

develop cultural capital. This capital provided the foundation for how parents in this study formed their educational beliefs, which manifested in their selection of a specialized academic program for their children. As a result, parents transmitted their cultural capital through shared values of traditional education and high expectancy of homework to their children. This process can be exemplified by the embodied state of cultural capital theory, as explained by Bourdieu:

Cultural capital can be acquired, to a varying extent, depending on the period, the society, and the social class, in the absence of any deliberate inculcation, and therefore quite unconsciously. It remains marked by earliest conditions of acquisition which, through the more or less visible marks they leave (such as the pronunciation characteristics of a class or region), help to determine its distinctive value. (1986, p.49)

Thus, the cultural capital of the parents in this study allowed them to identify and seek out specialized academic programs that contained traditional components of what they perceived as quality education.

A Community-Based Network of School Choice

Chinese mothers. This study found that a majority of Gifted and Traditional School parents (9 of 11) identified their social network as comprised of Chinese Americans who attended the same Chinese language school or church on weekends. The other two parents stated that they did not usually socialize outside of their family. Many of the parents also reported that they initially found

out about their specialized program through their Chinese language school and church networks. Lee (personal communication, June 30, 2011) described her group of friends and said, “I think my friends, most [of their] students go to the Gifted School. Like, the rest of them, half go to the Traditional School and half go to charter schools.” Mei Ling (personal communication, August 22, 2011) also described her Chinese American social network and explained, “Asian American community here is not so big, so we almost know each other a lot.” Wen (personal communication, June 30, 2011) echoed this sentiment when she shared, “So usually, when we wait for the kids, the parents will talk. Yeah, and we know a lot of our friends. Most of our friends were from there, the Chinese school.” In addition to meeting each other at the language school, parents also formed informal networks in other venues that contributed to their school conversations, as Yun (personal communication, August 23, 2011) revealed: “Yeah, Chinese language school and [the kids] also takes a lot of the extra curriculum class like, you know, swimming, joining piano, [so] you can meet all kinds of Chinese.”

In all of the Gifted and Traditional School expert interviews (4 of 4), administrators indicated that Asian American parents socialized and networked primarily with parents from the same ethnic group. The following statement by the Gifted School principal illustrates how same ethnic group social networks in the gifted program utilized one person as a group representative to communicate with school teachers and administrators:

I would tell you that among the group, they have their own home pages, their own Facebook accounts, their own blogging system that they use, that the entire gifted population uses, but then, I would also tell you there is, most likely, a subset of even, just of Asian parents that communicate with each other and talk about the teachers, they talk about the program, they talk about – well, how their child is doing. One parent, I can remember, specifically, walked in to their teacher the first day of school and said, "Well, I talked with all of Gifted School parents and we have decided that we would like you to do homework packets this year." And that was kind of a funny statement, and the teacher said, "Well, I am so glad that you are all getting along so well, but you need to understand that I will be deciding what homework goes home, depending on what the children are learning that day. (Gifted School principal, personal communication, July 15, 2011)

The Gifted Program director also spoke of her experiences with group representatives from other ethnic groups:

Very networked. Again, I guess, I would reference to the East Indian parents are, [they] tend to be very networked, and they will send a representative to come talk to me for all of them. But, I also find with other Asians, usually at, because of church or Saturday school or whatever, they know each other. (Gifted Program director, personal communication, August 25, 2011)

This statement denoted the connectedness of the Asian American parental network in the gifted program, which were formed in Chinese language schools.

The data also revealed that a majority of the parents (10 of 11) indicated that discussions about education were primarily with other mothers. The only male participant in the in-depth interviews, Ching (personal interview, August 30, 2011), confirmed that his wife obtained most of the information about schools from friends and would then relay the information to him. Liu (personal communication, August 16, 2011) described her experience in regards to school choice with her network of Chinese American church friends:

I do know that in recent years, there are more decisions even in terms of those who decide to homeschool, which for me, it is a very foreign concept. Perhaps I do not envision myself in that realm. But, there are certainly a lot of discussions among friends with parents of young kids that talk about school choices, and sometimes, within a particular circle of moms who are not working. (Liu, personal communication, August 17, 2011)

Mei Ling (personal communication, August 22, 2011) shared a detailed perspective of why she thinks Asian American parents rely on each other to obtain school information. She gave an example of when her *mommy group* of Chinese American friends proved to be a resource for her in regards to her child's education. Mei Ling said that she once received a school event flyer titled "Spring Fling." When Mei Ling received the flyer, she did not know what it was

for or how to support the school, whether it was something she had to pay for or if she needed to donate items. Mei Ling called her mommy group in a panic to ask them if they knew what she had to do for the Spring Fling at her child's school. Mei Ling said that receiving such a flyer from school is not considered to be a big deal for the other, non-immigrant, Chinese American parents, because they have a better understanding of the common norms in American schools. Therefore, Mei Ling believed that Asian American parents often are dependent on each other to help them navigate the school system in the United States. In one expert interview, the Traditional School principal (personal communication, July 13, 2011) stated that a large majority of the Asian American population attended school functions and said, "I notice they are in groups, talking to each other more...you see groups, moms in their comfort zones, in general."

The Chinese immigrant mothers in the current study described parenting techniques and negotiation of schooling similar to those of White middle class mothers (Lareau, 2000; Brantlinger, 2003). This connection with White middle class mothers in the negotiation of schooling may emphasize the presence of social class advantages and social reproduction in this study.

Conversely, the *accommodation without assimilation* strategy could also explain how immigration led the Chinese mothers in this study to utilize parenting techniques and social networks to teach their children dominant class competencies in schooling (Gibson, 1997).

Finally, however, both explanations prove to be problematic in the confined framework they provide, due to the lack of acknowledgment of the relationships between their past educational experiences, minority status, and competitive schooling conditions in the participants' native country and the current school system in Arizona.

Zhou and Kim's study (in press) provided stronger evidence of how coethnic social and informational networks are used to better understand the participants' notion of student educational achievement in the current study. Once again, it is important to note that all of the mothers in this study identified that their social network of other mothers was established through Chinese language schools and churches. They also cited Zhou in another study to support their finding on suburban Chinese American immigrants:

Even though many may be structurally assimilated, they still yearn for a community to reconnect with coethnics. Thus, suburban Chinese schools become an important cultural community for contemporary Chinese immigrants. Coethnic ties are rebuilt at local Chinese schools, where immigrants with varied levels of English proficiency and socioeconomic backgrounds come together. Although these ties may not be as strong as those that existed in traditional Chinatowns of the past, they often serve as bridge ties that facilitate the exchange of valuable information and connect immigrants to mainstream society. (Zhou, Adefuin, Chun, & Roachl, 2000, p. 18)

Zhou and Kim's study presented a different aspect to the function of social networks in Chinese language schools in this study by accentuating Chinese immigrant parents' desires to develop and maintain cultural ties with coethnic communities. As a result, these cultural connections are perceived in this study as strong influences in how participants in this study valued information from their social networks to make school choice.

In addition, the finding in this study presented evidence to identify the social and economic class status of parental informational networks as a significant factor in social class reproduction and mobility. Moreover, the child-rearing practices and school involvement of the Chinese mothers in the current study seemed to emulate the ways that White middle and upper class mothers assumed gender roles in Lareau's study (2000). Her study also found that the "differences in [social] networks, linked to the character of work, shaped the amount of information about information available to parents" (p.116). However, this study tries to see a deeper understanding of how cultural and social class networks intertwine with student achievement.

Past studies on parenting styles of Chinese mothers and high student achievement indicate that mothers are the primary source of positive belief systems and attitudes related to high academic achievement (Alva, 1993; Chao, 1994, 1996; Kao & Tienda, 1995). This is exemplified in a study by Chao (1994) that compared parenting practices of middle class educated Chinese and European American mothers. She found that Chinese immigrant mothers engaged in *chiao*

shun and guan or *training* parenting practices. When compared to authoritative parenting practices of European American mothers, Chinese mothers showed higher levels of maternal involvement through their belief in being the sole caretaker of their child along with physical closeness in promoting success for their children (p.1117). Chao's research provided information to explain the strong presence of Chinese mothers and their involvement in the school success of their children as a result of their sociocultural traditions. However, this study strongly believed that along with the participants' cultural-based shared values and beliefs of schooling, middle class-based norms and practices are what guided their reasoning (Brantlinger, 2003; Lareau. 2000).

To support this notion, a study by Lew (2004) found that the economic statuses of Asian American social networks are a key factor in how student academic attainment is achieved. Lew focused on the variances in social class backgrounds, capital, and resources as significant factors in how Korean American urban high school dropouts negotiated their schooling and concluded that the lack of strong coethnic networks at home and in their community were possible reasons why Korean American students perceived schooling as having an unsupportive frame of reference. Lew stated:

Given limited and social economic resources, low-status Korean high school dropouts operate under a different work orientation—one framed by limited income, parental support, and school resources. That is, if social capital derives from social relationships, then different groups of students

have varying degrees of advantage and investment based on class, race, and institutional discourses within the network. Thus, social networks may be also implicated in the reproduction of inequality. (2004, p. 319)

This finding in Lew's study displayed the complexities of how variances in social and economic class within Asian American groups affect the type and quality of schooling their children receive. It also appears that regardless of ethnic and cultural identities, strong social class networks and practices are strong determinants for school success.

Informal knowledge. Data from the in-depth interviews showed that all of the parents (11 of 11) identified parent reviews as one of the most important pieces of information that helped them when choosing a school. Although many of the participants also used the Internet to search for information, they stated that parent reviews were their main source of information about local schools. In addition, almost all of the parents gave specific examples of how they used other parents' experiences of school choice to explain their decision-making process.

Chow, a Gifted School parent, explained her attempt to gain information from other parents when choosing a school program:

I actually just tried to get a lot of testimony—the testimonials from parents. It was a very interesting scenario. A lot of the parents, they have the older siblings in the gifted program, and they always have the younger sibling at the private school. (personal communication, August 19, 2011)

Another parent from the Gifted School, Wen, shared how families' decisions in a community influenced school choice:

If the program's out there, the newer ones, let's say [charter school name], is really appealing and everybody can see the fact. Yeah, people will move as a group. I know my street has more than five families going there. I think one third of her class is going there. That means most of her friends are going. That's also a motivation. Sometimes they don't think too much about the curriculum. They came all about friends. So, that makes it easier for the parents to make the decision, too. (personal communication, June 30, 2011)

In this statement, Wen believes that parents choose schools based on their friends' opinions about the program, rather than learning about the details of the curriculum. Her account depicted the social network in this study as possessing a great degree of influence when parents choose schools.

The significance of parental reviews in the decision-making process of school choice suggests that parents in this study engaged in social class-based practices and shared values. This study described two classifications of information in the literature review section as *hot*, or grapevine, knowledge; derived primarily through interaction within social networks, whereas *cold* knowledge is obtained from official or formal sources of information such as educators, professionals, and educational institutions (Ball & Vincent, 1998). Parent reviews could be considered grapevine knowledge, similar to Ball and

Vincent's (1998) study of how different social classes utilized grapevine knowledge in social networks. Furthermore, the participants' profiles and decision-making process in the current study match Ball and Vincent's description of middle class parents as *privileged* or *skilled choosers* of making school choice. The two authors described how choosers engage in a process of *child-matching*:

They are looking to find a school, which will suit the particular proclivities, interests, aspirations and/or personality of their child. For some (objective/goal-oriented), this is often the primary concern and is driven by a very precise academic concerns and aspirations related to their child. The matching is based upon specific future/goal orientation. Here the child is often complexly constructed in terms of traits, needs, and talents. This in itself complicates choice, especially when combined with "insider" knowledge of the school system. (p. 387)

The ways that the participants used their social networks to support their decision-making of choosing a school provided evidence of how they gained access to *insider knowledge* in the school system. This study will uncover how the participants used their exclusive bicultural knowledge to capitalize on school advantages for their children in the next section.

Formal knowledge. In addition to obtaining information from their social networks, a majority of the parents (10 of 11) stated that supplementary sources of information were used to choose a school. Parents listed a variety of sources,

such as school websites, tours, meetings, presentations, and their child's past teacher.

A Traditional School parent named An (personal communication, June 5, 2011) explained the process of how she obtained information from the school website: "So we go online and see...a lot of them post the curriculum there. And after I see it, and if I have questions, then I call them and ask them." Yun (personal communication, August 23, 2011) identified the information she thought was important when she conducted research on the Traditional School:

I look at several things, you know. First of all, I heard it from feedback from other parents: It's that some kid here learn a lot. He behaves well. I also did my research on the website, go to, you know, gradeschool.org and look at the, you know, the ranking of the school, the AIMS Test, the test result. Yeah, parents review everything about the school, and what else I look at, I also look at, you know, the demographic. (personal communication, August 23, 2011)

This finding is also supported by all of the Gifted and Traditional School administrators, who indicated that the questions Asian American parents asked prior to enrolling their student in the school were specific to the specialized academic curriculum and enrollment procedures. This suggested that parents used their cultural capital to obtain formal sources of information from schools and the Internet as supplemental information in selecting a specialized academic program.

The parents' utilization of both informal and formal sources of information in this study could be perceived as an educated middle class advantage in schooling (Anyon, 2005; Ball & Vincent, 1998; Brantlinger 2003; Lareau, 2000). The middle class status and social networks of participants in this study may have attributed to the notion of school choice as a common practice among privileged parent populations. In addition, Lareau provided further support for the assertion that immigrant mothers in this study used social class-based practices in obtaining informal and formal knowledge to help them navigate the school system. Lareau discussed social class differences in social networks, which restricted working class parents' access to information through both, informal and formal sources of knowledge. Her study also suggested that working class parents "with a lack of college education is an exercise in exclusion" within school structures that have been influenced by educated middle and upper class norms. This statement suggested that the educated middle class practices of the participants in this study attributed to the segregated school conditions in the Cholla District.

Furthermore, a study by Louie in *Compelled to Excel* (2004) provided a deeper understanding of the cultural and social class networks to explain how immigrant parents obtained informal and formal knowledge to choose a school for their children. Louie conducted a detailed study of two groups of Chinese American parents and students with similar immigration patterns. Louie found that the immigrant working class parents relied on their ethnic and social class

networks to help them navigate through the urban school system. Louie cited Stanton-Salazar (1997) as a way to explain the presence of ethnic-based informational networks in her study:

Thus, much as Stanton-Salazar (1997) theorized, institutional agents, in this case, kin, friends, and coworkers living in better-off neighborhoods and with varying resources and lengths of residence in the United States, came together to provide an invaluable source of knowledge about school programs and academic help. (p. 89)

In contrast to the working class Chinese immigrant group in her study, the other group of middle class suburban immigrant parents “used their resources notably, financial resources and their English-language facility to learn and make sure of their best school option for their children” (p.113). The social profiles and setting of this current study matched the middle class suburban immigrant parent group in Louie’s study, with the exception that the Gifted and Traditional School’s parents placed more value on informal sources of knowledge from their social networks when they made school choice. A possible parallel is that Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant parents in this study used ethnic and social class informational networks as a means of social mobility. Thus, parents making school choices in market-oriented school systems can be viewed as a bicultural practice in middle class Asian immigrant communities.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND RESULTS CONTINUED

Chapter Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the self-selecting patterns of Asian American parents who enrolled their children in specialized academic programs. Qualitative data was collected in this study by conducting in-depth, focus group and expert interviews, field notes, and artifact documents to support the findings. The data were initially analyzed by categories and then coded by themes and subthemes. The findings in this chapter will also show connections between the participants' past educational experiences, parenting practices, and educational beliefs in the remaining two research questions:

3. What are Asian American immigrant parents' notions of academic achievement or success for their children?
4. How do Asian American immigrant parents perceive specialized academic programs after having their children participate in them?

This chapter is organized by headings and subheadings in order to present the interrelatedness of the findings along with the themes, subthemes, and theories in the conceptual framework. Therefore, the above research questions in this chapter will be presented under a combination of headings and subheadings, rather than the order of the research questions.

Findings and Results

A Cycle of Competitive Educational Conditions

The advanced curriculum. The in-depth and focus group interviews revealed that all of the Gifted and Traditional School parents (19 of 19) identified that an advanced curriculum was one of the most important factors in selecting a specialized academic program for their children. In addition, an advanced curriculum was what parents expected prior to enrolling their child in the Gifted and Traditional Schools. Parents described their expectations for the curriculum with the following descriptors: *advanced, accelerated, challenging, gifted, one grade level above, and rigorous*. Some of the participants expressed the type of education they wanted for their children with statements that related to their ethnic group identity and past educational experiences. Yun (personal communication, August 23, 2011) explained the important aspects of her selection of the Traditional School by making reference to the challenging curriculum she experienced in China:

Traditional, that's what I like, because we came from this kind of, you know, when I was little, it's like a traditional way. They teach one grade above from us. That's what I liked, you know. I think, you know, kids should be challenged. (Yun personal communication, August 23, 2011)

This comment reflected Yun's beliefs that the traditional schooling she received accelerated her learning. As a result, the back-to-basics curriculum incorporated an advanced curriculum which she saw as beneficial approach to education.

In both expert Gifted School interviews (2 of 2), administrators shared that the majority of the questions Asian American parents asked were related to the acceleration of the curriculum, specifically in the areas of math and science. The director explained the types of queries she often faced from the Asian American parents:

I often hear them ask about grade acceleration, math, what the math content is, what the math methods are, how we—not just how far we teach in math—but how we teach math. They are very interested in the methods and pretty knowledgeable about it, even for people that are not educators.

(personal communication, August 25, 2011)

The director's comment showed how parents engaged in the middle class advantage of soliciting formal school knowledge along with emphasizing their need for an advanced curriculum. She also implied that Gifted School parents often try to educate themselves on the curriculum. This complicated the study's previous finding of parent reviews as being strong influences in the decision-making process of school choice. The director also identified a strong presence of achievement-related behaviors in math; a subject area that is commonly connected to the model minority myth. The following section provides a deeper analysis of the Gifted Program director's experiences with Asian American parents.

The relationship between the middle class advantages of the participants in this study and the perpetuation of the model minority stereotype is connected by the ways that they engage in school choice. As an example, this study found that

parents' possessed a strong need and consumption of an advanced curriculum. Three layers will be used to illustrate how this relationship was formed. The first layer uses cultural capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986) as the foundation to understanding this relationship. This theory would reaffirm that the participants in this study engaged in the social class based privilege of making school choice. Specific to this example, their school selections were centered upon the high value that they placed on the accelerated curriculum. This finding appeared to coincide with the advantages of White middle class mothers in Brantlinger's (2003) study. Her study examined how White middle class mothers rationalized school advantages. Brantlinger's following statement exemplified how mothers in her study justified segregated schooling:

Children's "not being challenged" was a euphemism for their not being separated into advanced or accelerated tracks. Versions of this complaint included "boredom and lack of stimulation for gifted kids," "teachers teach to the common denominator and don't address the needs of advanced students, "lowered requirements to accommodate everyone," "a lot of more time has to be spent on basics for average kids and less on enrichment for the gifted kids" (2003, p. 49)

It could be understood that both groups of mothers, in Brantlinger's research and the current study, rationalized school advantages in similar ways. This understanding creates the second layer, which highlights the ways that parents in this study contributed to White dominant class structures in schooling. Their

contributions to White middle class norms in school systems could be seen as directly related to social class inequalities in education. In return, Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant parents in this study allowed for the opportunity for school systems to associate them with the dominant class. The third and final layer of this relationship, believes that parents in this study exposed themselves as being attributers to the high achieving, Asian model minority stereotype by participating in dominant class practices in schools. By doing so, they have disguised the educational injustices suffered by other groups of Asian Americans and minorities. In a similar context to the setting of this study, Lee quoted three researchers to emphasize the inequalities that the model minority stereotype creates and said:

Although advocates of market-based educational policies suggest that competition will increase opportunities for all students, there is growing evidence that the policies leave some students behind (Lipman; 2004, McNeil, 2000; Whitty, 1997). As schools have become increasingly competitive, there are distinct winners and losers. According to performance on standardized tests, Asian Americans students may appear to be winners in these educational contests. (p.11)

Lee continued to speak upon the evidence her study found which reaffirmed that the success of Asian American students disguised the challenges of other Asian American groups in the educational system. This study will present additional findings throughout this chapter that portrays how participants maintained the

high achieving model minority stereotype in the market-based system of schools of choice.

In addition to an advanced curriculum, most of the Gifted School parents (4 of 5) identified social and collaborative aspects of learning as an important quality of the specialized program. Parents used words such as *creative*, *depth*, *out of the box*, *presentations*, and *project-based learning* to describe the assets they perceived in the gifted program. Chow chose the gifted program after reconsidering her own education experiences in light of her daughter's abilities:

I have to go back to my parenting skill when my older daughter was young; I worked with her a lot. I spent a lot of time with her. I was actually, you know, I still remember that I would sit right next to her. And if she doesn't write something neatly and nicely, I would just have my eraser in my hand and I would erase it, and I would have her redo everything. It was too much on my part, and she was just too perfect and accelerated too fast. And so I just wanted her to try something completely different. (personal communication, August 19, 2011)

In this statement, Chow reflected upon her own strict parenting style and high expectations prior to selecting a school for her daughter. Another Gifted School parent, Jiao (personal communication, August 25, 2011) described parents' expectations of high academic achievement as a part of Chinese culture:

I think...all the Chinese here, we all grow up like you have to study harder. You have to get good grade. Like if you get a "B," it just seems

that it's not commit [*sic*], and then they always try to get excellent kind of grade...so it's saying Chinese, the culture is like that, you know, since the older times, it's always like that. (Jiao personal communication, August 25, 2011)

Jiao attempted to explain that historically, Chinese culture provided the foundation for Chinese immigrant parents to value education. This comment highlighted her meritocratic ideology of school systems.

The concept of meritocracy was originally invented by the Chinese philosopher, Confucius, and is deeply rooted in Chinese traditions (Meritocracy, 2011). This ideology supports the notion that students can achieve through hard work and due diligence which preserves the racist, Asian model minority myth. Louie (2004) illustrates this best when she said:

The model-minority myth does this by brilliantly articulating the popular belief that ours is an open society where success is attainable by the dint of hard work alone. The very success of Asians implicitly speaks to the question of why other minority groups are struggling and having a much harder time entering the ranks of higher education. (p.xvii)

This study believed neoliberal educational policies have enhanced the participants' beliefs of meritocracy in school systems; therefore, a home advantage to how they negotiate advantages in schools of choice. The following findings will illuminate the relationship between the parents' perceptions of their

educational experiences in marketized school systems in China and their parenting practices in relation to education.

Extracurricular activities. All of the Traditional and Gifted parents (11 of 11) stated that their children participated in extracurricular activities before they were school-aged. In addition, parents confirmed that their children continue to engage in extracurricular activities, including a variety or combinations of Chinese language classes, art, dance, language, music, and sports classes. A majority of the parents also described that they often visited museums, libraries, historical landmarks, and traveled with their child both within and outside the United States. One parent in the following comment identified the use of art museums as a way to support her children's interests:

Most of the time, we went to art museum. Because my two daughters, they love art. So, most of the time, they chose art museum. Because they want to know how different art in different countries are. So they love it, and I think it's worth it when we spend time at the art museum. (Hue, personal communication, June 8, 2011)

In addition, Wen (personal communication, June 30, 2011) described how she saw differences in the manner in which parents approached extracurricular activities for their children in China compared to others in the United States:

I know people who put lots of money and effort [into] learning piano in China. Usually, they want their kids to be professional in the future. If your kids only want to go through the normal college route, they won't

have the time to do that. Like in here, you can do a lot of fun things. I think it's very helpful for the kid's growth, mentally, or physically. But in China, I don't think they put lots of effort on those kinds of growth.

(personal communication, June 30, 2011)

Wen implied that students in China did not often engage in nonacademic extracurricular activities, unless they intended to pursue professional careers in noneducational areas. In addition, she perceived extracurricular activities in the United States as important experiences for the growth of children.

It appeared in the above findings that parents in this study transmitted cultural capital in the objectified form of extracurricular activities in their parenting practices, which included Chinese language classes, music, art and sports classes, museum and historical site visits, and travels with their child both within and outside of the United States. Bourdieu (1986) described cultural capital in the objectified form as “material objects and media, such as writings, paintings, monuments, instruments, etc...transmissible in its materiality” (p. 50). In that sense, extracurricular activities serve as a dominant social class practice of transmitting cultural capital. Furthermore, Bourdieu connects the process of cultural capital transmission in material forms to economic value, saying, “Thus cultural goods can be appropriated both materially—which presupposes economic capital—and symbolically—which presupposes cultural capital” (p. 50). In this regard, child-rearing practices of middle class Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant parents in this study may have attributed to the cycle of social class reproduction.

Extended school days and tutoring centers in the Republic of China.

Data from the in-depth interviews showed that a majority of the parents (10 of 11) experienced longer school days when compared to schooling in the United States. Rong (personal communication, August 16, 2011) described the length of her school day in Hong Kong, and said, “I just remember we went six days a week, half days in [*sic*] Saturdays. I do remember taking the school bus early in the morning and getting out late in the afternoon.” Many of the parents indicated that students were normally obligated to attend tutoring sessions for an additional 2-3 hours each day afterschool. Tutoring centers were described as privately owned and tuition-based in Taiwan, whereas they were provided free of charge at schools in the other areas. Mei Ling (personal communication, August 22, 2011) stated that tutoring centers were lined up one after the other, populating entire blocks in her neighborhood. Mei Ling continued to emphasize the popularity of tutoring centers in Taiwan and said jokingly, “If you want to be rich, go back to Taiwan and open a tutoring center there. You will make lots of money!” A gifted school parent named Chow (personal communication, August 19, 2011) shared a different perspective of tutoring centers in Hong Kong:

A tutoring center seems like it is a very mentoring and nurturing place.

But what I remember was a very, actually, a scary afterschool tutorial program that we attended. Yes, I remember it just mainly to prepare us for exams. (personal communication, August 19, 2011)

These statements depicted tones of intimidation in the participants' experiences in tutoring programs and its overwhelming presence in the educational system in their native Asian country. Despite their grim accounts of tutoring in the past, these parents continued to engage in those types of programs by incorporating them into their child-rearing practices. The connection between the participants' belief in tutoring programs and their expectations of high achievement will be discussed in further detail under the findings related to the pressure for high test scores.

Tutoring programs and Chinese language schools in the U.S.

Additionally, it was found in the in-depth interviews that a majority of the Gifted and Traditional School parents (8 of 11) had enrolled their children in a tutoring or core subject-based extension program as a supplement to their school's specialized academic program. A gifted school parent named Wen (personal communication, June 30, 2011) noted that her daughter attended math and Chinese language classes on the weekends along with approximately 100 other Chinese American families and said, "They teach not just Chinese; they also teach math. So the math is more advanced than your regular grades." Wen also continued to describe how students often attend a combination of Chinese and math classes, one after the other. In an expert interview, the Traditional School principal (personal communication, July 13, 2011) said, "I do see more students in afterschool clubs in the Asian population, especially academic, computer club,

chess; that is where you see a little more—there may be networking or extra carpooling together.”

Although functional relativism was used as a basic and simple understanding of the cultural and structural framework in Zhou and Kim’s research (in press), their study provided a deeper understanding of how supplementary education supported the participants’ notion of high student achievement in this study. Zhou and Kim stated that after approximately 60 years of legal exclusion in the United States, Chinese language schools were initially established in the late nineteenth century to sustain language and cultural heritage for the generations to come. In more recent years, Chinese and Korean ethnic language schools and afterschool institutions were described by Zhou and Kim as focused on the same objective of assisting second generation children to assimilate into a dominant class society by “fostering ethnic culture, heritage, and identity, and to provide a wide range of tangible supplementary (rather than competing) services to help children do well in regular schools and ultimately gain admission into prestigious colleges” (p. 14). Furthermore, the researchers explained the relationship between the functions of Chinese language schools and the current economic conditions in their communities:

For ethnic minority members, however, family socioeconomic status may not be the sole determinant of educational outcomes. The ethnic community can also be a source of support. Chinese and Korean ethnic communities are supported by robust coethnic entrepreneurship. Even

more importantly, the relatively high premigration socioeconomic status of Chinese and Korean immigrants enables these groups to carry over and revitalize a practice that originated in the homeland. As the demand for education exceeds what public schools can offer, ethnic entrepreneurs provide afterschool programs to their coethnics. Also, because of the higher standards imposed on Asian American children as a model minority, parents increasingly turn to these ethnic institutions in the hope of giving their children an extra boost in the race for admission into prestigious schools. (p. 15)

It can be understood that the participants' educational experiences prior to immigration may have perpetuated the strong presence of tutoring programs and Chinese language schools in their U.S. communities. As a result, the intent of academic extracurricular activities in the participants' parenting practices straddled a fine line between functional relativism and social class advantages in education. The connection between the participants' beliefs in tutoring programs and their expectations of high achievement will be discussed under the findings related to the pressure for high test scores.

A few participants (2 of 11) stated they had either enrolled or attempted to enroll their child in a specialized math extension program or charter school, which used the Chinese abacus as a supplement to their math education. Chow and Mei Ling also mentioned that they knew of many Chinese American friends who enrolled their children in this type of program. Mei Ling (personal

communication, August 22, 2011) described the abacus math tutoring center near her home: “I would say 85% Asian or Indian family go there.” In this type of math program, young students are taught to utilize an abacus to learn math. Once students master the abacus, they no longer use the tool manually and instead, they visualize a mental image of the abacus to complete math problems and calculations. At one point in time, Chow (personal communication, August 31, 2011) enrolled her child in a charter school, which contained a specialized math curriculum that was centered on the use of the abacus. Chow spoke of her charter school experience in the following statement:

I went to that school’s orientation or information section, and we’re very impressed by three of the kids that were able to do mental math in seconds. So, I enrolled my older daughter into the program. I think it was about two weeks into the program. I was attending the class because I have doubt about the program, so I attended all the classes with my older daughter, and about two months into the program, I decided to pull her out. (personal communication, August 31, 2011)

Chow’s comment illuminated the decision-making of school choice as a continuous process even after she engaged in the charter school’s specialized math program.

Earlier in this chapter, this study stated the belief that neoliberal ideals in the free market of education have increased the unfortunate opportunities for middle class Asian American parents to be stereotyped as the model minority.

The findings showed a reciprocal relationship between the participants' parenting practices and the commodification of education in relation to childhood and parenting (Ball 2004). In the process of commodifying education, parents are expected to act as *risk managers*, which Ball expands upon in the following:

The education market is a diffuse, expanding, and sophisticated system of goods, services, experiences and routes—publicly and privately provided. For many parents, educational opportunities are sought for their children through a made-up mix of state and/or private institutions, and paid-for add-ons, like educational toys, parental tasks, tutoring, commercial activities, and sources of information and advice. (p. 7)

In addition, the careful implementation of these types of academic goods and services in parenting practices perpetuates the dominant middle class status quo in educational school systems. This notion supports the growing evidence of how the participants have engrossed themselves in the model minority myth through their social class privileges, as honorary whites.

The Pressure for High Achievement

Model minority parents. Some of the parents (4 of 11) discussed their perspective of high achievement in the Asian American population and how it has affected their decisions. Various comments made throughout the study illustrated how the participants perceived or experienced the model minority stereotype, which links the Asian American population with high academic achievement:

When I say typical Asian, I sort of put a quote around it... because Asian people, especially for the first generation of immigrants, it's not easy for them to come to the United States. We usually work really hard. At least from my perspective, I think we work really hard. We go extra miles to get things done. When we come to raising the kids, we want done to be the same [*sic*]. Even in Asia, if we want to excel because there are large population out there [*sic*]. If you want to excel, you have to put more effort than most of the people. That's what I mean by typical Asian. You work hard and then you don't be lazy, something like that. Basically, work diligently, work hard. (Wen personal communication, July 18, 2011).

The following statement compared immigrant Asian and Caucasian American perspectives of worth ethic and academic achievement:

Americans, maybe they don't have this in parents before [*sic*]. It's a life [in which] you have to fight for your future. Everything here is ... at the beginning, they have a quick start compared to what they have. They don't feel like you have to do the academic strong [*sic*] to get a job or to lead a better life. Sometimes I don't understand them. Some parents don't pay too much attention to their kid's academic, how well they do. I think their expectation is not as high as [ours]. Maybe because for us, this is the only way we can be successful. Americans, in their point of view, people can be successful by doing all kinds of things. You don't have to

be a computer programmer. You can have a plumbing job if you like it.

Values are different. (Yun personal communication, August 23, 2011)

Rong's (personal communication, August 24, 2011) comment highlighted her perception of the types of professions Asian Americans valued:

Engineering, lawyer, doctor, pharmacist...almost all of my husband's side of the family, are in that area. And, you know, you will laugh that we have gone to a wedding where they would go around table and they'll be like, "Name your profession." I would feel like, "Why? I just work [with] computers." And then it is not...like, they are not bragging, though.

(Rong personal communication, August 24, 2011)

This comment made by Rong exemplified how the parents in this study rationalized the model minority role and the prevalent professions of educated Asian Americans. In an era of market-based school systems, Lee (2009) points out that "stereotypical high-achieving Asian American student who studies computer science or engineering is seen as ideal in this context, whereas other students, including many Asian Americans, who struggle academically or choose to pursue other fields are viewed as less desirable and less valuable (p.11).

In addition, Ning (personal communication, June 13, 2011) shared her daughter's concern of being perceived as a *nerd*, as a result of her enrollment in the Gifted School:

Sometimes [my daughter] says, "Mom, I don't wanna go to the Gifted School or the nerd school!" and she's not nerd by any means, she don't

look like it, and she's smart and have the looks, too. (Ning personal communication, June 13, 2011)

Ning's articulated her view on the term nerd, which she expressed with a negative connotation. She also expressed her own perception of the model minority stereotype as being Asians that are unattractive, yet highly intelligent. Therefore, it appeared that Ning has adopted what dominant society has deemed as being associated with the Asian model minority.

In the focus group of Gifted School parents, most of the parents (4 of 5) engaged in discussions about differing societal perceptions of high achieving students in China and in the United States. The only father in the group, Fan (personal communication, August 25, 2011) voiced his concern that Gifted School teachers should support students to perceive high educational achievement and intellectual capabilities as positive traits. Fan continued to say that smart Asian American students in the U.S. might lose focus on their education due to their resistance to being labeled a nerd. Fan explained the difference in how people in China view high student achievement and said, "I mean, being a nerd in Chinese culture, it's like nothing there, and these people think you are smart. It's not [like being called] nerds here, in that kind of [negative tone]."

The data in the expert interviews also showed that a majority of the administrators (3 of 4) described their Asian American parent population through a comparison to other races or social classes. The Gifted School principal's

statement characterized her perception of Asian American parents in the Gifted School:

I would tell you that they are—when it comes to being on campus, they are pretty quiet and pretty reserved. They follow sort of that norm that they have a high respect for the role of the principal, which I do not always see with my other families, who feel that...I am very approachable. (Gifted School principal, personal communication, July 15, 2011)

In addition, the following statement described a sense of strong solidarity amongst the Asian American population in the Traditional School:

Especially at our school, they are really a solid majority because...our population is very much Asian, Asian American, but...they are the least needy group of the parents. (Traditional School administrator, personal communication, August 25, 2011)

The Traditional School principal recognized the different social economic classes in her Asian American parent population, which attributed to their dissimilar parental expectations for student behavior:

I've had some [Asian American parents] that are over lenient. And I tend to see a difference in the highly educated Asian population, [which] is very strict. And the Asian population that possibly is working more blue collar jobs [is] more lenient. And [this] is just an assumption, but I've seen both sides of that in several different instances. (Traditional School principal, personal communication, July 13, 2011)

These comparisons can also be viewed as evidence in support of Ogbu's (1998) second frame of reference, which he explained in the following statement that voluntary minorities compare the situation of others back home:

They became immigrants because they hoped to do better than they did previously in their home countries or places of origin. In comparing their situation in the United States to that of family and friends back home, they often conclude that they are doing better or seeing better opportunities for their children in the United States. This provides them with motivation to work hard to succeed. (p.170)

However, this frame of reference indicates that voluntary immigrants were more likely to accommodate to mainstream society and "willing to accommodate and to accept less than equal treatment in order to improve their chances for economic success (Ogbu 1978; Shibutani and Kwan 1965, p.170).

The data in this study did not indicate any responses to show their willingness to accommodate and accept less than equal treatment in making school choices. In contrast, it seemed as though parents were empowered by ethnic and social class based social networks in making school choice. In other words, these networks strengthened the participants' intercultural competency in seeking educational advantages for their children in market-oriented school systems. Therefore, it appeared that Ogbu's (1998) frame of reference did not fully explain the participants' beliefs in this study. This study found that the social class status of the participants played a more substantial role in their

immigration status and perceptions of educational attainment. In this regard, the failure to emphasize social class practices in minority populations maintains the model minority stereotype. This type of generalization that attributes Asian Americans as high achieving minorities impedes the reveal of significant factors related to high academic achievement.

High test scores. The majority of the participants (10 of 11) described the significance of high test scores in order to attend junior high or high school in their country of origin. Parents often used the term *competitive*, or described the feeling of pressure and heavy competition, due to the ranked school system used in their countries. Chow (personal communication, August 19, 2011) described that in her educational experience, she felt that the primary objective of schooling was to prepare students for the placement exam: “From what I remember, I didn’t learn much from elementary school.” Yun (personal communication, August 16, 2011) described that by high school, students had been filtered twice by entrance exams, which meant high school students were all college-bound. However, students had to attend a highly ranked high school in order to increase their chances of scoring well on the college entrance exam. A few parents used comparisons in their statements to illustrate the differences between the educational systems in their home countries and the one used in the United States. Mei Ling (personal communication, August 22, 2011) described how her perception of nonacademic extracurricular activities in the United States changed after she questioned a friend’s parenting technique in the following:

One of my friend's kid was a top nation, number one or two chess player in the first grade. And one time I talked to one [sic] mother [in my] group, and I told them, I said, "What is so good about playing chess...? So, what is that going to do about in any [sic] future?" They told me, "No. In America, you have to [be] good so [sic] something besides your score." See, you know what, in our entire Asian system—China, Taiwan, Hong Kong—it is all about score. They do not care about if you are good as the best—yeah, you are good at swimming, you are good at the gym, you are good at the basketball. (Mei Ling personal communication, August 22, 2011)

Chinese students dedicated most of their time to study for the entrance exams, which explained the absence of nonacademic extracurricular activities in Wen's (personal communication, July 18, 2011) following statement:

I would say more than 50% of the effort is just for the test. If there's no such test out there, maybe the schools in China will rethink about the way they are teaching. I wouldn't say it's not authentic teaching, because for math and some subjects, you do have to push them to learn no matter what. But just because of the existence of the test, people do a lot of things just for that. Even during the summer, they don't... not like the kids here, they can do swimming class. They can go to this camp and just come back. [In China] there's no such thing. All you do is to get the students together. Of course, the parents have to pay extra money for the

summer. They put the students together and just to study for the exam. Not directly, but they always put the kids to a higher level of learning. The next year they learn higher. Basically, the last year of high school, they do nothing but to prepare for the test. (Wen personal communication, July 18, 2011)

In addition, Yun (personal communication, August 16, 2011) described how the school system in China measured student achievement solely based on entrance exam scores, whereas schools in the United States considered other indicators of academic performance:

That test, I can tell you, it's not like it here [in the U.S.] when we look at certain performance, we look at how the student do homework or quiz. We cannot account for all the information. For our test, it's rated. It's only one test. Some people usually, they can do well in the past 3 years, but on the test day, something happened. You didn't feel well, they didn't do well on the test, terrible, just, you know, somebody got a bad luck and couldn't pass the test, your fate is gonna change. (Yun personal communication, August 16, 2011)

This statement also emphasized the severe consequences of high stakes testing in China, which Yun described them as life-changing events. The hierarchical educational system they experienced did not fully support their academic endeavors, and in a majority of the cases, this barrier led to their immigration to the United States.

As a result of immigration, it could be reasoned that the majority of parents in this study perceived high achievement and success for their children through a process that included the practice of afterschool tutoring and academic extension programs. In return, this process provided opportunities for social mobility through education. Zhou and Kim's study (in press) of supplementary education in Chinese and Korean immigrant communities made similar conclusions. They stated:

Prior to immigration, both Chinese and Koreans lived in a country of origin where education is the single most important means of attaining social mobility; where access to quality education is fiercely competitive (and in the Chinese case, highly restricted), and where families invest a disproportionate amount of their resources in supplementary education in order to improve their children's future life chances. (p.15)

This information also supported Sue and Okazaki's (1990) idea of functional relativism, which "assumes that limitations in mobility in noneducational endeavors influences educational levels" (p.917). However, Sue and Okazaki would agree that studies have not provided substantial evidence to indicate that Asian Americans are indeed, restricted in noneducational areas. The researchers enhanced this conflict when they cited another study (Sue et al., 1976), in which Asian American students at the University of California, Berkeley, identified their reasons for educational attainment: to gain more income, to increase their opportunities for a better job, and the difficulty of advancement in other avenues

due to discrimination. Nevertheless, Sue & Okazaki (1990) posed the question of why other minority groups have not adopted the notion of education as mobility under restricted conditions in noneducational arenas. Unfortunately, this study believes that it is in these types of questions that seem to nurture the model minority myth.

Competition within the same ethnic group and with others. In over half of the interviews (6 of 11), parents from the Traditional and Gifted Schools discussed their perception of competition in relation to selecting an advanced curriculum for their child. Ning (personal communication, July 7, 2011) commented on her expectations before enrolling her child in the Gifted School, saying, “I expect that she’ll be educated [so that] when she get out there, she’s on top of the company, on top of other people; she stands out.” Mei Ling (personal communication, August 22, 2011) also voices her view on academic competition with others:

We exchange our information a lot during our mommy group, like a lunch get-together. Like, how school is doing, or how is that, and we can exchange information. You know, that group is all about competition. I can tell you, as Asian family, Indian family, it is all about competition. Here is okay, it is not like in California. Arizona mother is more like, they are competing, but we are okay. But, when we say "competing" [it means] we want the best school. (Mei Ling personal communication, August 22, 2011)

Jiao's (personal communication, August 25, 2011) following statement alludes to academic rivalry between Asian American and white students when she described the type of education she wanted for her child:

We wanted them to have...strong social skills, which usually Asian kids [are] a little bit, you know, weak [in]...like public speaking debate class, you know. I wish those kids in the gifted program should be...include[d in] those so that [they] can compete them, with the White [kids]...well, the real Americans. Like, English literature, writing, those are the kind of things that I think I need...for the gifted program to be improved...last year, I think that they have the job interview kind of stuff. That, I think, is...very good...in China, in older time, we are more like toward a humble [attitude]. You know, [humility] is our, like, good character instead of [saying], "Oh, I'm so good," you know. But in America, it's like you have to be visible. You have to do, play the leadership. If you didn't have the kind of that strong skill, then even though you're so good academically, it will not get [you a] successful career. (Jiao personal communication, August 25, 2011).

This comment seemed to indicate that Jiao sees Whites as superior. Her concerns of the gifted program revolved upon the ways that Asian American students could assimilate to American perceptions of high achievement. Therefore, it appears that Jiao has assumed the model minority stereotype by shaping her notion of high academic achievement to match the values of the dominant society.

The parents in this study used a variety of comparisons between their own educational experiences with those of other children's to highlight their expectations of high academic achievement. Chao (1994) explained the parenting practices of *chiao shun* and *guan* in Tobin et al.'s study:

Teachers in China would continuously monitor and correct children's behaviors by appraising whether children were meeting the teacher's expectations of standards, and comparing children to each other in these appraisals; teachers also were very clear what they expected from the child, and what the child was not allowed to do. (p.1112)

The participants' utilization of comparisons to emphasize their expectations of high academic achievement could be interpreted as a parenting style that was influenced by their Chinese culture. Although the research provided a cultural lens to understanding the participants' use of comparative statements in their interviews, this study did not address social class factors related to this type of parenting practices.

Social network pressure. This study found that over half of the parents (6 of 11) said they felt pressure from their friends in relation to choosing a school for their children. Their friends were Chinese Americans parents from the Chinese language school or church, described as a part of their social network. Chow (personal communication, August 31, 2011) expressed that her level of education and professional status played a role in the social pressure that was placed on her, when she made school choice:

My parenting skill, a lot of people had, especially our friends, had a great expectation on us. Both my husband and I are professionals, and I was named an outstanding teacher at my work. And they all comment that our kids will be super smart and will be super ready...because of our background. We were under a lot of pressure, so I started. My daughter started reading fluently was she was 3 ½ years old. (Chow personal communication, August 31, 2011)

Yun's (personal communication, August 22, 2011) comment is an additional illustration of how social pressure is perceived in the process of making school choice:

Just before school starts, you know, I tell to more parents, everyone have done their part to be on the waiting list, to do something. I feel like "Oh my gosh, I feel sorry for my daughter. Maybe I should do something." So I start calling the Traditional School here; they said, "Well, you know, it's too late for the opening. You are late for the opening enrollment period, but we have a waiting list if you are interested."...So I put my daughter's name on the waiting list, and when the school start[ed], at the time [it was] her first year; the school [had started] one week [before] already. (Yun personal communication, August 22, 2011)

These statements indicated that the mothers' social network placed a great deal of stress on them to make school choice. The extra burden that was

placed on the mothers to provide their children with successful educational outcomes may have increased their sense of competition in education.

Exclusive Schools of Choice

Intellectual and school comparisons. All of the Gifted School parents (5 of 5) believed that their specialized program provided better learning conditions when compared to other programs or schools and the identification of their child's intellectual abilities and needs. Lee (personal communication, June 13, 2011) compared the academic qualifications of gifted program teachers to regular academic curriculum teachers and said, "...the teachers get special training, you know, more than the regular teacher, for the gifted program teacher. Wen (personal communication, June 30, 2011) also differentiated the gifted program from other academic curriculums and stated:

The things that they like about the program [her friends] are all the kids that are tested into the [gifted] program stay in a separate classroom. And once the kid got tested into the program, they can stay to junior high, so, they don't have to be retested again. So, those are the main thing actually. And then also, the main, another thing is the curriculum is one year ahead of the regular program. (Wen, personal communication, June 30, 2011)

These Gifted School parents' statements discerned the gifted program as containing advantageous teachers and students.

The above findings can be interpreted that the parents in this study use cultural capital in the form of academic qualifications as means for exchanging

cultural capital and economic capital by “guaranteeing the monetary value of a given academic capital” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.51). In more than a few in depth interviews, participants described teachers in their specialized academic program as holding academic qualifications that are above the norm in regular schools. Additionally, the participants’ comments seemed to duplicate the words of the White middle class mothers in Brantlinger’s (2003) study, which they unknowingly used to marginalize other children in the school system. Lareau (2000) emphasizes the affects of White professional class norms in schools when she found that the absence of a college education is an “exercise in exclusion: exclusion from understanding conversations at school; exclusion from feeling that one belongs at school and is capable of evaluating the performance of better-educated persons; even exclusion from being able to help children with their school work” (p.119). The findings and research continued to exacerbate the implications of social class advantages of schooling and social class influences on market-oriented school systems. Bourdieu’s following statement serves as a connection to solidify this relationship:

The strategy for converting economic capital into cultural capital, which are among the short-term factors of the schooling explosion and the inflation of qualifications, are governed by changes in the structure of chances of profit offered by the different types of capital. (p.51)

This notion highlighted the market-oriented conditions of the school system in this study as an ideal setting for the parents to partake in dominant social class reproduction in education.

Special enrollment. Data from the in-depth interviews revealed that a majority of Traditional School parents (5 of 6) described the use of wait lists and lotteries as part of the enrollment process at the Traditional School. An (personal communication, June 8, 2011) stated that she looked into two other traditional schools but explained, "...they are all very full. I mean, there is no way to get [in] and wait." Rong's comment indicated that the Traditional School's selective enrollment process increased her interest in the school:

We have a friend who have [*sic*] a son in the other traditional school. He mentioned that it was a charter school that was public, still. It was very good because it was free. The only thing is [the] lottery. That's where we heard it from. As soon as we heard that there's a waiting list and lottery, we looked into it more. We took the tour here. We really liked it, actually. (personal communication, August 17, 2011).

Rong's comment indicated that the Traditional School's enrollment process enhanced the attractiveness of the school, which motivated her to obtain further information to make school choice.

In an expert interview with the Traditional School's administrator, he shared his belief that the Asian American parent community perceived that the Traditional School contained a distinct curriculum. In this regard, he described

how some Asian American parents obtained and responded to enrollment procedures:

I think, they are well aware...we ranked second in the [city name] magazine last year for schools, this site. So, it has quite a reputation as far as being a reputation for academics and academic excellence. And anything in that realm stands out, especially in our current state of education in Arizona. I mean, we are a cheap alternative to a private education—very, very much so. We will get prior contact via e-mail asking about registration procedures and things but never questioning about the academic program and never questioning about the discipline program...it is more about the logistics of, “How do I get in? What are your boundaries?” So that they can almost ensure that they get into the school. So, a bulk of the information that they have already received is outside of the school. (personal communication, August 25, 2011)

The administrator’s comment captured the essence of Ball’s (2004) commodification of education by referring to how parents’ perceived the school’s distinctiveness as a tuition-free, yet equitable alternative to tuition-based private education. Ball originally constructed this notion to “highlight the need for proper debate about the necessity or validity of defending some boundaries between public and private—in other words to ask whether there are places where the market form is just inappropriate” (p.3). Furthermore, the Traditional School

administrator supports the participants' conception of the Traditional School as a distinct curriculum related to high academic achievement.

In addition, the themes of academic competition in the parents' decision-making process of school choice in this study could also serve as evidence of a *marketized* setting, which is defined as the presence of an "intensified injection of market principals such as deregulation, competition, and stratification into public schools" (Bartlett et al., p. 1). Therefore, the market-oriented school system in this study may have supported the parents' consumption of a high achieving academic program. To enhance this understanding, data from a local magazine in Arizona were analyzed as material evidence of a competitive culture of schooling, which presented quality schools in the area through a ranking system.

In addition, an analysis of Gifted Program brochures and Traditional Program student manuals provided evidence of their distinct approach to education when compared to other regular elementary schools within the district. The academic specialization of the Gifted and Traditional Schools in this study is perceived through Lubienski's (2003) lens of how schools are marketing their programs as consumer products:

Shrewd administrators may concentrate on shaping their student intake through themes and marketing to attract higher (SES) students rather than on diversifying or innovating, because the consumer product, rather than the process, may be a more certain route to improved test scores and market position. (p. 420)

This statement is supported by the program components of the Gifted School by incorporating progressive ideals in teaching students through the project-based learning method. In addition, the different curricular options that the Cholla School District offers to students and parents are intended to market themselves as competitive contenders in the public charter and non-charter school system in Arizona. Furthermore, the offering of academic programs was described on the website as a “menu of personalized learning experiences” (Cholla School District, 2011), which presents the idea of students and parents as marketable consumers of education. The Cholla School District website also highlighted district academic achievement when compared to state and national test score averages, which indicates a culture of schooling that is based upon academic competition with other educational systems. This data also showed how the Cholla District responded to the market-oriented school conditions by implementing specialized academic programs with the intent of increasing student enrollment. In this regard, Lubienski (2003) addressed inequitable school conditions in the following:

Although, according to many critics, coherence of mission on academic goals is not necessarily a bad thing, it can limit opportunities for innovation promised by reformers, particularly regarding some of the other societal goals imposed on public schools. Thus, educators who establish a school on an idea such as heterogeneous grouping or serving

at-risk students may find it difficult to provide consumers with evidence justifying their approach. (p. 421)

The Search for an Ideal Model of Education

Immigration as social mobility. Over half of the participants (6 of 11) stated their reason for immigrating to the United States was to pursue a level of higher education. In addition, some of the participants had obtained a college degree in their country of origin prior to immigrating to the United States. Many of the participants mentioned that there were only a few universities in their native country, which attributed to the competition they experienced in school. Chow (personal communication, August 19, 2011) said, “When I was going to school at that time, there were only two universities in Hong Kong. And there was only one or two community-type of schools, and so it was just extremely competitive.” Chow also told her story of immigration to the United States:

When I took the exam...to get into what we call the matriculation degree, or to get into matriculation time, the grade 12 and grade 13, I didn't do very well, and I think I was too nervous. I always stud[ied] very hard, but I was just very nervous. So I [ended] up going into a school which was probably, if there are five different tiers, I probably went to a school that is in between [tier] four to five for grade 12. I didn't do grade 13, so my parents felt very sorry for me. And so they started to look for opportunity or asked me to look for opportunities to study abroad. (personal communication, August 19, 2011)

Chow indicated that her parents prompted her immigration, as an alternative avenue for her to obtain a college education. This connection is supported by Sue & Okazaki's (1990) idea of functional relativism:

Using the notion of relative functionalism, we believe that the educational attainment of Asian Americans are highly influenced by the opportunities present[ed] for upward mobility, not only in educational endeavors but also in noneducational areas. To the extent that mobility is limited in noneducational avenues, education becomes increasingly salient as a means for mobility. That is, education is increasingly functional as a means for mobility when other avenues are blocked. (p. 917)

Zhou and Kim's (in press) study enhanced this notion in their study of Chinese and Korean communities:

Upon arrival in the United States, immigrants encounter a relatively open education system and abundant educational opportunities on the one hand, and "blocked" mobility on the other. This reality not only reaffirms their belief in education but also fosters a perception of education as the only possible means for social mobility. (p. 15)

Schools of choice as social mobility. This study found that all of the parents (11 of 11) stated that their child would benefit from the specialized academic program because it would assist them in the pursuit of a college degree. Some parents who shared their thoughts about their children's future in relation to the specialized curriculum illustrated this notion. For instance, Chow (personal

communication, August 19, 2011) explained how the gifted program would help her child with real-life application to the job market:

I fully believe that in order to be successful in the United States, a person needs to have very, very good interpersonal skills and communication skills and presentation skills, etc. And so I see that it is very important for a program to teach the children the real world information, [to] ask them to do the real world projects, to do a lot of presentation, giving them opportunity to do presentations and to explore their interests in life. I think those are the things that I think would benefit them the most in the program. We expect them to finish at least their master's degrees. Both my husband and I were in the business program, and we know that we are biased, but we always feel that the skills in management and business, statistics and math and all that are very, very important. (Chow, personal communication, August 19, 2011)

In addition, An (personal communication, June 5, 2011) hoped that the Traditional School would strengthen her daughter's math and writing skills, which she believed were the two most important ingredients in finding academic success:

I think that quite a bit of my friends say that Traditional School's math is pretty strong, so I hope that after [my daughter] goes through junior high and elementary school in Traditional School, so when she go to high school and college, if she wants to do something in the science field, it's a

benefit to have that because of the math. And, also the writing part.

Because right now it's too soon to say what she wants to do in the future, but I think math and writing both are very important. So if she's strong in both sides, I think, she will succeed in basically whatever she decide[s] to major in when she's in college. (An, personal communication, June 5, 2011)

Yun (personal communication, August 23, 2011) illustrated how her own educational aspirations played a role in the type of future she wanted for her child:

I want [my daughter] to...go to top universities, and to have some skill, you know, in the future. I want her to be academically strong. And also, I want her to be happy, too. I don't want her just to, you know, go to a school every day, just the homework, she is not going to have fun. So, so for her future school choice, how to think kind of balanced, you know. Academically strong is kind of, it's very important to me, you know, because I want her eventually, if she can, go to Harvard or Yale, that would be, you know, it's my dream school and I [didn't] have the opportunity to go there. If she can do that, that will be great and if she cannot, [an]other school is okay. But I just want her to do her best. So, I want her to go to a school [where] she can learn as much as possible, and also the school environment is important too, so she's happy, you know. It's [a] more balanced program; it's not like, just the academic. (Yun, personal communication, August 23, 2011)

Similar to Chow's belief in the Gifted School, Hue (personal communication, June 8, 2011) stated that the project-based learning approach in the gifted program was more beneficial for her daughter's college education, rather than the traditional program:

I think that the way they teach with the project, she has a chance to create, to research, and to present. It will help her [out more], growing with that way. So, when she's in high school, and after that, in college, it will help her learn easier than the traditional way. (Hue, personal communication, June 8, 2011)

These statements reinforced the participants' high expectations of academic achievement in this study. It was evident in their responses that parents saw a clear and direct application of the specialized academic program as being beneficial for their children's college education.

The study of Hirschman and Wong (1986) provided historical evidence to support the notion of "one might expect parental education to serve as the minimal expectation for the next generation" (p.23). They stated that immigration personnel in the mid-twentieth century often selected Asians with high educational qualifications, which left a declining population of Chinese Americans to use "marginal resources to invest in the education of their children, rather than in supporting a growing ethnic enclave" (p.23). Another study by Hirschman & Wong (1981) found that in the postwar era, college graduation became the common level of educational attainment among Asian Americans,

which presented itself in a large share of Asian Americans in professional and technical professions. Therefore, Asian Americans seem to seek out education in professions where they see as the most viable avenue for social mobility.

In addition to high expectations for their children, other studies support that Chinese immigrant parents' school choices are focused on quantitative academic areas due to their limited English skills. Sue cited himself and Zane (1985) in another study, which found that Chinese immigrant students restricted their selection of majors in math and computer science. According to Sue and Okazaki, functional relativism in specific technical and quantitative areas in education is due to the idea that "increased English proficiency is likely to be related to knowledge of American society and ways of getting ahead, which may ultimately decrease the relative value of education as a means for mobility" (p.1990).

Chen & Stevenson's study (1995) found that Chinese and Japanese American students outperformed Caucasian and other Asian American in mathematics achievement; although, there were a higher percentage of Asian American students who were more likely to attend schools with the highest level of achievement (p.1219). The study also found that Asian American and Caucasian students showed high ratings on how they perceived parental expectations of valuing education by referring to both their parents and themselves. However, a significant difference within the groups in this measure indicates "Asian American students tended to believe more strongly that going to

college and getting good grades were very important to both their parents and themselves” (p.1222). It was also found that Asian American students “expressed the strongest value for education, had very positive attitudes about mathematics, and were the most likely to link education and employment” (p.1233). The findings within this study supported the notion of functional relativism in math achievement but should also be accompanied by cultural capital based theories to explain other correlations found between high math achievement and cultural, ethnic, and social class based practices.

The revolving doors in schools of choice. This study found that a majority of the parents (8 of 11) stated that their child had attended a private school, charter school, or other non-charter public school prior to enrollment at the Gifted or Traditional School. In addition, a few of the parents described that they were still in the process of possibly selecting another school for their child. Mei Ling described how she continued to struggle with the decision of not enrolling her child at a charter school that specialized in teaching:

I did not bring my kids over there. To be honest with you, at this point, I do not even know if I make a right decision or not, okay? I just cannot bring my kids over there to learn. (personal communication, July 22, 2011)

Wen (personal communication, July 18, 2011) stated that she was in the process of transferring her child to a charter school which also specialized in math and science, and spoke of the factors affecting her new decision:

Actually, my daughter is going to go to [charter school name]. I think [charter school name] has a lot of people recommending it. I think they have strong curriculum. We went to some of the information meetings and also heard from a friend who has kids already in [charter school name]. They talked about it. I think it's very appealing compared to [the Gifted School]... because my son already went through junior high [there], so I have a comparison. (personal communication, July 18, 2011)

These parents' experiences support the emphasis that was placed on the expectation and need for schools of choice to contain strong math and science curriculums. Consistent with Hirschman and Wong's research (1986), participants in this study continue to believe that their children will find the most success in quantitative-based professions.

The underlying perception of specialized academic programs as a means to social mobility for the majority of Chinese American parents in this study could also be explained by the charter school specialization theory through the parents' shared educational experiences, backgrounds, and goals through educational, as opposed to vocational, arenas. However, it appeared that the charter school specialization theory only provided a basic understanding of the self-selecting patterns of Asian American parents as the dominant minority group at the Gifted and Traditional Schools. Although this study applied the charter school specialization theory to a non-charter public system, the specialized programs of both schools, along with the majority of participants who named their

out of boundary enrollment, supported the perception of the Traditional and Gifted Schools as schools of choice. One of the main factors that attributed to the relevancy of this theory in explaining the self-selecting patterns of parents was the small sample size of this study. In this regard, those who were represented in the specialized academic programs maintained the model minority stereotype of parents who take advantage of schools of choice.

In addition, Garcia (2008) viewed the theory as a flawed explanation to the segregated academic and racial conditions of charter schools in Arizona. He also stated the following finding in his study in regards to back-to-basic charter schools:

In some cases, such as the Back-to-Basics charter elementary schools, students attended racially segregated schools where there is no prior reason to expect high levels of segregation based on academic specialization. Back-to-Basics charter schools are the most segregated type of charter schools in Arizona. (p. 609)

In contrast to the Back-to-Basics schools studied by Garcia (2008), the Traditional School and Gifted Schools adopted an advanced academic program, which may serve as an indicator of segregated conditions. Nonetheless, some larger studies on school choice both supported and negated the relevancy of the charter school specialization to this study.

Furthermore, the notion school choice as a means of social mobility in this study's small sample of participants proved to be problematic when compared to a

larger study of charters schools in Arizona. A study by Cobb and Glass (1999) confirmed that charters schools in Arizona often sort students by ethnic and racial groups, showing higher enrollments of White students in college preparatory schools, whereas minority students tended to be enrolled at-risk or vocational schools. In addition, the study found that specialized charter schools, such as back-to-basic charter schools, are similar to the Traditional School in this study, which provided more opportunity for charter schools to select parents and students. Cobb, Glass, and Crockett's study (2000) research on ethnic and racial stratification among charter schools in three states found that "Charter Schools offer more than just choice of a school for students and parents, they offer schools (or those that sponsor new schools) opportunities to select students and parents" (p.13). The results of their findings left the impression that Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant parents in this study perceived school choice of specialized academic programs as being similar to the White dominant class. As a result, the ways that Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant parents in this study select specialized academic programs heightened the level of segregation in schools. Thus, the charter school specialization theory may perpetuate the model minority myth, when used as the overall explanation for ethnic segregation.

Although parents in this study did not identify school achievement data as a significant piece of information in their decision-making process of selecting a school, the continuous process of evaluating their program and other schools supports Lubienski's (2003) notion of parents as *rational choosers* in market-

oriented school systems. Lubienski stated that the use of school achievement scores in consuming education is a reflection of the parents' social economic status, which leads to the understanding of rational choosers as those who "may shop for schools on the basis of more obvious indicators of social characteristics in intake, as represented by other consumers, rather than on the basis of obscured information such as innovative processes" (p. 420). The self-segregation patterns of Asian American students represented in the Gifted and Traditional School in this study also supported Lubienski's statement, which indicates that the Asian American middle class characteristics of the specialized academic programs played a role in how participants engaged in school choice.

Summary

This study found that the middle class Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant profiles along with competitive and strict schooling experiences attributed to the participants' high expectations of academic achievement and attainment for their children. The primary factor that influenced school choice was the identification of an advanced curriculum. Parents in the traditional program exemplified other factors by selecting the disciplined approach to foundational learning, which resembled the school conditions in their own educational experiences. Another significant factor in making school choice were other parents' reviews of schools from their same ethnic-based social networks in Chinese language schools. It is in this context that Chinese mothers gathered to obtain and exchange information about schools. Parents also indicated that school

choice was an on-going process, even after enrolling their student in the specialized academic program. These findings presented a complex intersectionality between gender, ethnic, and social class practices of Asian American immigrant parents who engaged in school choice.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the self-selecting patterns of Asian American immigrant families in specialized academic programs in one non-charter public school district in Arizona. The research focused on the educational experiences of middle class Chinese and Vietnamese American immigrant parents, their decision-making process of school choice, notions of achievement or success, and perceptions of the specialized academic program after have engaged in it. In this qualitative study, theories in the conceptual framework built a structure for the data to be analyzed in greater depth. Therefore, the presentation of the findings in Chapters 4 and 5 were interpreted by the theories in the conceptual framework and themes of the literature review in approaching the research questions. This chapter will summarize this study by identifying implications of the findings and recommendations.

Conclusion

This study found that the market-oriented school structure activated the middle class Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant parents' agencies to negotiate schooling for their children. The past educational experiences of the participants in their native country were perceived as significant factors in the decision-making of school choice and attributed to their sociocultural beliefs of education as social mobility. The relationship between the participants' social class

practices and ideas of social mobility was integrated in how they confront school choice in the United States. This study believes that their middle class experiences of meritocratic school systems in the Republic of China along with social class structures and intracultural groups were used as a vehicle in the mobilization of cultural capital, which eventually transmitted to their children through the mothers' child-rearing practices and shared belief system.

Furthermore, the consumer-based market of education highlighted the parenting practices and ways that the mothers engaged in their children's education as evidence of educated middle class advantages in White dominant school systems. In return, participants were perceived as assuming the high achieving model minority stereotype that is encouraged by competitive conditions in the free market of schooling. While there were overwhelming similarities in how the Chinese mothers approached schooling for their children to White middle class mothers, this study found that parents had the extra benefit of using ethnic-based resources to help them navigate the school system. The study also revealed the significance of supplementary education institutions, specifically Chinese language schools, held many functions in how parents seek education for their children. In essence, Chinese language schools served as the primary forum for Chinese mothers to exchange vital information for making school choices. Therefore, it is likely that Chinese mothers in this study participated bimodally in middle class ethnic-based networks which provided them information and support in utilizing school choice as social mobility; as well as promoted common high

levels of expectation and attitude for their children. This may have lead the participants to identify advanced specialized academic programs for their children as a means of social mobility; to the extent, in which the participants continue to perceive and engage in competitive educational conditions as being beneficial for their children. This provides a deeper understanding of the middle class Asian immigrant parents' bimodal acquisition of school advantages for their children. Furthermore, this study suggests that systems of school choice operate in benefit to educated middle class Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant parents, while overlooking other Asian American parents who are of lower socioeconomic classes or ethnic groups.

In addition, the study found an overwhelming presence of competition and pressure that parents faced in their own educational experiences and in the process of choosing a school for their children. Parents indicated that they continued to evaluate their specialized program of choice and acknowledged other programs or schools that were still available to them. The theme of competition and pressure in the data provided clarity to how the market-oriented school system in this study preserves parents' perceptions of high achievement and academic qualifications as a result of their children's participation in specialized academic programs. This reciprocal relationship instigates the chances for social class divisions and segregation to occur in school systems. This study asserts that it is in these types of contexts that enable the misrepresentation of the Asian population as model minorities in society.

Overall, the study revealed the complexities of how the participants' ethnic, cultural and middle class practices of educational attainment intertwine with their conceptions of high academic achievement and success for their children. The interrelatedness between these practices and market-oriented school structures place bicultural middle class Asian immigrant parents in an advantageous position to make school choices. The small sample in this study may have also provided a disproportionate view of other Asian American subgroups in the Arizona school system; whose disparities are often ignored because of the spotlight on the model minority stereotype. However, this study also understands that the factors related to school choice cannot be explained sufficiently through a simple layer of theoretical notions and ideas. Therefore, it suggests that the relationships and connections between parents' educational experiences, cultural and social class practices, and context of the marketized public school system are taken into consideration to explain how middle class Asian immigrant parents capitalize on schools of choice.

Recommendations

Recommendations for School and District Administrators

Create schools of choice for all students. The parents in this study stated that the presence of an advanced curriculum was indicative of making school choice. Under the assumption that schools of choice in Arizona increase *quality education*, what explanation would schools use to determine why not all students are afforded the opportunity to engage in advanced curriculums in their initial

conception of formal schooling? The implementation of accelerated curriculums in charter and non-charter public schools suggests students generally possess the ability to learn at a rigorous pace; if so, why aren't more schools approaching student learning in this way? There are limited explanations for parents who may want an advanced academic curriculum for their children, but are restrained by residential enrollment boundary lines and means of transportation. Are choice schools and specialized programs built upon the lines of separation between social economic classes? These questions could possibly signify the perception of the *deficit model* of quality educational attainment in non-accelerated academic curriculums. Equitable school conditions would suggest that schools and programs that are deemed as innovative approaches to providing quality education would present themselves in low socioeconomic schools. In the development of schools of choice and specialized academic programs, it is essential that administrators remember to consider parents who may not appear interested or actively shop for specialized academic programs. It is vital that administrators acknowledge how they may have influenced a new set of standards and expectations for academic achievement in a consumer-based market of educational attainment.

Recommendations for Educational Policy Research and Policy Makers

Consider non-charter public schools in academic and racial segregation in schools of choice. Due to the charter school movement in Arizona, researchers and policy makers are engaged in a broad discussion focused

on academic and racial segregation in charter schools. This study assumed that the charter school system perpetuated market oriented conditions in both charter and non-charter public schools. It is recommended that research and policy studies include non-charter public school populations to investigate academic and racial segregation in schools; such as, the specialized academic programs in this study. The extension of non-charter public schools in this discussion may offer further information on how public funds are used to provide innovative quality education to which groups and types of students.

The second recommendation for research is the study of quality education and its descriptors in academic programs and schools that were originally developed as a response to charter school competition. This would provide information on how school districts approach student learning in the types of programs that are utilized as competing models of education. In addition, research on quality schools should also examine parents' perceptions of quality education in comparison to the types of education their children received in market oriented school systems. This knowledge may aid researchers in the examination of the actual needs of their communities appraised to the current education they are provided with; in return, providing more information to assist the attainment of equitable schooling.

The third recommendation is for policy makers to regulate the consistent use and public dissemination of student enrollment by demographics in charter and non-charter public school systems. In this study, pertinent student

demographic information in one type of charter school was not easily accessible for public view; whereas student enrollment information in non-charter public school districts can be accessed directly from the Arizona Department of Education's main website. In addition, policy makers should demand schools to identify student racial and ethnic group descriptors based on the categories used by the U.S. Census Bureau. This will provide a more detailed description of student populations according to subgroups. The Asian American student enrollment data reviewed in this study included South and East Indian students in the Asian American group, which compromised the validity of the data. Larger studies on academic and racial segregation might also benefit from this type of student enrollment categorization.

Quality education in schools of choice. To address the educational needs of different communities and racial segregation in urban schools, let us refer to the history of the implementation of specialized programs and schools in the United States. By providing equitable schooling, public school systems should prioritize the needs of their community, especially with those who possess cultural capital that is not consistent with the dominant white class. For instance, the significant presence of Chinese language schools in this study served not only as an extension to the curriculum, but a center of knowledge of shared cultural experiences, traditions, and educational beliefs. The purposefulness of maintaining their language and ethnic identities within a white dominant society could have been interoperated as additives to a positive frame of reference

towards schooling. As an alternative to advanced curriculums, this study recommends the adoption of foreign language based programs and bilingual education in schools of choice. Dual language programs would serve the needs of minority children, who may struggle with positive frames of references towards schooling. Nonetheless, approaches to student learning by the use of students' cultural capital in their native language is restricted by Proposition 203² in the state of Arizona. This law eliminated bilingual education and mandated instruction to English Language Learner (ELL) students in English only. Furthermore, ELL students are often placed in concentrated four hour blocks of intense English acquisition instruction during their school day. This study perceived that students' native languages are stripped of its language capital in school structures such as the case in Arizona. In the same setting, ELL students are expected to conform to dominant class school structures and practices; whereas, immigrant parents in this study were able to use their ethnic and middle class practices to overcome the absence of heritage language development in public education. In this regard, policy makers should take into consideration the ways in which school structures could adopt the cultural capital of minority students in providing equitable school conditions for quality education.

² Text of the proposition downloaded from <http://www.azsos.gov/election/2000/info/pubpamphlet/english/prop203.html>

Recommendations for Asian American Educational Research

This study examined the self-selecting patterns of middle class Asian American families in specialized academic programs by researching their past educational experiences, decision-making process, notions of academic achievement or success, and perceptions of the program. This study found that the Asian American immigrant parents shared similar ethnic and social profiles and cultural and middle class-based practices in making school choice. It is recommended that studies continue to include Asian American parents who are not represented in specialized academic programs or schools of choice to examine social class practices within subgroups in educational attainment. This may lead to the identification of middle class school advantages among all ethnic groups, which can enhance the advocacy for policy and educational changes in low-socioeconomic school systems.

A second area for future study is the exploration of Asian American parents' perceptions and participation in school systems as being a variety of subgroups, unlike the majority of Chinese American participants, who were represented in this study. This study found that all of the parents were middle class voluntary immigrant minorities, which served as an explanation to their positive attitudes towards schooling. It is recommended that future studies include Asian American students who may have veered away from their parents' perceptions and expectations for educational attainment under ideal conditions for academic attainment. This will provide further information to the different

profiles of Asian American students that have rejected the model minority stereotype by an examination of how they formed and perceived their identity in relation to education and school structures. In this regard, the context of school systems may play a role in the development or declination of low-achieving Asian American student identities.

A third area for future research involves the past educational experiences of Asian Americans immigrants as the focus. The parents in this study shared similar educational experiences; they described their experiences as competitive and driven by test scores and entrance exams. This may enable educators to gain insight to the affects of market oriented school systems from a more global perspective and to distance themselves from market-based approaches to student learning. This leaves the opportunity for educators to reflect on their own educational philosophies and how they intend to teach democratic principles and social responsibility to students in marketized school conditions. This study challenges educators to examine their perceptions of inequitable schooling in the free market of schools by turning their “gaze upward and inward at educated middle class people’s desires for school distinctions for their children and at their descriptions of working toward that end” (Brantlinger, 2003, p. 189).

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

I am a doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Bryan Brayboy in the Educational Leadership & Policy Studies Division at Arizona State University. As part of my coursework in the doctoral program in Educational Administration, I am conducting a research project for my dissertation, which explores the decision making of immigrant Asian American parents in specialized programs.

I am recruiting participants, at least 18 years of age and older to discuss their parental educational experiences and journey in making choices in education for their child (ren). Your participation will require approximately two interviews, approximately 60-90 minutes each. In addition, participants must meet the following criteria: a) participants and their student must be Asian or Asian American, b) at least one parent (if interviewing together) must be an immigrant to the United States, and c) student(s) have not been enrolled in a specialized program, prior to their enrollment in the traditional or gifted program.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Translating services in your preferred language will also be available upon request. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (602) 703-5519.

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT FOR FOCUS GROUPS

I am a doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Bryan Brayboy in the Educational Leadership & Policy Studies Division at Arizona State University. As part of my coursework in the doctoral program in Educational Administration, I am conducting a research project for my dissertation, which explores the decision making of immigrant Asian American parents in specialized programs.

I am recruiting participants that are 18 years or older to discuss their parental educational experiences and journey in making choices in education for their child (ren). Your participation will require one focus group meeting with approximately three other parents and myself for 60-90 minutes. In addition, participants must meet the following criteria: a) participants and their student must be Asian or Asian American, b) at least one parent (if interviewing together) must be an immigrant to the United States, and c) student(s) have not been enrolled in a specialized program, prior to their enrollment in the traditional or gifted program.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Translating services in your preferred language will also be available upon request. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (602) 703-5519.

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT FOR EXPERT INTERVIEWS

I am a doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Bryan Brayboy in the Educational Leadership & Policy Studies Division at Arizona State University. As part of my coursework in the doctoral program in Educational Administration, I am conducting a research project for my dissertation, which explores the decision making of immigrant Asian American parents in specialized programs.

I am recruiting participants that are 18 years or older to discuss their experiences with immigrant Asian American parents in a specialized program. Your participation will require one interview with the duration of approximately 60-90 minutes.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (602) 703-5519.

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW INFORMATION LETTERS

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW INFORMATION LETTER

WHY IMMIGRANT ASIAN AMERICAN PARENTS SELF-SELECT INTO SPECIALIZED PROGRAMS

Date _____

Dear _____:

I am a doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Bryan Brayboy in the Educational Leadership & Policy Studies Division at Arizona State University. As part of my coursework in the doctoral program in Educational Administration, I am conducting a research project for my dissertation, which explores the decision making of immigrant Asian American parents in specialized programs.

I am recruiting participants to discuss their parental educational experiences and journey in making choices in education for their child (ren). Your participation will require approximately one to two interviews of approximately 60-90 minutes each. The interviews will be digitally audio recorded and based on these interviews, your educational history and the decision-making experiences of selecting a school for your child (ren) may be used as data in my research project. You will not be recorded, unless you give permission. If you give permission to be digitally audio recorded, you have the right to ask for the recording to be stopped at anytime. The digital audio recording of your interview will be transferred onto a password protected USB flash drive and sent out for transcription within 24 hours of the interview. Once the recording has been transferred onto the USB flash drive, your interview will be erased immediately from the audio recorder device. The USB flash drive will be kept in a secure location in Farmer Building #144 at Arizona State University until the interview is transcribed. After the interview has been transcribed, you will have the opportunity to receive a copy of the transcribed interview. The digital audio recording will be deleted and destroyed from the USB flash drive within two years of the interview date.

Your participation in this effort is voluntary. Your time commitment will approximately 2-3 hours and if you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the project at any time, there will be no penalty. It will not affect you in any way. The results of the research project will not be written with your name and a pseudonym will be used to protect your identity. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be known/used.

Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation includes the opportunity to share your parental experience concerning the dilemmas in making school choices in the public school system in Arizona. You will also have the opportunity to share your educational history and biography.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team at: (602) 703-5519. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

Sincerely,
Hoang-Thuy Padilla

FOCUS GROUP INFORMATION LETTER

WHY IMMIGRANT ASIAN AMERICAN PARENTS SELF-SELECT INTO SPECIALIZED PROGRAMS

Date _____

Dear _____:

I am a doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Bryan Brayboy in the Educational Leadership & Policy Studies Division at Arizona State University. As part of my coursework in the doctoral program in Educational Administration, I am conducting a research project for my dissertation, which explores the decision making of immigrant Asian American parents in specialized programs.

I am recruiting participants to discuss their parental educational experiences and journey in making choices in education for their child (ren). Your participation will require one focus group interview with a duration approximately 60-90 minutes. The focus group will be held with approximately three other parents with a student(s) in a specialized academic program. During this focus group, you will be asked to share your perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes towards specialized academic programs and education in general. The focus group will also allow you to talk and interact freely with other group members. The interviews will be digitally audio recorded and based on these interviews, your educational history, decision-making experiences of selecting a school for your child (ren), and perceptions of education and specialized programs may be used as data in my research project. You will not be recorded, unless you give permission. If you give permission to be digitally audio recorded, you have the right to ask for the recording to be stopped at anytime. After the focus group, the digital audio recording of your interview will be transferred onto a password protected USB flash drive and sent out for transcription within 24 hours of the interview. Once the recording has been transferred onto the USB flash drive, your interview will be erased immediately from the audio recorder device. The USB flash drive will be kept in a secure location in Farmer Building #144 at Arizona State University until the interview is transcribed. The digital audio recording will be deleted and destroyed from the USB flash drive within two years of the interview date.

Your participation in this effort is voluntary. Your time commitment will approximately 1-2 hours and if you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the project at any time, there will be no penalty. It will not affect you in any way. Due to the exposure to other participants in the focus group interview setting,

complete confidentiality cannot be maintained. However, the results of the research project will not be written with your name and a pseudonym will be used to protect your identity. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be known/used. Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation includes the opportunity to share your parental experience concerning the dilemmas in making school choices in the public school system in Arizona. You will also have the opportunity to share your educational history, experiences, and perceptions of education within your community.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team at: (602) 703-5519. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

Sincerely,
Hoang-Thuy Padilla

By signing below you are agreeing to participate in the study.

Signature

Date

EXPERT INTERVIEW INFORMATION LETTER

WHY IMMIGRANT ASIAN AMERICAN PARENTS SELF-SELECT INTO SPECIALIZED PROGRAMS

Date _____

Dear _____:

I am a doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Bryan Brayboy in the Educational Leadership & Policy Studies Division at Arizona State University. As part of my coursework in the doctoral program in Educational Administration, I am conducting a research project for my dissertation, which explores the decision making of immigrant Asian American parents in specialized programs.

I am recruiting participants discuss their parental educational experiences and journey in making choices in education for their child (ren). As an administrator of a specialized program, your experiences with Asian American families will be discussed during the interview. Your participation will require approximately one interview of approximately 60-90 minutes each. The interviews will be digitally audio recorded and based on these interviews; I may use your experiences and perceptions of the decision-making process of Asian American parents selecting a school for their child(ren) as data for my research project. You will not be recorded, unless you give permission. If you give permission to be digitally audio recorded, you have the right to ask for the recording to be stopped. The digital audio recording of your interview will be transferred onto a password protected USB flash drive and sent out for transcription within 24 hours of the interview. Once the recording has been transferred onto the USB flash drive, your interview will be erased immediately from the audio recorder device. The USB flash drive will be kept in a secure location in Farmer Building #144 at Arizona State University until the interview is transcribed. After the interview has been transcribed, you will have the opportunity to receive a copy of the transcribed interview. The digital audio recording will be deleted and destroyed from the USB flash drive within two years of the interview date.

Your participation in this effort is voluntary. Your time commitment will approximately 1-2 hours and if you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the project at any time, there will be no penalty. It will not affect you in any way. The results of the research project will not be written with your name and a pseudonym will be used to protect your identity. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be known/used. Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation includes the opportunity to share your experience concerning the dilemmas parents face in making school choices in the public school system in

Arizona. You will also have the opportunity to share your educational experiences with your Asian American parent community within your school.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team at: (602) 703-5519. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

Sincerely,
Hoang-Thuy Padilla

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

PARENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Focused Life History of Immigrant Asian American Parent

1. What is your occupation?
2. Where is your country of origin?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. Why did you immigrate to the United States?
5. How would you describe your educational experiences as a child?
6. What were the primary modes of teaching and learning in the classroom?
7. How would you describe the characteristics of the type of education you experienced?
8. What were the expected responsibilities and behaviors of teachers?
9. What were the expected responsibilities and behaviors of students?
10. What are the cultural norms in parental involvement in education?
11. What resulted from your educational experience?

Decision Making of School Choice

12. What is your current family makeup (nuclear family, number of children, extended family)?
13. How would you describe your social network (ethnicity, number of people, group affiliations)?
14. What types of activities or experiences did your child have before s/he went started school?
15. What types of activities or experiences does your child participate in now?

16. How would you describe the type of education you want for your child?
17. How did you find out about the program?
18. How did you seek out the type of school information you were looking for?
19. What kind of information did you receive about the school?
20. Were you interested in other schools or programs during this time?
21. Who or what kind of information helped you make your school selection?
22. What was important to you in making your school selection?
23. What were your expectations of the curriculum before enrolling your student?
24. What are the characteristics of the program?

Reflection of the Decision Making of School Choice

25. How is the program meeting your expectations?
26. How is the program not meeting your expectations?
27. What part of the program do you feel is most important in your child's curriculum?
28. What part of the program do you feel is the least important in your child's curriculum?
29. How do you think your child will benefit from this type of program?

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe the type of education you want for your child?
2. How did you find out about the program?
3. How did you seek out the type of school information you were looking for?
4. What kind of information did you receive about the school?
5. Were you interested in other schools or programs during this time?
6. Who or what kind of information helped you make your school selection?
7. What was important to you in making your school selection?
8. What were your expectations of the curriculum before enrolling your student?
9. What are the characteristics of the program?
10. How is the program meeting or not meeting your expectations?
11. What part of the program do you feel is most important in your child's curriculum?
12. How do you think your child will benefit from this type of program?

EXPERT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe the interaction you have had with Asian American parents in this program?
2. What types of questions do Asian American parents ask before enrolling in the program?
3. How would you describe the parental network of Asian Americans in the program?
4. How would you describe the Asian American parental support or tensions within the program?
5. How would you describe parental involvement of Asian American parents in the program?

APPENDIX D
IRB EXEMPTION

To: Bryan Brayboy

f From: Mark Roosa, Chair, *SM*
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 06/02/2011

Committee Action: **Exemption Granted**

IRB Action Date: 06/02/2011

IRB Protocol #: 1105006506

Study Title: Parental Choice in Education: Why Immigrant Asian American Parents Self-Select into

Specialized Programs

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(1) (2) .

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

APPENDIX E

SCHOOL PERMISSION TO USE CAMPUS

November 22, 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to give permission to Hoang-Thuy Phan Padilla to conduct interviews on [REDACTED] Elementary School's campus, relating to research she is gathering for her doctoral dissertation through Arizona State University.

Please feel free to call me if you have any further questions.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
Principal
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

ELEMENTARY

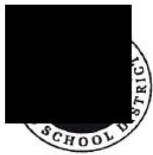
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]





**TRADITIONAL
CAMPUS**



December 7, 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to give permission to Hoang-Thuy Phan Padilla to conduct interviews on [redacted] School's campus, relating to research she is gathering for her doctoral dissertation through Arizona State University.

Please feel free to call me if you have any further questions.

[redacted signature]

[redacted]
Principal
[redacted]