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Abstract

Current literature is scarce on the diverse experiences of hundreds of thousands of mainland Chinese who, since 1979, have come to the U.S. primarily for graduate study and mostly settled here afterwards in dispersed university or corporate jobs and suburban residences. Since the Immigration Act of 1990, many of them have become visible experts in science and engineering. Yet their struggles as Chinese academic migrants simultaneously privileged by their educational backgrounds and disadvantaged by their outsider status in the U.S. often remain invisible. Possibly due to the myth of “model minority,” mainstream America has seen them as doing-well and well-behaving, and scholarship in gender studies, Asian-American studies, science and technology studies, and (sub)urban studies have all ignored this group. This dissertation documents how a group of Chinese academic migrants engage with everyday struggles around their paradoxical (im)migrant statuses through participation in a weekend Chinese language school. The title of this dissertation speaks to how this group, while appearing peaceful and at ease on the surface, is actually paddling non-stop underneath. Through individual and communal bootstrapping, they manage to survive harsh disciplining mechanisms such as an often excruciating immigration policy and the tricky discourses of multiculturalism. My data analysis draws upon diverse fields including education, sociology, philosophy, cultural geography, Asian-American studies, migration and globalization studies. What is also interesting about this research is that it focuses on Chinese schools (instead of Chinatowns) as significant institutions that mediate this group’s migration experience.

LIKE A DUCK ON WATER: CHINESE ACADEMIC MIGRANTS IN THE U.S.
AND THEIR SUBURBAN WEEKEND CHINESE SCHOOL

By

Jianping Xu

M.S., Syracuse University, 2009
B.A., Southeast University, China, 1996

Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Foundations of Education.

Syracuse University
December 2016

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: CULTURE AS AN ONGOING PROJECT	1
Privileged Migrants in Disadvantage.....	2
Historical Background I:	
Why is this Group’s Migration Experience Important to Study Now?.....	8
Historical Background II:	
Why Choose the Chinese School for a Research Site? – Chinese Schools in the U.S.	14
My Study: An Ethnography	17
Data Analysis and Organization of the Chapters	20
Conclusion	27

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW: GRADUATE STUDENTS, CHINESE SCHOOLS, MIGRATION, SUBURBS	29
1. Literature in the Field of Education and Related Fields on Chinese Graduate Students in the U.S. – Empirical Studies	30
2. Literature on Weekend Chinese Schools: Empirical Studies Again	34
3. Critical Migration Studies (Asian American Studies Included) and Globalization Studies: My Theoretical Lenses.....	44
4. Literature in (Sub)urban Studies and on Suburban Identities: My Theoretical Approach again	55
4.1 The Social-historical Formation of American Suburbs	56
4.2 Issues and Critics of Suburban Identity: Social Conformity, Victimhood, Complicity	62
Conclusion	67

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES	71
Research Setting: a Weekend Chinese School in Myles	71
Methodological Start Point	73
Procedures	83

Insider/Outsider Researcher Positions,	89
Dis/comfort, Within-group Differences	89
Methodological Reflections as Epistemological Openings	95
Other Messy Struggles and technicalities in the field.....	97
Fieldwork Nitty-gritty #1: During my Participant Observation, Where/what to Tell and Not Tell my Participants about my Research?.....	98
Fieldwork Nitty-gritty #2: for our Interview, How/what to Ask and Not Ask my Participants? 99	
Fieldwork Nitty-gritty #3: The Tensions between Rapport-building and Productive Fieldwork	101
Conclusion	102

CHAPTER IV

BLENDING IN, STANDING OUT: THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL-PERSONAL MAKING OF THIS SUBURBAN CHINESE SCHOOL.....	112
1. “So Few Chinese here, it’s Easy to Make Friends” – Geography and Demography do Matter	114
2. “I Always Knew I would Go to the U.S. ...” – the Cultural Logics of Migration Desire	122
3. “Is this the Place I Should Reside in?” – Living the Bubble of “the American Dream”	129
4. How the Chinese School Addresses their New Cultural Logics of Desire, Now in the U.S.	137
4.1 Reconnection to their essentialized “cultural roots” and reproduction of class status	138
4.2 Reproduction of their class status through facilitating a competitive edge for their children’s future	144
4.3 Reconnecting to their professional selves in gendered ways.....	153
4.4 General social function of the Chinese school	161
5. “Some of these people, they have their life here!” – The insider and outliers’ view of and experience at the Chinese school	167
Conclusion	171

CHAPTER V

EMBRACING ALL, PLEASING SOME: THE EVERYDAY MAKING OF THE SUBURBAN CHINESE SCHOOL	176
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Suburban Diaspora: Place, Power, and the Other (Race, Gender, Class, Sexuality)	179
1. Invisible Divide between Social Classes: the Informal Organization of the Chinese School 187	
2. Enforcing Suburban Parenthood: Conversation Topics at the Chinese School Hallway and Events	196
3. Gendering of Spaces and Activities at the Chinese School and at Events	201
Conclusion	224

CHAPTER VI

DOING WELL, STRUGGLING HARD: THE MAKING OF THE IDEAL IMMIGRANT.....	226
1. The Making of the Ideal (Im)migrants as Self-sufficient Immigrants/Family	229
1.1 H1B Work Visa Program: Producing Vulnerable thus Docile Racialized Labor	233
1.2 Suburban Isolation and Enrichment Programs Frenzy: Producing Overworked and Stressed Family Life Driving to Places After-school and On weekends	238
1.3 Boot-strapping through Individualized Explanations and Distancing Strategies: Becoming OK with Institutionalized Racialized Job Stress, Family Life Stress and Social Loneliness.....	241
1.4 Chinese School: a Site of Communal Boot-strapping and Self-policing.....	257
1.5 Fading into Background or Sharp in Relief? The more Resourceful and “Integrated” Participants.....	265
2. The Making of the Ideal (Im)migrant Wives as the Ever-adjusting Women.....	267
2.1 Unpaid Work of Stress Management and Artful Mothering	270
2.2 Migration-related De-skilling: Becoming “Full-time Mothers”	274
2.3 De-skilling: Meandering into Professional Jobs Outside their Academic Training	276
3. The Ideal (Im)migrant Parent – the Proper Care-givers.....	280
3.1 Privileged Hopes for their Children’s Future: a College Education and a Happy Life ..	282
3.2 Mediated Worries for their Children’s Future: “Integration into” the Mainstream Society.....	287
Conclusion	294

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: RECAPTURING AND RE-IMAGINING CULTURE	300
--	-----

In between Mainstreaming and Ethnicizing/Othering.....	301
Contemporary Significance of my Study	306
Limitations of this Study.....	309
Implications for this Particular Group	310
Implications for the Larger American/Global Society	312
Implications for the Fields of Higher Education, Multicultural Education, and Heritage Education	313
Implications for Interdisciplinary Study	316
APPENDIX A DETAILS OF CODING: CODES, THEMES AND GROUPINGS	319
APPENDIX B INFORMED CONSENT	322
APPENDIX C BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT INTERVIEWEES	326
APPENDIX D QUESTIONS USED TO CONDUCT SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS	328
REFERENCES	329

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: CULTURE AS AN ONGOING PROJECT

...diasporas are not just there ...

- Cho, 2007a, p.11

In 2011, New York Times reported on *the Battle Hymn of a Tiger Mom*, a forthcoming autobiography of a parent who was herself an offspring of an immigrant Asian family (where the father was an academic immigrant specialized in computer sciences) in the U.S.. Drawing extensively on the stereotype of strict Asian parents and academically-strong Asian children, the book stirred up heated public discussions about parenting differences of “the East and the West.” Despite their heterogeneous experiences in the U.S., East Asian immigrants as a group remain largely a mythic doing-well and well-behaved shadow in the imagination of many Americans. Few channels exist for us to understand how, for these individuals as for everyone else, their diverse and complex identities and experiences come into shape in the socio-historically specific power relations within global and local exchanges.

To represent this complexity of their lived experiences, for the title of the dissertation I chose a somewhat new idiom. The metaphor “Like a duck on water¹” captures how this group appears to be gliding smoothly from the surface, but actually paddling like crazy underneath, unbeknownst to the general public and the media in the U.S.. It also highlights the (inter)national contexts this group lives in, as the water – globalization and multiculturalism – may look charming, smooth and supportive, but to this particular group, it could oftentimes feel dark, uncertain and precarious.

Privileged Migrants in Disadvantage

Since China and the U.S. resumed educational exchanges in 1978, hundreds of thousands of mainland Chinese students have come primarily for graduate study in science and technology (Szelenyi, 2006). Many have become visible and often vocal scientists and experts in the U.S. through the Immigration Act of 1990, which tripled quotas for skilled immigrants mostly from Asia (Rumbaut, 1997). Yet often invisible are their struggles as Chinese academic (im)migrants simultaneously privileged by their educational backgrounds and disadvantaged by their outsider status in the U.S.. So this is an interesting group: like earlier Chinese labor migrants, these academic migrants live in

¹ From a news story about Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson's first day on the job as mayor of the newly merged city and county government: " 'How's it going?' he asked, reaching for his lunch, from a café nearby. 'How wild and crazy it is?' 'Like a duck on water,' Deputy Mayor Joan Riehm replied. 'That means we're smooth on top but paddling like hell underneath,' Abramson explained." *The Courier Journal*, Louisville, Ky., Jan. 7, 2003.

<http://leadership-technology.blogspot.com/2013/01/ten-big-ideas-of-school-leadership.html>

profound displacement because of their migration. But unlike earlier migrants, this group can negotiate their displacement through their social class privileges.

In this dissertation I use the word “(im)migrant” instead of “migrant” or “immigrant” to highlight that this group includes both Chinese students in a temporary visa status and professionals (mostly earlier students who have settled here) who may or may not have obtained U.S. citizenship. Below I usually use the word “migrant” as an umbrella word for simplicity. My lack of a better word actually signifies the life trajectory that many of them take (from migrant students to migrant professionals and finally to immigrant professionals), as well as this seemingly-homogeneous group’s diverse experiences, which my dissertation seeks to understand.

Statistics show that the presence of Chinese academic (im)migrants² has become ever more significant. According to National Science Foundation’s “Survey of earned doctorates,” the size of Chinese student group rank at the top among the list of foreign students who earned a Ph.D. degree in Science and Engineering (S&E) in the U.S. between 1985 and 2005 (NSB 2008: Table 2-8). Numbering 41,677 in total, these Chinese students account for 22% of all the foreign recipients between those years. In 2006, Chinese form the largest group of *doctorate-holding* foreigners receiving new H1B skilled worker visas from the U.S. government, accounting for 32% of all new *doctorate-holding* H1B visa recipients in that year (NSB 2008, Figure 3-64).

² By Chinese academic (im)migrants I mean mostly graduate students from **mainland** who came since 1979, even though parents at the weekend Chinese school probably included some Taiwanese students who came to the U.S. along the same time. While the situation is changing, international students used to settle in the U.S. after finishing their study. A National Science Foundation study found that 63% of all foreign science and engineering students had had plans to stay in the U.S. after received their PhD’s; among 1990-91 **doctoral recipients**, 88% of Chinese science and engineering students were still in the United States in 1995 (Szelenyi, 2003, 2006).

This privileged group has certainly pumped fuel into the “model minority” myth. For example, when a poster came out in 2009 for a Counseling Center’s new campus-wide initiative to start a support group wherein “women of color graduate students” can share academic and personal struggles, there were no East Asian faces represented. Instead, the poster featured only several African-American and Chicana faces, besides one woman who looked Middle Eastern. The campus itself, on the other hand, is one known for its progressive diversity efforts and in the process of starting an East Asian studies program at the moment. The Counseling Center’s poster representation seems to suggest that East Asian students in general are doing well on campus, yet I have heard numerous accounts of painful experiences among my Chinese peers here. Possibly due to this label of “model minority” – coined by Peterson (1966, p.11) to depict some upwardly-mobile Asian American groups – literature in several fields is sorely scarce on this group’s diverse experiences.

They are seldom of interest to migration and globalization studies or Asian American studies (e.g., Zhou, 2009). Most scholarship in Asian American studies on Chinese in the U.S. investigates the historical impacts of Chinese Exclusion Act – a federal law passed in 1882 and repealed in 1943 (see W. Li’s (2005) review). The Sociological focus is on Chinese construction labor migrants’ and later generations’ identity and community struggles in Chinatowns (e.g., Takaki, 1989; Zhou, 2009). Migration and globalization scholarship on contemporary Asian immigrants – in the fields of sociology, cultural anthropology, human geography, among others – highlights the experiences of either lower-end service labor or upper-class business and cultural

migrants³ (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Liang & Morooka, 2004; Ong, 1999; Lowe & Loyd, 1997; Appadurai, 1996, see also W. Li's (2005) review of studies of Chinese settlements).

Even in recent comprehensive books dedicated to Chinese experience in the U.S., Chinese academic migrants are barely acknowledged. Both *Chinese America: the Untold Story of America's Oldest New Community* and *The Chinese in America: A narrative history* only briefly speak of "skilled immigrants" or "Chinese scholars" on one single page in each (Kwong, P. & Miscevic, D., 2005, p. 441; Chang, I., 2003, p. 315). In *Chinese Americans and the Politics of Race and Culture* (Chan, S. & Hsu, M. eds. 2008), there is no mentioning at all about this group. And of course Xiaojian Zhao's (2002) monograph, *Remaking of Chinese America: 1940-1965*, is only concerned with the three decades before China's open-door policy started in the late 1970s.

The field of science and technology studies pays little attention to immigrant (non-white) scientists as compared to women scientists. In the field of education, research with international (including Chinese) graduate students often isolate these students' academic experience here and subdue their general life histories. These articles usually have a certain disciplinary focus (e.g., English composition, comparative education) on these students' academic adjustments *within* American higher education institutions (e.g., Zhang & Xu, 2007; Huang, 1997). The few ethnographic studies are short interviews

³ As an exception, Indian IT workers are gaining more attention among migration scholarship. For example, Banerjee, P. (2006). Indian Information Technology Workers in the United States: The H-1B Visa, Flexible Production, and the Racialization of Labor. *Critical Sociology*, 32(2-3), 425-445.
Chakravartty, P. (2006). Symbolic analysts or indentured servants? Indian high-tech migrants in America's information economy. *Knowledge, Technology & Policy*, 19(3), 27-43.
Purkayastha, (2010). Interrogating Intersectionality: Contemporary Globalisation and Racialised Gendering in the Lives of Highly Educated South Asian Americans and their Children.
Xiang, B. (2007). *Global body shopping: An Indian labor system in the information technology industry*. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press.

covering their academic, psychological and cultural or communication difficulties here (Sun & Chen, 1997; Turner, 2006), or about how they decide to migrate or return (Szelenyi, 2006; Zweig, 1997). With few exceptions (Zhao, 2008; Qin & Lykes, 2006), the rest of the studies with Chinese academic migrants are mostly *macro* analyses of the controversial phenomena (i.e., brain drain or brain gain?) of skilled migration and international education (Hart, 2006; Zhao, 2000). Seldom do we read details about these migrants' transnational life and their own understandings about their migration-related pursuits and frustrations, as situated in broader social, cultural, economic, and political contexts.

While Kumishira (2006) and others have noted the myth of the “model minority” for second and later generations of Asian-American students, we know little about first-generation Chinese academic migrants' struggles. Outside the metropolitan Chinatown collectivity, dispersed in institutions of higher education and (for some of them after graduation) hi-tech businesses often in small towns or suburbs all over the U.S., how do these Chinese (im)migrants find support in their search for a new sense of identity? Having relocated to the U.S., they have learned to also re-locate their self-understandings, when dealing with social difficulties on a daily basis as privileged migrants in disadvantage.

While actively engaged in their study and work, many of these academic migrants also experienced a drop in terms of their social status. Back in China, among their family and peers they enjoyed an elite-like identity with their academic distinction and upward mobility. After migration, while many remain confident and competent in terms of their much-valued “high skills” in science and engineering, they also began to feel

marginalized or down-trodden as Asian students and professionals in the U.S.. Often in an upbeat tone typical during friends' or church gathering, they would paradoxically express feeling meaningless about their social life and intellectual work here.

Building on theories in transnational migration studies, I look at why, in the midst of these migrants' everyday challenges and identity struggles, many of them gravitate toward the ethnic weekend Chinese school, and how they manage to build a sense of belonging, i.e., building their (re)new(ed) selves in community. Chinese schools, mostly established and operated voluntarily by Chinese migrants to teach their children Chinese language and culture⁴, have been called “pillars of ethnic Chinese communities throughout the worldwide Chinese Diaspora” (Zhou, 2009, p. 152). They are now becoming even more important to Chinese migrants in the U.S., since more than half of them now live in suburbs that have few other ethnic institutions (ibid), as different from earlier labor migrants' Chinatown experiences.

Literature on Chinese schools, however – in the fields of education, sociology, and cultural studies – focuses on the experiences of the second generation children there, rather than those of the first generation of Chinese academic migrants (e.g., Pu, 2008; Zhou, 2009; Ziegert, 2003). Or else the focus is on the organizational aspects of Chinese schools, particularly how it relates to the mainstream schooling or society (Zhou, 2009; McGinnis, 2007; Wang, 1996). The experiences of the waves of Chinese academic migrants fall through the cracks of research interest.

⁴ Recently some interested American adults have become learners there too. Most of them have adopted children from China and would like to help their children keep their “Chinese roots.”

My in-depth ethnographic case study explores instead, from the first-generation perspectives, the everyday lives of a group of Chinese academic (im)migrants in Central City⁵, a medium-sized city with a population of 150,000 (metropolitan area 600,000) in upstate New York. This group includes graduate students as well as professionals who were working there, some of whom had obtained American citizenship or permanent resident status. Through an interdisciplinary lens, this project seeks to understand how they build spaces and resources in a weekend Chinese school to address the tensions in their paradoxical statuses and identities, tensions which they sometimes express (but often suppress) regarding their migration-related pursuits.

Having briefly reviewed the gaps in literature among various fields, below I first discuss in more detail the historical backgrounds which inform this study. Then I outline how I have conducted this study. Finally I state some of my major analytical approaches and research findings, with brief sketches of my data chapters.

Historical Background I: Why is this Group's Migration Experience Important to Study Now?

There are a number of interrelated reasons for studying this group. Firstly, this population is increasing in size both because Chinese government has encouraged it since 1978 and because universities in the U.S. have become more market-driven and have actively recruited outstanding international STEM students (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math), mostly from China and India. Secondly, the “model minority”

⁵ To protect privacy, all names of places and people in this dissertation are pseudo-names.

image prevalent in the U.S. assumes that this group of Chinese students is doing well and there is no need to study them. But their lived realities are a very different picture. Often they experience a drop in status and confidence, and a struggle with their sense of selves after migrating here. No one has studied in-depth how they individually or collectively live out these struggles while seemingly “making it” into the middle-class in the U.S..

Firstly, what is interesting about this group of academic migrants is that their number is becoming significant. In the U.S., Chinese account for 14.3% (not including Taiwan 4.6%) of international students, only behind India (15.2%) (IIE, 2008). This has attracted media attention. In 2008, *Science* announced that “the most likely undergraduate alma mater for those who earned a Ph.D. in the U.S. in 2006 was Tsinghua University” (Mervis, 2008). Peking University was second, and UC Berkeley came third. *And these data are for all academic disciplines combined.*

They have also received their fair share of (although still meagre) media and scholarly attention as potential “Yellow Peril” or as a boon for the U.S. economy. Most of the Chinese international students have studied in graduate STEM fields. Therefore they are sometimes officially acclaimed as a much “sought-after commodity” globally, and hence it is a matter of “U.S. competitiveness” for these “imported brains⁶” to be best tapped into (NAFSA, 2003, 2006; OECD, 2008; Industry Canada, 2007; Friedberg, 2007; Shachar, 2006). Yet others have worried about the alleged “crowding out of natives in graduate programs” (Regets, 2007). An NSF working paper (Regets, 2007) addressed

⁶ To this notion I would add “disciplined” - imported and disciplined brains.

this worry by analyzing data from NSF's "Survey of Graduate Students and Postdoctorates in Science and Engineering (GSS), an annual survey that tabulates the enrollment of graduate S&E departments." Based on GSS records for 1982–1995, Regets finds that the worry about displacement of natives is unsubstantiated: "an increase in enrollment of 1.0 foreign students is associated with an enrollment increase of 0.33 for white U.S. students, an increase of 0.02 for U.S. underrepresented minority students, and a decrease of 0.07 for U.S. Asian students" (p. 11). Similarly, Stephan and Levin (2003) agree that from 1980 to 1999, the citizen doctoral population grew at a much slower rate than the non-citizen doctoral population, and they attribute this outcome to many causes instead of "displacement of natives by foreigners." In particular, they note that "the high opportunity costs and the relatively low rewards expected from investing in a doctoral education in S&E, and the winner-take-all nature of outcomes" has led many qualified citizens "to invest in careers in medicine, law and business instead of in S&E" (p. 16).

The conspicuous presence of Chinese graduate students in STEM majors in U.S. higher education can be better understood in its historical context in terms of what has happened both in China, in the U.S and between them. Below I will first review how the changing political economic climate in China enabled the waves of student migration since 1978. Then I will outline changes in U.S. higher education which encouraged such waves of student migration from China and elsewhere.

China in fact has become the largest "exporter" of students in the world since the 21st century started. Of the worldwide 2.5 million international students in 2004, Chinese students comprise 14% (UNESCO, 2006, cited in Yang, 2007). "Since 1978, more than

1.2 million students have left China to study” abroad (Xiang & Shen, 2009, p. 515)⁷. The year of 1978 was an ice-breaking year as China adopted an “Open-door policy”, particularly with regard to its relation with the U.S.. Besides formally establishing diplomatic relations on January 1st, 1979, the two governments agreed in 1978 to resume U.S.-China educational exchanges (earlier exchanges ended in the early 1950s due to Cold War politics). They also signed “the Agreement on Cooperation in Science and Technology in January 1979” (ibid). Since then, many Chinese students and scholars have come to the U.S., mostly for graduate study (Zhao, 2005, p. 9) and/or career advancement, to try living out their “American dream.” In 2004 alone, out of a total of 343,126 Chinese students abroad, 87,943 (or 1 in 4) were in the U.S., their top destination choice (UNESCO, 2006, cited in Yang, 2007). After almost three decades of following the former Soviet Union’s model of politicized education, China returned to a profound interest in the Western model, only now primarily focusing on science and engineering education. Since this shift, my generation and later ones have actually grown up under the slogan, “*Master mathematics, physics and chemistry, and you can travel the world without fear.*”

While China changed policies toward the west, in U.S. and Britain a neoliberal trend started in the 1970s that encouraged universities (along with other sectors in society) to become more market-oriented (Currie & Newson, 1998). Increasingly important has been the issue of national competitiveness in (higher) education. Although this trend in the U.S. was not as obvious as in Britain (where higher education has been largely under the control of the national government), American policy initiatives still helped to draft

⁷ Between 1978 and 2002, over 580,000 Chinese students studied abroad (Fulbright 2003, cited in Yang 2007).

competition policies for universities nation-wide. Two policies in particular played major roles: the Business-Higher Education Forum, and the Government-University-Industry Research Roundtable (ibid, p. 18).

These national policies were later successfully translated into laws encouraging deregulation and commercialization of universities activities (ibid). Thus, more funding began to flow into science and engineering fields (ibid), fueled by the input of multinational corporations. This ample financial support has been an important appeal for most Chinese graduate students studying in these fields in the U.S., since the Chinese government sponsorship for study abroad significantly declined after the 1989 *Tiananmen* crackdown (Xiang & Shen, 2009). The available funding attracts international graduate students in general, who continue to make up almost half of total enrollment in major science and engineering fields⁸ in the U.S. (NSB, 2006).

Together with students from India, the prevalence of Chinese students makes race and nationality stand out in the STEM fields (particularly with the under-representation of African-Americans there). Furthermore, many Chinese females have entered these traditionally male-dominated fields. This bears interestingly on gender dynamics in their displaced lives as academic migrants here.

When seen in these historical contexts, it comes as little surprise that Tsinghua, China's top university in science and engineering, eventually became the largest feeder of

⁸ Making these visibly "raced fields," since we find most foreigners in these graduate majors (compared to those in social sciences and humanities, as well as law and medical schools) (Liu, 2001, p.2). International students particularly from India and China often seek funding for graduate study here, and they typically enter these highly-funded majors.

“Ph.D. materials” for U.S. institutions. Rumor has it that one class of Tsinghua University held its reunion in the U.S. because almost all the class members were here. Compared to other migrant groups in the U.S., Chinese academic migrants seem a much welcomed and sought-after group, given their “high skills” valued by American policy-makers, industries and universities. Whereas mass media rave about the role of “Asian values (regarding education)” in producing high-performing Chinese international students, we need to also take into consideration the historical and political economic dynamics of this phenomenon.

Despite their increasing visibility on U.S. campuses, compared to other migrant groups in the U.S., their migration experience has been of less scholarly concern, possibly due to their relative privilege and the “model minority” myth. “As of 1990, 30% of those who have come to the U.S. from Mainland China, 47% of those who have come from Hong Kong, and 62% of those from Taiwan *have at least a college degree* [emphasis added],” making it close to 40% for Chinese (im)migrants in general (Chandler, 1998, pp. 17-18)⁹. The 1990 Immigration Reform Act speeded this trend by tripling quotas for skilled immigrants, mostly from Asia (Sharpe, 2000, p. 119; Rumbaut, 1997)¹⁰.

Its partial truth notwithstanding, the image of “model minority” serves to make this group of Asian (im)migrants seem culturally amiable and professionally competent, and hence their difficulties under-heard (Lee, 1996). Just as discourses of “un-deserving

⁹ Stuart Chandler, 1998, Chinese Buddhism in America: Identity and Practice. In Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth Ken'ichi Tanaka, (edited) *The faces of Buddhism in America*, pp. 13-30. University of California Press.

¹⁰ Jenny Sharpe 2000. Henry Schwarz, Sangeeta Ray (Eds.) *A companion to postcolonial studies*. ISBN 0631206620, 9780631206620 Pp. 112-125. Wiley-Blackwell.

citizens, minorities and immigrants” mask unjust social relations, discourses of “deserving citizens, minorities and immigrants” can be equally deceiving (Lowe, 1996; Ong, 1996). Many studies, such as Liu (2001), take the manufactured silence as natural or “cultural” for this “good” group.

Situated in their privileged displacement, the “doing-well” and “well-behaving” Chinese students and professionals remain relatively silent in the American public imagination. While this might make them seem, to the policy-makers and the public, a low-maintenance high-productivity migrant group, their everyday struggles actually often wear them down, as I learn from my own experience and my peers’. It is my hope, therefore, to contribute to the un-silencing of this group, by investigating the displacement and struggles the privileged Chinese(-American) professionals and students experience in the U.S..

Historical Background II: Why Choose the Chinese School for a Research Site? - Chinese Schools in the U.S.

As mentioned earlier, the sociologist Min Zhou, author of *Contemporary Chinese America* (2009, 3rd ed.), describes Chinese schools as “pillars of ethnic Chinese communities throughout the worldwide Chinese Diaspora” (ibid, p. 152). In the U.S., as early as 1884, Chinese schools that taught Cantonese were developed in California (ibid). After WWII, during which the U.S. and China became allies, the number of such schools shrank. Zhou attributes this change to new mainstream opportunities and assimilation pressures, with the 1943 official ending of the “Chinese exclusion” era in the U.S., an era

of 6 decades which began in 1882 with the passage of the federal law “Chinese Exclusion Act” (ibid). In the 1960s, waves of Taiwanese urbanite immigrants who settled in U.S. suburbs and “ethnoburbs” led a revival of the Chinese schools (ibid).

This trend was further expanded in the 1990s by skilled (im)migrants from mainland China (ibid). “Today, more than half of Chinese immigrants live in suburbs” (ibid, p. 155) away from ethnic institutions in Chinatowns. Chinese schools (just like suburban churches) have in fact become a primary nexus of social life in contemporary Chinese America (Zhou & Kim, 2006). The social role of the Chinese schools has been significant¹¹, because other ethnic (political or civic) organizations manifest weak ties in the suburbs and are often not locally grounded (ibid).

In a study with Chinese schools in the U.K., the authors note that while children studying at these Chinese schools seem to think that the schools’ main function is to teach Chinese language to them, the international literature instead recognizes many other purposes and benefits (Francis, Archer, & Mau, 2010). The major 3 other functions include “the replication of ‘culture’ (Wang, 1996; Chow, 2004); a shared community space to facilitate intra-ethnic interaction (Zhou & Kim, 2006); and the provision of educational capital in relation to mainstream schooling (Zhou & Li, 2003; Zhou & Kim, 2006)” (ibid, p. 102). Most studies however have focused on the first and the second perceived function: transmission of language (and “culture”) to the second-generation

¹¹ While Chinese student associations on American campuses nowadays usually organize to pick up and help settle new students (because it is relatively easy to do so as new students typically come in July or August before each busy fall semester starts), suburban weekend Chinese schools do not routinely help settle new families into the area. For new families moving into a town or city, for example, they themselves have to seek out the local Chinese school, if so motivated. And they often do, for the valuable resources it provides, particularly when their children are old enough (> age 4/5 usually) to attend the Chinese school.

and re-creating “Chinese culture” in the U.S. for the first-generation themselves. Recently, The Sociologist Min Zhou, working with colleagues, has substantially studied the fourth function, facilitating children’s success in mainstream schooling (Zhou, 2009). Still very little is written on the third function, as an intra-ethnic social space. The nitty-gritty details of the Chinese school experience of the first generation, as a matter of fact, attract least attention from the scholarly circle.

It seems, therefore, only what stands out for the mainstream society is studied, that is, either how this ethnic group maintains its different language and culture, or how this group manages to produce the stereotypical “Asian kids” who does exceedingly well in American schools. As Steet (2000) argues, what we see in others is in fact what is haunting in our mind, through her study of *National Geographic*’s 100 years’ of portrayal of Arab people and cultures (See also Hoodfar (2001) “The veils in their mind and on our head”). Even the study of “the replica of culture” can be limiting and problematic, because often researchers do not recognize that “culture” is not static but is the way migrants choose to navigate their life in a new land. All in all, as Francis, Archer, and Mau (2010) note, only very few studies are attentive to the first generation’s experiences and perceptions of Chinese schools.

Of course Chinese schools do fulfill their original mission, i.e., teaching Chinese, a function that has received most scholarly attention. In 2008, enrollments in Chinese heritage sector (meaning Chinese schools) in the U.S. are around 160,000 students (McGinnis, 2008). This accounts for about 60% of all enrollment in Chinese language instruction in the U.S. (ibid). Students of Chinese language thus showed a much higher enrollment in these Chinese schools than in all of American K-16 education system,

including foreign language classes (ibid). Connecting to the Chinese school revival that Zhou (2009) notes, McGinnis (2008) also observes that “over the course of the past three decades, the Chinese heritage language sector has moved from a largely insular or peripheral status in American second/foreign language education to being the largest provider of Chinese language teaching in the United States” (p. 231). With these understandings about the significance of Chinese schools in contemporary (Chinese suburban) American life, I now turn to elaborate on my own research.

My Study: An Ethnography

In order to help break the partial silences within the group, on campuses, in media and in academic literature, I ask why these Chinese academic migrants, as parents, teachers, and/or administrators at the weekend Chinese school, chose to volunteer or send their children there. I break my *research question* down to two connected aspects of their lives:

1. What are the contexts – global and local, social and historical – in which these Chinese academic migrants navigate their identity-related quests and frustrations? For example, what are the historical conditions – including political economy, popular sentiment, laws and policies – in the U.S. and China that have enabled, encouraged, and regulated significant academic migration mostly in science and engineering fields from China to the U.S.? How are these historical developments situated in the on-going global and domestic concerns around skilled migration and international education? And how do the changing

dynamics – economic and financial crisis, anti-immigrant and pro-immigrant policies and activism in the western world, as well as China’s economic development and social instabilities – bear on these migrants’ struggles here?

2 . In re-defining and re-affirming their sense of self after migration, how do they construct and experience the spaces and resources in the suburban Chinese school? How do they navigate the complex interplay of privileges and disadvantages in their lives (in terms of race, gender, class, nationality, language, religion, etc.), situated in the changing economic, cultural and political dynamics of a medium-sized deindustrialized city in the U.S.?

Simply put, this study asks two key questions about Chinese academic migrants’ everyday lives: What ocean do they swim in, and how do they swim? This study, therefore, strives to enact “the Sociological Imagination” (C. W. Mills, 1959), by seeking to understand how individuals negotiate their socio-historically-situated lives.

Specifically, I look at why they have chosen to come to the U.S. and what role their involvement at a suburban Chinese school plays in their migration-related struggles. For my research participants, my key questions are, “What diverse meanings might the Chinese school hold for them? How is this ‘ethnic’ space constructed by them as constructive in their very identity formation, i.e., in their understanding and performing of “Who I am” or “Who we are”? Through and beyond the Chinese school, how do they make sense of, narrate and live out their own struggles around and for identity, as Chinese(-Americans) in the U.S., Asian, females or males, wives or husbands, parents, middle-class(-to-be), students, professionals or intellectual workers?”

Personally (and politically), I was drawn into asking these questions about our locally-grounded yet transnationally-lived identities by my own experience here as an

academic migrant. Upon coming to the U.S. for graduate study I was suddenly made to often remember that “I am Chinese!” And I felt “at home” at the Chinese school while volunteering there. I was also intrigued by the copies of *People’s Daily* – the official Chinese newspaper – that have been delivered to my door every day except Sundays (free subscription which the Chinese embassy offers and which my ex-roommate took up). Drawing upon but also problematizing my “insider” lens and “cultural” knowledge, I explored with my informants how we/they understand being Chinese in the U.S., and how we/they perform being Chinese, at the intersection of race, ethnicity, language, gender, class, nationality.

To understand the complexities of this group’s locally-grounded yet transnationally-lived experiences and perspectives, I have conducted an ethnographic study through *participant observation and semi-structured interviews* (complemented by *textual analysis*) (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). My research site was the weekend Chinese school in a suburban town which I call Myles, where I volunteered teaching for a year. About 10 years before I started my research, several local Chinese academic migrants had got together to start this school voluntarily to teach Chinese language to Chinese families’ children.

Many Chinese academic migrant families are now living in this suburban town (with a population of over 30,000 at the 2010 census), which was ranked among the top 100 on CNN Money’s list of “Best Places to Live” a few years before I started my fieldwork at the Chinese school. Central City, which the privileged town of Myles is part of, however has suffered major economic setbacks for decades, experiencing serious challenges as industrial jobs have left the area. Local and state governments have also been employing less and less people. Right now, Central City’s top employers are primarily in education and in the service

industry (mainly hospitals and a premium grocery shop) (information source omitted for confidentiality).

Several of my participants either work at one of the local or nearby universities or have a spouse working there, and many have confirmed that their family lives in Myles. The fact that the school started and remained in this town probably indicates the availability of volunteer administrators and teachers as well as resources and the population it serves (Chinese families) in the privileged town. While I do not have access to data as to what percentage of my participants live in Myles, in this dissertation I highlight the ideology of the suburb which conversation topics at the school frequently point to and reinforce, even though some families may not actually reside in the suburb. My research participants were volunteer teachers, administrators and/or parents there, as well as some spouses. With consent, for more than one year I had observed teachers' meetings, classes, as well as happenings and chattings at the school before, after and during the classes most Sundays. I also collected data from 23 interviewees, asking participants open-ended questions to draw out their life stories. Each interview lasted about 1-3 hours, some with follow-up interviews. I have complemented my fieldwork by textual analysis of the collection of the school's annual newsletters, as well as their listserv.

Data Analysis and Organization of the Chapters

My data analysis draws upon diverse fields including education, sociology, philosophy, cultural geography, anthropology, gender studies, cultural studies, Asian-American studies, migration and globalization studies. Overall, this study argues that the

Chinese school is itself a project, a relational and contingent process. It is a site of on-going cultural production of a specific suburban diaspora: all those seemingly “innocent” hallway conversations and interactions at the school, as well as the school’s organizational structures and activities, serve to make particular kinds of places and subjects. That is, they weave together the project of place-making and subject-making in *the cultural production of a Chinese professional suburban diaspora* in the U.S..

I use the term “culture” here in its anthropological sense. In particular, it means how people imagine and perform who they are, “draw[ing] upon historically sedimented practices, landscapes, and repertoires of meaning, ... through particular patterns of engagement and struggle” (Li, 2000, p. 151, cited in Perreault, 2003, pp. 584-5) and contemporary discourses. Culture, thus defined, means all kinds of inter-group and intra-group “cultural production” (Willis, 1977). Therefore I prefer to use the word “cultural” instead of “culture.”

My use of the word “culture” in this dissertation therefore does not refer to an essentialized heritage – language, food, apparel, dance, and so on. It is not about “the traditional folkways of a person’s ancestral homeland, but the active ways that people living together in a community making meaning” (Burkholder, 2008, p. 538) in their contemporary everyday realities. To illustrate this anthropological sense of culture, Burkholder (2008) states,

This meant that it was impossible to understand “Puerto Rican” culture in America without investigating the dynamics between Puerto Ricans, Italians, African Americans, and Jews in a particular neighborhood of

NYC, not to mention the rivalries and factions within local New York Puerto Rican communities (p. 538).

This also means that minority cultures are not *cultures of their own*, isolated from the mainstream culture of host societies, as we often understand them to be. Burkholder (2008) emphasizes that “it was not that these minority groups were outside of American culture – anthropologists understood these groups as active participants in American culture. They *were* American culture” (p. 538). They creatively live out the tensions between *discourses and realities of structural inequality* and *ideals and practices of liberal equality* (often on multiple scales), just as the members in the dominant groups do, in the American society.

For another example, in my study, one of the male administrators at the Chinese school suggested to me that I should really interview the (all-female) ethnic dancing team there as well, commenting on the role of the team within the host society as well as in group members’ lives:

They represent our school often in the community – they are invited to perform, so, [promoting] cultural exchanges. ... [And their activities are] not just for the community, but for themselves too – (starting to smile) they come to be able to *gossip* [emphasis added] among themselves too, and they really enjoy it!” He smiled and leaned his head a bit jokingly, as if saying, “these women!” (fieldnote, 5/3/2009)

From this brief scenario, we can see that ethnic dancing, made digestible by de-politicized multiculturalism in contemporary American culture, serves to reinforce the

larger society's imagination and consumption of this group as a model minority. Many female members at the school, as mostly middle-class mothers with some time and energy to devote to their interest, actively participate and took pleasure and pride in this representation of their group to the community. The ethnic dancing activities also serve as a gendered space for these women to collectively discuss their everyday lives and share their folk knowledge among themselves (or "gossip" as defined in the male administrators' gendered understanding).

Therefore, central to my study is that I do not see the school as an essential "ethnic" site of either isolation or celebration of Chinese folkways in the host country. Instead, my participants' experiences in and beyond the school show that it is a space produced by and embedded in contested meanings and relations of ethnicity, race, class, gender, nationality, language, generation, etc.. Carving out *a space of their own*, they inventively live out the acute pleasures and pains of being privileged migrants in disadvantage.

In this way, my study highlights "the making of diaspora and the experience of diasporization" (Parreñas & Siu, 2007, p. 12):

In focusing on the problem of subjectivity and subject formation, I am suggesting that *diasporas are not just there*. They are not simply collections of people, communities of scattered individuals bound by some shared history, race or religion. Rather, they emerge in relation to power, in the turn to and away from power (Cho, 2007a, p. 11).

In this dissertation, I follow Cho's advocacy of looking at "*how* [emphasis added] it is that individuals and communities become diasporic" (Cho, 2007a, p. 12), instead of *what* (Chinese academic migrants') diaspora might essentially look like. In particular, I investigate the "discourses of diaspora." That is, I look at the symbolic and material "production of cultural communities [and subjects] under conditions of dislocation" (Cho, 2007b, p. 468), in my participants' everyday negotiations around identity and meanings through and beyond their participation at the suburban Chinese school.

To illustrate how this group of Chinese academic migrants shape and experience their weekend Chinese language school to navigate their everyday struggles as privileged migrants in disadvantage, I have chosen to organize my 3 data chapters as follows, each with a specific focus:

Chapter IV gives a larger picture about their cultural logics of desire (borrowing from Nicole Constable (2003), Teo (2003) and others), that is, how my informants talk about why they wanted to come to the U.S. for their American dream, and why once here and having blended in, many of them now want to stand out through participating in the Chinese school. In the field of migration studies, research has increasingly challenged the boundary between voluntary migration and involuntary migration. While involuntary migration (e.g., refugees) seems more obvious, voluntary intentions are less than clear according to the research findings. It is very hard to define a choice to emigrate as voluntary, when an individual's understanding of choices in life is in the first place shaped by his/her experiences in the larger forces and relations of power. The traditional

“push and pull” migration analysis is inadequate too, with the dualism of structure and agency embedded therein. It is too simplistic a picture for us to understand how individuals come to make the difficult choice of leaving home for a strange land. So why did these Chinese “choose” to leave their familiar landscape of families and homeland to further their education in an American university in the first place? What did an American education signify for them¹²? What social-historical backgrounds in China facilitated such signification? And then I look at the cultural logics of desire for participation at a suburban weekend Chinese school once they are here in the U.S..

Chapter V looks at the place-making process: what the Chinese school actually does for this group, through politics of exclusion and inclusion. I discuss in detail how the Chinese school is shaped into a highly-regulated private-minded place for this particular group of middle-class academic migrants. Through painstaking details, I document the cultural production of the Suburban diaspora at the intersection of place, power, and the Other (race, gender, class, heterosexuality ...). In particular, I note the invisible divide between social classes inadvertently maintained by the informal organization of the Chinese school, the normalized suburban parenthood enforced through conversation topics at the Chinese school hallway and events, and finally, the gendering of spaces, interactions and activities at the Chinese school.

Chapter VI is about what kind of subject-making happens in that place-making project. This chapter builds extensively on my interviews. It looks at how the Chinese school participates in the shaping – and hence this group’s day-to-day performing – of the “ideal immigrants” (at and beyond the Chinese school) in their efforts to address their

¹² For a case study on Korean students seeking and experiencing an American education, see Kang (2015).

everyday joys and struggles as Chinese academic migrants in the U.S.. How did they experience and negotiate their study and then career here as privileged migrants in disadvantage? What choices did they perceive they had, and what strategic choices did they make?

My dissertation is therefore an ethnography of this group of academic migrants' lived experiences, of how they understand and construct their identities and choices vis-à-vis the larger social context of purported multiculturalism and persistent inequality. My theoretical lens comes primarily from critical migration studies (and globalization studies) which have moved from essentialist assimilation accounts to poststructural and transnational ones. Informed by feminist and post-colonial epistemologies, cultural studies, and critical theories, migration scholarship has elaborated on social-historically specific formations of identities. Methodologically and epistemologically, I rely on Symbolic Interactionism as complicated by poststructural insights (Denzin, 2001, 2007). In this approach, it is possible to document in my participants' everyday life the governmentality Foucault noted as "a rationality of governance that produces [specific] kinds of political subjects" (Oksala, 2013, p. 34) by defining bodies and populations. Such disciplinary power is understood to be productive and pervasive (as compared to the traditional punishing and vertical power). As Foucault (1982) highlights, subjects have become vehicles and effects of power:

[B]efore someone or something can be controlled or managed, they must first be defined. Therefore, the state designs systems for defining populations, which make them known and visible. [These systems] include mechanisms of management and administration (work processes, procedures, rules) and ways of

classifying individuals or groups (by income, race, professional and personnel categories), which allow for their identification, classification, ordering, and control. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/governmentality>

By applying poststructural insights to Symbolic Interactionism, it helps me capture how Chinese academic migrants, with their fragmentary and constituted subjectivities, make meanings of the things in their lives through interacting with diverse institutions such as media, schooling, government, law and industries. All of these interactions and meaning-making have major roles to play in their experience of migration and subject formation – their understanding of who they are and thus how they are supposed to behave.

Conclusion

So first and foremost, my project is a step toward un-silencing this group. More importantly, it will contribute substantively as a case study of complex identity formations (Ignatiev, 1996; Lowe, 1996; Ong, 1997; Lowe, 1998a; Razack, 1998; Brodtkin, 1999; Gilroy, 2000; Roediger, 1999), and methodologically as an endeavor at documenting governmentality and subject-making (Foucault, 1979; Butler, 1990) in their everyday workings. Further, it is my hope that my insistence on situating Chinese academic migrants' struggles in their beyond-classroom everyday lives can inform the Higher Education field toward better understanding of and services for this group in particular, and international graduate students in general.

For Chinese academic migrants (who may or may not be) like me, I hope my work here will be sometimes a pleasure to read, because they might smile and say, “Oh, that’s something I would say too.” At other times, I hope my work will be a pain for them to read, because they might frown and say, “Now that’s not something I want to talk about.” I hope the pleasures they gain from reading it will persuade them to persist at moments of pain. I hope that the fact that I care enough, to have done teaching, observations, interviews, reading and writing for years at and about the Chinese school, will convey to them that some of what I offer here might assist them in reflecting about and seeking to improve their (and others’) lives here in the U.S. and beyond.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW: GRADUATE STUDENTS, CHINESE SCHOOLS, MIGRATION, SUBURBS

To address my research questions outlined in the Introduction chapter, here I give a comprehensive literature review suggesting theoretical and empirical entry points into the lived experiences of Chinese academic migrants around their weekend Chinese schools. I break it down into two reviews on empirical studies – one on Chinese students in the U.S. and one on Chinese schools in the U.S. – and two reviews on the theoretical lenses which inform my study - one in migration scholarship and one in suburban studies. For the two bodies of empirical studies, I start with literature on Chinese students in the U.S., and then move on to studies of weekend Chinese schools, because this matches the chronological trajectories of most Chinese academic migrants in the U.S. – after they came to the U.S., they primarily identify as being students on U.S. campuses, but once they start settling down here, most send their children to Chinese schools on weekends. As most of them are now living in suburbs with few ethnic resources (except in big cities with large concentrations of Chinese), they adopt Chinese schools as (one of) their major social sites.

As my review below will make clear, the first 2 bodies of literature often compartmentalize Chinese (academic) migrants' lived experiences by either highlighting

their parenting anxiety and strategies (at weekend Chinese schools) or their academic and/or psychological adjustments (on U.S. campuses); The 3rd body of literature, migration studies, on the other hand, have almost ignored suburban Chinese academic migrants. Instead they focus on either low-class service labor migrants or high-class conspicuous cultural or entrepreneur migrants from Asia. Despite the empirical neglect, the theoretical approach of migration studies – the recent critical ones - could address the oversight in the first 2 camps by situating Chinese academic migrants’ experiences (with a foundational approach) in the larger socio-political contexts they have found themselves navigating constantly. The last body of literature, suburban studies, has overlooked migration studies, and vice versa. However, suburban studies has offered a unique input to our understanding of suburbs by applying a historical political lens to the development of suburbs in the U.S.. Regrettably, in suburban studies we can find only a few sociological studies, and most of these are on white groups, a very few on black ones.

So these four bodies of literature could inform and enrich each other. My literature review below tries to bring them into conversation. In particular, I address how my study stands at and contributes to the unique intersection of these four bodies of studies.

1. Literature in the Field of Education and Related Fields on Chinese Graduate Students in the U.S. – Empirical Studies

Chinese graduate students in the U.S. (and in UK and other countries too) have been studied, however often with a narrow disciplinary focus (e.g., Higher Education, English Composition, Comparative Education) on these students’ “adaptation” or

“adjustment” within higher education institutions. Some of these studies conclude that most Chinese students are successful here, in terms of adjusting to American higher education (Huang, 1997; Orleans, 1988). Others acknowledge that Chinese students encounter difficulties here in the U.S., but their difficulties are often attributed to their lack of English proficiency or to their academic struggles because of cultural differences in teaching and learning styles or unfamiliarity with U.S. education system (Sun & Chen, 1997). Still others note the “loneliness” Chinese students feel here, supposedly because they lack time to socialize due to “heavy academic work-load and language limitations” (Chen, 1996; Zhang & Xu, 2007, pp.48-49). The list can go on with diverse topics of similar gist: Chinese international students’ culturally-specific learning and lower academic confidence due to emotional loneliness (Turner, 2006), their cultural struggles in terms of communication styles as Teaching Assistants (Xia, 2000), their (mis)communication with peers and faculty (Meyers, 1996; Williams, 1997; Dong, 1996; Jenkins, 1997). Studies have thus offered tips on practical skills to improve their communication in general, which included how to enhance their performance in English tests (Jenkins & Parra, 1997), in speaking (Tam, 1997; Yang, 1988), in raising questions in class (Portin, 1993).

This literature in general suggests that these students’ own characteristics – either a supposedly static “Chinese culture” or their “objective language capacities” – mostly explain their academic and social frustrations. It seems that it is their “*fixed foreign self*” that stands in the way of their “adjustment.” This resonates with the traditional anthropology model adapted from the natural sciences model, where we assume there are certain attributes of an object or a people that we can pinpoint by observing and

describing them closely. Anthropology has since come to realize its non-neutral Western gaze upon other “cultures.” Social sciences in general are learning to grapple with the understanding that the object/subject of our study is always dynamic, in process, and in the making. As discussed earlier, *transnational migration scholarship in a more interdisciplinary lens* has shown identities to be social and fluid, rather than inherent and fixed in individuals (Lowe, 1996; Ong, 1996; Roediger, 2005).

While many of the studies on Chinese students proffer an essentialist understanding of Chinese students’ complex migrant experience with a “culture” explanation, some do try to argue that Chinese students comprehend reading materials (Tang, 1997) or discourses in the same way as Americans. However, these few studies still suffer from inadequate consideration of how Chinese migrant students negotiate the materials and discourses in their “migrant shoes.” Most studies, as discussed above simply follow *a deficiency model* focusing on their writing skills, communication anxiety, lack of host-society’s cultural knowledge, or frequent use of Chinese proverbs that does not make sense here (Jin, 2001; Huang, 1998; Townsend & Fu, 1998; Wong, 1992).

Also, different disciplines have each for their own purposes dissected Chinese students’ experience here into bits and pieces, interested only in certain cultural, cognitive or psychological aspects supposedly characteristic of these Chinese academic migrants. For example, in the field of social work, Pan and et al. (2008) examine how they make sense of adversity; in English for Specific Purposes, Cheng (2008), Gu and Brooks (2008), as well as Parks and Raymond (2004) all explore the social-cultural complexity in their experience of genre, plagiarism, language strategies; in Educational Technologies (incl. Distance Education) Zhao and McDougall (2008) as well as

Thompson and Ku (2005) look at these students' perceptions and cultural experiences of online courses. In communication studies Lin (2006) observes how, contrary to traditional wisdom, communicating with same culture members can sometimes help intercultural adjustment. In his case study of a Chinese student organization on campus, he finds that the organization actually helped its members cope with culture shock and gain intercultural competence. His study thus seems to confirm Zhou and Kim's (2006) account of "ethnicized assimilation." The rest of the studies on these Chinese academic migrants often focus on explaining their decisions to migrate, immigrate or return (Chae, 2008; Szelenyi, 2006; Wang, 2005; Zweig, 1997; Lin, 1994; Pedersen, 1992). Almost all of these studies have compartmentalized Chinese academic migrant's experiences to the detriment of paying adequate attention to their everyday lives.

Only a few studies, despite their disciplinary focus still, discuss multiple aspects of these students' academic and social experience, and depict a broader picture of how they try to re-define their fluid selves in complex power relations (race, gender, class, nationality, among others) after migrating (Zhao, 2008; Hsieh, 2007; Zhang, 2006; Lin, 2002; Wan, 1999; Belcher, 1994). Drawing upon these insights, I will explore how Chinese migrant students' within-university difficulties could be part of their daily struggles around their partially-marginalized yet partially-privileged lives in the larger American society. Moreover, how they might move on to search for meaning, identity and community in places such as the Chinese weekend school.

Compared to earlier Chinese labor migrants, this group of student migrants is similarly disadvantaged by geographical and social displacement, yet relatively privileged with their academic capacities. Ethnographic work helps me to hear their stories when they

voice (or struggle to verbalize) testimonies of experiences of violence – in the (sometimes explicit sometimes implicit) control of their bodies and their choices. It is important to situate their experiences and narratives in unjust structural relations, shaped by symbolic violence that discursively mark them as different and often deficient. I also situate their migrant lives in the larger American cultural context of professional individualism (Chase, 1995) and recent middle-class anxiety due to neoliberal developments. This study thus responds to C. W. Mills' (1959) now classic call for "Sociological imagination," combining geographical and ethnographic imaginations (Harvey, 1973; Willis, 2000), seeking to understand how individuals navigate their historically-situated lives on the local/global stages.

2. Literature on Weekend Chinese Schools: Empirical Studies Again

While Chinese schools are as important as family social centers as they are language learning sites (McGinnis, 2008; p. 232), scholarship has focused on **language instruction** instead, either the second-generation children's experience in learning Chinese (Pu, 2008; Jia, 2006), or on the school's structure or effectiveness in teaching them Chinese. For example M. Li (2005) problematizes most of such schools' total reliance on parent volunteers instead of professional educators (see also Fong J., 2003). Specifically, the research on Chinese schools has been primarily concerned with national foreign language capacity (e.g., Wang, 1996; and the above-cited Scott McGinnis is from Defense Language Institute), or second generation's bilingual heritage language education, acculturation and/or identity formation (Hu, 2006; Zhang, 2005; Lam, 2005;

Chang, 2004; Chiang, 2000; Chang, 1998; Jiang, 1994). Studies on Chinese schools in Canada tend to be additionally concerned with Canadian's national multiculturalism and socio-linguistic diversity, with a focus also on second generation's success or struggles (Li, 2008; Maguire, 2005; Li, 2006; Chow, 2001).

Even when some studies venture out of these two dominant perspectives, the focus is still on the students and not the adults who work or socialize in the schools. For instance, Min Zhou's (2009) chapter on Chinese schools is a sociological study of how such schools (together with other ethnic complementary education) *contribute to the second-generation's mainstream schooling success*. Silvia Ziegert (2003)'s chapter on a Taiwanese Chinese school, written from a cultural studies perspective, briefly acknowledges parental concerns and struggles. However, as a second generation Chinese American, her personal empathy and scholarly interest only remain with *the school's cultural effect* (on immigrant children, on Chinese-American cultural performances, and on the larger American society). Similarly, Zhang (2005) does pay some attention to parental insistence on home language (i.e., Chinese) maintenance in their children as critical to their family cohesion; however, her primary focus remains on *the second-generation's acculturation*. In the field of sociology of knowledge, Curdt-Christiansen (2008) scrutinizes Chinese school textbooks to explore how the *power relationship between "legitimate" cultural knowledge* is established and to what extent it affects language minority students' literacy practices in mainstream school and heritage language school contexts – thus the focus is still on children's (literacy) experiences.

Chinese schools, however, are *significant as social spaces* for adults (parents and volunteers) and children alike (Zhou, 2009). Yet adults (as parents, teachers, or

administrators) appear in most studies primarily as facilitators or hinderers of the children's interest in and study of Chinese language and culture (e.g., Yang, 2007 besides those cited above). Even though the schools are supposedly "designed 'by the parents, for the parents' (Zhou and Li, 2003, p. 67)", these schools are often studied as if they are sites that exclusively benefit or impact the children. This *child-centered approach*, while valuable in itself, keeps adults (as complex social agents with their own struggles and concerns) in the shadows. It ignores the role that the school has in the lives of the adults who work and/or socialize there.

Fortunately there are a few studies that pay more attention to parents' experience at Chinese schools, from the lens of communication studies. Lu (2001) explores how, with a desire for cultural preservation as well as for bicultural identity, parents expect their children's Chinese school experience to build up their self-esteem as well as bi-literacy hence marketability in a multicultural global economy. This study thus challenges the popular perceptions that middle-class immigrant Asian Americans are either well assimilated or that they identify with their ethnic members only. Silver (2003)'s ethnography employs the construct of "*language ideology*" – members' common-sense notions about language and language learning – to explore what it means to speak, act, think, and feel like a member of the community. He argues that the Chinese school helps to reconcile cross-cultural experiences so that children maintain positive social identities, and both first and second-generation members maintain stable senses of self as Chinese.

While both studies illustrate how adults negotiate their identity searching for meaning in life and how their Chinese school experience mediates these negotiations,

they nevertheless do not sufficiently consider how the schools might serve or impact adults above and beyond their relationship to their children.

I was able to find three important exceptions:

Francis, Archer, and Mau (2010) interviewed parents and teachers at six Chinese schools in U.K., and conducted discourse analysis on how these adults understand the purposes of Chinese schools. The adults seemed to talk about the schools' functions mainly as instrumental for their children (cultivating a basic proficiency in Chinese, facilitating communication with parents, developing marketable language and cross-cultural skills, avoidance of future regrets of not learning Chinese). However, adults also considered learning Chinese very practical for their children because many adults were concerned about the habitual charge made toward their children, from Chinese and Americans alike, "You are Chinese, how can you not speak Chinese?" The authors note that this seemingly practical concern actually revolves around the issue of performativity. Like gender (Butler, 1990), culture is expected to be continually performed to feel true, through self-censorship and peer pressure. The authors thus recognize that "complex discourses around 'culture' and identity" underpin even "many of the apparently pragmatic explanations given for the purposes and importance of Chinese schooling" (p. 107).

The authors then go on to unpack adult perceptions of the Chinese schools' functions that foreground complex *issues of language, identity and culture*:

For one, adults see the Chinese school as a community. Here they see the children getting relief from marginalization in mainstream schooling by making friends at

the ethnic enclave of Chinese school. In particular, adults say “[Since these children share the same] yellow skin, so easier [for them] to make friends” at the Chinese school, thus the authors note that these adults’ perspectives here rely on a discourse of “embodied race” (p. 108). Also here adults and children alike can gain social capital by drawing sustenance from one another or (for families in the restaurant business) meeting Chinese people from other social classes.

Secondly, many adults expect Chinese schools to aid in the replication of reified and fixed “culture.” These adults seem to understand culture either as a package of folk customs (such as mooncakes or festivals) or as (moral and nationalistic) values. Learning Chinese, they believe, would help produce “Chinese identity” and “Chinese values” in their children, which would guard them against western “contamination.”

Rich in interview data and discourse analysis, this study in the U.K. is nevertheless limited given that it does not have observational data support. It also has a narrow focus on the adults’ perception of the Chinese school’s functions only, without touching upon their everyday lived experiences (beyond the Chinese schools) which shape these perceptions. My study thus serves well to complement and extend this research into larger realms.

Another article (Wilcox 2011) again looks at the replication of “culture” at one Chinese school, in particular by examining the dancing practices there. According to Hui Wilcox, these immigrants’ dance typically constructs an essential Chineseness through familiar cultural symbols such as dragon dance or ethnic dancing, in order to cultivate a collective identity. In the article just reviewed above, the authors also note that “Hall

(1990) has discussed how [migration] experiences sometimes produce a greater need for, and stronger production of homogeneous versions of ‘culture’ among minority ethnic groups than might be the case in their heritage countries” (Francis, Archer, and Mau, 2010, p115). As I will indicate in my later chapters, I have never before learned or even ventured into ethnic dancing or Taichi, when I was in China (same case for most members of the ethnic dancing group at the Chinese school I studied). But here in the U.S., these days, almost every weekend Chinese school organizes an ethnic dancing group and a Taichi class. Dancing has been somewhat suppressed for centuries among the Han majority ethnic group in China. In fact dancing was reduced to a low-class stigmatized profession primarily by girls or women entertaining the noble or bureaucratic class. The stigma of dancing washed out briefly when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) revived dancing and singing with revolutionary spirits, whose popularity in China faded together with CCP’s popularity there, and young people moved on to western classic dance or discos. So immigrant Chinese in the U.S. these days often resort to traditional dancing by ethnic minorities in China, for their dancing group practices and performances at the weekend Chinese schools and elsewhere. Like Hall (1990), Wilcox understands that “[t]he transient feelings of being at home evoked by [homeland-related] dance are important survival mechanisms for immigrants marginalized by American society” (p. 322).

Although the ethnic dancing group’s performances seem innocent, Wilcox notes that they are actually complicit with Han Chinese nationalism AND American multiculturalism, “wherein differences are celebrated but power relations are not critiqued (p. 327).” Thus she highlights the irony that “it is through fetishizing and

appropriating ethnic minority cultures in China [i.e., internal orientalism/Han nationalism/multiculturalism] that Han Chinese immigrants of [the Chinese Dancing Group] manage to take part in American multicultural celebrations [western orientalism]” (p. 327). By homogenizing and presenting a unified “Chinese culture” (through for example Tibetan dancing) to themselves and to the larger American society, these immigrants Chinese performatively convince themselves and other social groups about their “collective ethnic identity” in the U.S.. In this way, they could proudly participate in the multicultural ideology in the U.S., without looking threatening in their coming together as a group.

Regrettably, while Wilcox (2010) did take note of her participants’ words and experiences, her analysis is very western-centered. It zeros in on the group’s practicing of Tibet dances, and the author claims that this group is paradoxically reproducing the re-appropriation of Tibetan culture and land by Chinese government while complying with the mainstream multiculturalism in the U.S.. It is certainly a keen and interesting observation that has valuable academic currency, except that her article overall seems less concerned about how her participants experience the school as how the researcher herself experienced the school (in particular, the Tibet dancing practices there). Also, her analysis does not address the global geo-politics which has resulted in China’s “Tibet issue” (as with the “Taiwan issue”) becoming a matter of U.S. national security and national interest¹³.

¹³ See Melvyn C. Goldstein, the leading western scholar on Tibet issues, Member of National Academy of Sciences, and author of (1989) *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State*, University of California Press.

Therefore, Wilcox's account seems a narrow U.S.-centered window to view the ethnic dancing group's rich and multiple experiences at the Chinese school. What kind of intra-"ethnic" dynamics happen in and beyond the dancing group? In her account, we learn very little about her participants' concrete experiences at the Chinese school and in their everyday migrant lives, even though (herself as a native from mainland China) she spent extensive hours with the group through participant observation and in-depth interviews.

So ironically, Wilcox's (2010) lens actually confirms that the choice or strategy of these Chinese immigrants' – their self-representation as a "(homogenous) cultural" group – works: at least their "ethnic dance" got showering attention from her (and from Wong (2010) too, as well as from the larger American society), while their myriads of weekly conversations at the Chinese school about their everyday joys and struggles did not seem to gain a cursory glance from her or a brief line from her pen.

In contrast, Liu's (2006) dissertation gives an extensive account of how in Southern California middle-class Taiwanese' volunteering at a Chinese school help empower adult participants as parents and as immigrants searching for identity affirmation. She argues that the Chinese school fosters a cohesive ethnic community which enables "selective acculturation" – immigrants' "paced learning of *the host culture* [emphasis added] along with retention of significant elements of the *culture of origin*" (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001, p. 308, cited on Liu, 2006, p. 13). She understands selective acculturation to be "not simply an assimilation mode or process, but also a self-

empowerment *tactic*¹⁴ and a parenting *strategy* that fosters children's ethnic identity through deliberate ethnic preservation" (ibid, p. 63). I appreciate Liu's claimed focus on the adult experience at the school, and she does spend a dozen pages documenting how the school functions as a social and spiritual space for volunteer parents.

Nevertheless, Liu's overall study is narrowly framed by an assumption that subsumes these adults' self-empowerment under their choosing selective acculturation, which she connects with a parental strategy. Her focus on adults is therefore still primarily hinged upon how they affirm themselves by attending to their children's welfare through Chinese school involvement. Also, like many other studies on Chinese schools, it risks essentializing "ethnic" "culture of origin" as fixed customs or values (Francis, Archer, and Mau 2010, Wilcox 2011).

In addition, valuable as her study is, it is an ethnography of a Taiwanese school, and the Chinese mainland participants' experience in Chinese schools can be different since most mainland (im)migrants are non-religious, and are intellectuals in science and engineering. These group characteristics have important bearing on how they engage each other socially as (im)migrants in the U.S.. As the sociologist Carolyn Chen argues in her (2008) book, "[i]n important, but often overlooked ways, Taiwanese immigrants become American by becoming religious," reconstructing their unsettled selves after

¹⁴ According to Liu (2006), "Michel de Certeau distinguishes *strategy* from *tactic*, defining the former as a practice in which dominant institutions and groups exercise their power to control knowledge, structure social life, and maintain order. However, tactical practices are employed by those who are under the control of a dominant group to subvert or redirect the rules of behavior established by dominant institutions or groups (see Polkinghorne, 2004, p. 66). Ethnic socialization using ethnic language education as a parenting "strategy" implies the dominant status of immigrant parents in parent-child relations. Constructing ethnic identity and fostering ethnic pride in the second generation through ethnic preservation as a self-empowerment "tactic" implies that Chinese immigrants are a culturally marginal group in American society" (p. 63).

migration through joining Taiwanese Christian and Buddhist communities here¹⁵ (p. 3). While only 3.9% of Taiwan's population are Christians, approximately 20-25% of the Taiwanese population in the U.S. are Christians, most of whom are converts after (im)migration (ibid).

Immigrant religion has been a significant institution for migrants' social integration (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Hurh and Kim 1990; Warner and Wittner 1998; Yang 1999a), but most Chinese mainland (im)migrants do not join that resourceful space. As one parent voiced, in Zhou and Kim's (2006) study of ethnic Chinese organizations, for many suburban Chinese from the mainland "*We are non-religious and don't go to church. So coming to Chinese school weekly is like going to church for us* [emphasis added]. ... I kind of look forward to going to the Chinese school on Saturdays, because *that is the only time* we can socialize with our own people in our native language" (p. 243). Chinese school is therefore a major ethnic institution that mainlanders find comfortable social spaces in.

To sum up this second section of my literature review, studies on Chinese schools generally are concerned more about the families', in particular, the children's identity and mainstreaming struggles. Often missing are critical insights on the larger social-historical contexts that (im)migrants negotiate their acculturation in, and an understanding of the (im)migrants' transnational imaginations and activities in their volunteering at Chinese schools. Briefly touched upon but left un-elaborated are a couple of intriguing issues: the

¹⁵ Carolyn Chen 2008. *Getting Saved in America: Taiwanese Immigration and Religious Experience*, ISBN: 978-1-4008-2417-5. Princeton University Press. Other studies of Chinese churches also report a high number of converts (Guest, 2003; Ng, 2002; Yang, 1999a; Yang and Tamney, 2006; Yang 2002a, Abel 2006; Hall 2006, Chen and Jeung 2000; Levitt 2001; Yang and Ebaugh 2001a).

politics of the inclusion or rejection of ethnic languages in Britain (Wei, 1997, cited in Silver, 2003); the “problem of definition” in the different naming of ethnic languages as foreign languages, heritage languages, international languages or community languages (Wiley, 2008, pp. 91-92); “ideologies of language” that “enact ties of language to identity and underpin the very notion of person and the social group” (Valdes et. al., 2008, p. 107). To help extend these insights, my study seeks to draw upon critical migration studies and globalization studies to situate the (im)migrant families’ involvement at Chinese schools within social-historically specific formations of identities (race, ethnicity, language, class, gender, and nation-state), as I will elaborate on during the next section.

3. Critical Migration Studies (Asian American Studies Included) and Globalization Studies: My Theoretical Lenses

First-generation Chinese academic (im)migrants’ involvement at Chinese schools in the U.S. can be better understood through the interdisciplinary lens of critical migration studies (intersecting with globalization studies). Sociologists have come to realize that their early studies had been most concerned about immigrants’ incorporation into host countries, hence suffering a “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2003). This narrow concern was often coupled with a conceptual essentialism that understands “*ethnicity*” as a fixed Other, at best given up by (and at its worst hindering) the new Americans who should dissolve into “the melting pot” (Park and Burgess, 1924; Park, 1950; Gordon, 1964; Gans, 1973). These studies thus often worked within the framework of (and hence reinforce) the rampant orientalism (Said, 1978) which immigrants from Asia suffer daily in the host society here. This area of

scholarship, however, has moved on from local *assimilation* to focus on the *transnational* aspects of migration (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007).

Particularly informative for my study is how migration studies have drawn upon poststructural and feminist (in particular, women of color) insights. Instead of focusing on how immigrants “overcome their *inherent difference*” from mainstream society to “assimilate” into the host country and community, we now understand these differences to be *themselves constituted* by complex historically-contingent social relations. In particular, attention is given to how such constituted identities are woven together through multiple levels (local, national, global), that (im)migrants negotiate on a daily basis (K. Anderson, 1991; Lowe, 1996; Wright, 2006).

Literature on Chinese school, however, is still hinged upon the lens of assimilation, as reflected in their almost unanimous focus on second-generation’s struggles, pushing the first-generation’s into the shadow. Min Zhou’s (2009) acclaimed chapter on Chinese schools, for example, studies them as a supplementary education that provides cultural and structural support for children to succeed in mainstream public schools. Even though she does pay brief attention to the adult experience in contemporary suburban Chinese schools, her lens is still assimilation-oriented. Specifically, she notes how the schools and parents’ interactions there help them affirm educational values and exchange information on “how to navigate the American education system” for their children; also, their involvement at the school fosters civic sense and motivates some of them to “participate in community affairs beyond ethnic boundaries” (ibid, p. 161).

Ethnic institutions such as Chinese schools are thus now understood to facilitate rather than hinder immigrants’ assimilation (Zhou & Kim, 2006) in their negotiation of

“cultural and language barriers” in mainstream institutions as well as their own “psychological and social isolation associated with uprooting” (Zhou, 2009, pp. 158, 161). Zhou and Kim (2006) highlights and celebrates this paradox of “ethnicized assimilation,” whereby “ethnicity” can be a resource of cultural and social capital (instead of an obstacle as conventional wisdom would have it). Novel as their approach is, their lens is nevertheless centered upon assimilation within the U.S.. It does not attend adequately to these immigrants’ everyday struggles and/or transnational imaginations and activities¹⁶, and also runs the risk of further essentializing Chinese (im)migrants as the cultural and language Others.

While I appreciate Zhou’s descriptive account, my study of adult experience at the Chinese school will go beyond her and others’ assimilation lens to ask instead, “what are the academic (im)migrants’ multiple concerns and struggles in their daily experiences here, and what role does volunteering or participating at Chinese school play in their locally-grounded yet transnationally-imagined lives?” Critical migration studies highlight three inter-connected key issues that I hope to draw upon to understand their lived experiences: historical and contingent *social formations of identities and belongings* at the intersection of race, ethnicity, class, gender, nationalism (Omi & Winant, 1986; Bettie, 2003); *the changing role of the nation-state and the institution of citizenship* (Pratt, 2004, 1999; Mountz, 2004; Ong, 1999); *the spread of physical and structural violence, both shaped by symbolic violence* in diverse global/local power relations (Sassen, 1984; Bourdieu, 1991; Nelson, 1999; Bryan, 2007).

¹⁶ Liu (2006) too, limited in this aspect like Zhou’s.

Sociologists, philosophers, and historians no longer see “ethnicity” or “gender” or “race” or “disability” as defined by “intrinsic” differences (Said, 1978; Hall, 1997; Becker, 1998; Butler, 1990; West, 1994; Biklen, 2005). Identities (which used to be considered fixed, self-evident, and an explanatory factor) are increasingly seen as themselves fluid and socially-historically formed. The social formations of race in the U.S., for example, were a history of how (im)migrants of various geographical or national origins – Africans, Italians, Irish, Jewish, Chinese – struggled to construct their identities vis-à-vis gendered and classed whiteness in the often messy and contested nation-building process (Cooper, 1892 [1988], Omi & Winant, 1986; Takaki, 1989; Bhabha, 1990; K. Anderson, 1991; Ignatiev, 1996; Lowe, 1996, 1998a; Ong, 1997; Razack, 1998; Brodtkin, 1999; Gilroy, 2000; Roediger, 1999, 2005; Stoler, 1995; Berlant, 1997; Anzaldúa, 1999, Triandafyllidou, 2001)¹⁷. The race/ethnic identity struggles were and still are simultaneously a class, gender and nationality project. How would Chinese academic (im)migrants’ struggles compare to or differ from these diverse group experiences, and how does their Chinese school involvement mediate their identity struggles?

My study therefore follows migration studies’ recent turn in drawing upon three different fields of scholarship. First is the philosophical (epistemological) rethinking about boundaries (Bordo, 1987; Haraway, 1988; Jaggar, 1989; Nicholson, 1990; Harding, 1991). I also turn to cultural studies for theories on representation, difference, popular

¹⁷ Gilroy, P. (1993) *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London: Verso

Ignatiev, N. (1996). *How the Irish Became White*, New York: Routledge.

Lowe, L. (1996). *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Brodtkin, K. (1999). *How Jews Became White Folks and what that Says about Race in America*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Roediger, D. R. (2005). *Working toward whiteness: How America’s immigrants became white: The strange journey from Ellis Island to the suburbs*. New York: Basic Books.

culture, and cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Said, 1978; Hall, 1997; Ahmed, 2000; Steet 2000; Paloscia, 2004). Moreover, my analysis is informed by Critical Theories about power/knowledge, discourse, constituted selves, post-foundational identities and social justice (Foucault, 1977; Galeano, 1988; Brown, 1995; Lesko, 2001). Rather than taking boundaries as “natural” and “always there,” we now focus on the social and historical formation of borders and identities. Migrants as social groups are now understood as living on the constituted and constituting borders (Anzaldúa, 1987(1999); Tode, 2000).

As migrants (including refugees) face new opportunities and challenges, they are also subject to socio-historically specific disciplinary practices that discursively produce and mark them as “different” (Foucault, 1977). This process of “Othering” works materially through institutional practices such as government policies, as well as in individual negotiations. Lowe (1996), for example, views the U.S. state’s immigration acts as the site of Asian American formation, which historically and discursively made Asian Americans into subjects who are “different” and either “desirable” or “undesirable” in different periods (p. 9-10; see Anderson (1991) for the Canadian case). See also Triandafyllidou (2001) for a more elaborate study on the European case¹⁸. Ong (1996) ethnographically demonstrates that “encounters between [Cambodian refugee] new-comers and U.S. urban institutions” (such as social services and churches) actually serve to constitute the very differences they purport to tolerate and include. “Ethnicities” are thus “dynamic formations constructed out of the everyday processes of inclusion and exclusion (ibid, p. 741).” Her study illustrates the possibility of methodologically and

¹⁸ Triandafyllidou, Anna. (2001). *Immigrants and National Identity in Europe* (Advances in Sociology) (Hardcover) Routledge.

epistemologically applying Symbolic Interactionism through poststructural lens¹⁹ (see footnote below).

In my study of how a group of Chinese(-American) professionals and graduate students navigate their migrant life through involvement in this Chinese school, I pay attention to these complex formations of identities (relations of class, gender, race, nationality, religion, among others, intertwined). These formations congeal into discourses around Chineseness (that are found here in the U.S. as well as in China or elsewhere), which intimately structure how Chinese(-Americans) experience their day-to-day migrant lives, in particular, how they find meaning and belongings in their work, family, and in the Chinese ethnic school.

Situated in these conceptual understandings, theoretical questions I explore regarding Chinese academic migrants' identities struggles are: How are they social-historically formed as a group, and how do they understand and negotiate their identities at specific intersections, disadvantaged through their migration and yet privileged by their class positions at the same time? For example, how does the global discourses of Asian or Confucian ethics work for them (Ong 1999)? And, since they started coming to the U.S. in the late 1970s in the legacy of civil rights movements, how do they experience the convenient placing of them into the evolving race relations as the Asian "model minority"²⁰? With their class privileges (which not all Asian-Americans here enjoy), they

¹⁹ This methodological approach is further elaborated on in my method chapter.

²⁰ I explain the myth of "model minority" discourse in my Data Chapter 6. See Claire Kim (1999, 2000) for detailed theoretical and empirical debunking of the "model minority" myth and its use in the "racial triangulation" game, where black Americans are often blamed vis-à-vis the "diligent" Asian immigrants, a charge/compliment ignoring the structural inequality experienced by both groups, while legitimizing white supremacy and maintaining status quo.

are often perceived as mostly middle-class(-to-be) heterosexual couples contributing to nation-building in the U.S.. Could their productivity (and partial “normal”-ness), however, itself be produced through disciplinary practices by the nation-state, businesses, and other institutions and interpersonal relations in the U.S. as well as in China? Is it possible that these discourses of identities and citizenship together put Chinese academic migrants in place (in the geographic AND structural sense), at the same time allowing them a sense of control, so that they see themselves following their own choices and creating their own fate? In this complex subject-formation process, do they also have to negotiate physical, structural and symbolic violence, even while they may not have many opportunities to pinpoint or discuss these everyday difficulties for themselves? Do they experience the contradictions inherent in the liberal-democratic state since its start, “granting” rights to abstract individuals (rather than concrete subjects) while simultaneously depoliticizing and entrenching the forms of social and economic power that constitutes concrete subjects (Brown 1995: 74, see also Lowe and Lloyd 1997; Davis 2006)?

More importantly, how do these academic migrants make sense of their own marginalized lives here, situated in the historically specific neoliberal discourses and practices, which do seem to give them an edge with many privileges? As we know now, host countries’ need for differentiated thus cheap labor (Lowe 1996) in service jobs are fulfilled by both “unskilled” and “skilled” migrants. However, the groups of “unskilled” migrants are condemned (and exploited) at low-end insecure jobs. Simultaneously, the “skilled” ones such as Chinese academic migrants are celebrated (and also underpaid in most cases) as the welcomed (im)migrants by policy-makers. Chinese and other academic migrants in science and engineering are even competed for among industrialized

countries (OECD 2008, Industry Canada 2007, Friedberg 2007, Shachar 2006,). Behind all these advantages they enjoy in the host country is the cultural and social capital they have accumulated back in China, which may or may not be transferrable here. How do their disadvantages (raced, gendered, and in (im)migrant status) and privileges (self-confidence and their cultural, social capital) play out in their navigation of everyday struggles and their involvement at the Chinese school which is an important mechanism in their mostly suburban lives? How do these academic migrants perceive and understand their own choices and decisions? Do they also experience a social-psychological drop similar to the “lofty ambitions, thwarted dreams” that Teo (2003) discusses regarding skilled immigrants to Canada from mainland China?

I also look at how these academic migrants negotiate their sense of belonging vis-à-vis the Chinese and American states, both of which have responded to the increasing presence of Chinese(-American) professionals and graduate students in the U.S.. In the midst of “deterritorialization” with increasing flow of people, capital and goods across borders, the state is still strong in its hold, only exercising more biopolitical disciplining than its more conventional and direct control (Foucault, 1977; Ong, 1999, 2000; cf. Hydman, 2000, p. xix). The anthropologist Aihwa Ong (1999, 2000), for example, documents how Asian states are changing their role so as to practice “graduated sovereignty,” defining and treating their diverse migrant and native populations of citizens in different ways. By extending privileges to court transnational Asian businessman, and harshening their disciplining of “unskilled” migrants in low-wage export-oriented manufacturing zones, these nation-states have important roles to play in

the formation of transnational Asian capitalism (ibid). To attract and stabilize transnational Asian capital, both Asian and western states have also eagerly resorted to a biopolitical championing of a modern “Chinese essence” of “Confucian ethics” which supposedly explain “Asian success” (ibid). Sojourning Chinese businessmen have themselves appropriated these discourses to legitimize their own transnational capitalist endeavors (ibid).

The Chinese state also actively seeks to solicit “long distance nationalism” (a concept used by Glick-Schiller and Fournon (2003) in their study of Haitian immigrants) among Chinese overseas professionals and graduate students, to promote economic relationships as well as to garner political support. Thus the nation-state – together with the global market (and the extended family relations) – play into the subjectifying process of Chinese’ migrant lives. The American state, on the other hand, deliberately disciplines Chinese(-American) professionals and students through harsh immigration policies, while championing multiculturalism in hopes for maintaining a low-cost, highly-skilled yet docile workforce. As emigrants and (possible) immigrants, how do these professionals and students themselves understand and live with these diverse discourses practiced by both states?

More importantly, how does their weekend Chinese school experience shape their migration experience and address their multiple struggles in the issues outlined above? This is a very neglected area in migration studies in general, despite the presence of some limited research on weekend Chinese schools. In 2009 when I was beginning my fieldwork, I looked into *the Encyclopedia of American immigration* and found no entry for heritage language schools or weekend schools. Under the entry of “Bilingualism” in

Volume 2 on page 727, the Encyclopedia notes public schools' bilingual programs' history and current situations. In Volume 3 on page 812 there is a note on children's exposure to ethnic language from home, elderly, tradition, church, family, enclave businesses and media. In its entry on "Religion," again there is no mentioning of affiliated weekend schools. Nowhere does the Encyclopedia acknowledge the importance of weekend (Chinese) schools in immigrants' lives. On page 813 the book even comments that immigrant parents often let go of children's ethnic language maintenance and instead care more about their fluency in English, social life and mainstream education.

In its "CHINA" section, from page 1157 to 1167, the discussion revolves around the Chinese immigrants now living less in Chinatowns but more in suburbs, with their family structures becoming more "normal." This section also discusses issues of (interracial) marriage for Chinese here, as well as the problem of brain drain for China, and lists some famous Chinese Americans.

So again weekend Chinese schools find no place in this Encyclopedia, not even in the section dedicated to Chinese immigrants' experience. Also interesting is that Chinese **academic** migrants appears briefly in the book only in two topics, their suburban residence pattern here in the U.S. and the brain drain impact on China. So their migration experience seems to matter only in how they fit into the larger American or Chinese economic-political landscape. The entry on "Transnationalism" does not include these

academics either, leaving them to the “brain drain” issue in the section on Education issues²¹.

To address these various theoretical and empirical gaps in migration studies and Asian American studies, my study draws on two *in-depth studies* on Chinese professionals in the U.S., each with their own limits though. The anthropologist Bernard Wong’s (2006) book on the Chinese in Silicon Valley highlights their re-rooting efforts in local community-building and also how the Chinese professionals experience and navigate social difficulties to achieve their American dream, often through, paradoxically, sojourning back to China for entrepreneurial trips. His insightful account, however, is about a Chinese community highly visible (in the Silicon Valley area), and thus more condensed and resourceful than the one in a medium-sized city that I am studying for whom weekend Chinese school experience matters greatly.

In this aspect, I find the historian Huping Ling’s (2004) study of “a cultural community” in the St. Louis metropolitan helpful in understanding the less visible or territorially-bound Chinese communities beyond Chinatowns or ethnic suburbs. Regrettably, her notion seems to emphasize Chinese professionals’ psychological pursuits (of a cultural or ethnic identity) (ibid, p.14), to the neglect of their mutual support in concrete ways. Highlighting the groups’ pursuit of a cultural or ethnic sense of togetherness also again risks of essentializing their experience. Furthermore, because she conceptualizes transnationalism primarily in economic terms, she downplays this group’s

²¹ “Transnationalism” section only includes three parts: 1, theorists like Nina Glick-schiller on transnationalism, 2, economy (remittances and entrepreneurship), 3, class and status – downward mobility (which may relate to the migration experience of Chinese academic migrants, even though there is no specific mentioning).

transnationalism because these Chinese in St. Louis live in “a hinterland or remote area, where the transnational economy has only limited penetration” (p. 13).

My study, as informed by critical migration studies, hopes to move beyond Ling’s reductive approach and shed light on how the Chinese academic migrants negotiate their everyday suburban migrant lives in intricate messy ways through their weekly interactions at and beyond the weekend Chinese school, at the intersection of gender, class and racial/ethnic formations.

4. Literature in (Sub)urban Studies and on Suburban Identities: My Theoretical Approach again

It is difficult to count the number of cities that have been extensively damaged by kowtowing to the demands of the automobile. So many come to mind – Detroit, Hartford, Des Moines, Kansas City, Syracuse , Tempa – that it has to be considered the standard American urban condition. The typical result is a downtown where nobody walks, a no-man’s land brutalized by traffic.”

- Duany et al., 2000, *Suburban Nation*, p. 159

An ethnographic study of Chinese academic migrants in the U.S. and their suburban weekend Chinese school cannot be complete without a deeper investigation of the social-historical formation of American suburbs. What historical developments shaped the formation of *American suburbs* (and urban cities in the same stroke), *a unique social phenomenon which we tend to almost mistake for a natural habitat*? Contested as it is, the U.S. suburb has enjoyed positive and negative fame and fortune.

It might seem weird that I start my literature review of suburban studies with this quote on American urban history. However, as documented by Duany et al. (2000) quoted above and many other scholars in urban studies, the development of both suburbs and inner cities in the U.S. are intricately tied together to the interests of automobile manufacturers and real estates and their allies in industry and in the government. I divide this section of my literature review into two sub-sections: A. the social-historical formation of American suburbs; and B. the suburban identities and its critics.

4.1 The Social-historical Formation of American Suburbs

This literature review draws primarily from Hayden's (2003) book, *Building Suburbia*. Written by an urban historian and architect, it is similar in depth to (but more updated than) *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, the 1987 classic by Kenneth Jackson, a historian at Columbia University. According to both authors, in the beginning, U.S. suburbs built before the 1930s relied on streetcars (i.e., horse-drawn and electric trolleys) and railways for transportation. In the 1920s and 1930s, the developers, builders, bankers, and automobile industry waged heavy lobbying on the U.S. government, resulting in car-dependent suburban sprawl²², a trend exacerbated after the building of interstate highways in the 1960s²³. "By 2000, more Americans lived in suburbs than in central cities and rural areas combined" (Hayden, 2003, p. 10).

²² Hayden (2003) defines (suburban) sprawl as "the lack of land use controls or environmental planning (p.11)."

²³ As real estate overtook manufacturing in dominating U.S. economy, suburbanization continued.

Thus the federal government has played a central role in sprawl. Herbert Hoover, who ran for the U.S. presidency with the slogan, “A chicken in every pot and a car in every garage,” believed that “the federal government could promote business growth through real estate development” (ibid. p.122). Before and during his presidency, he worked intensely with the real estate interest group the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB), which led to the establishment of The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) in 1934. Even though Democrat Roosevelt already took office as President by then, FHA followed NAREB’s industry interests. For example, FHA “supplied funds for new home mortgages on favorable terms²⁴,” and it even promoted developers’ new construction fund-loans by federal guarantee²⁵ (ibid. p. 123). Hayden notes that government had capitulated to the pressures of “the growth machine” – the powerful alliance of finance, insurance, real estate, timber, manufacturing (GE appliances in particular), and auto interests. Real estate historian Marc Weiss even goes so far as to claim that the new federal agency FHA was “run to a large extent both by and for bankers, builders, and brokers” (ibid. p. 152). “Despite the fact that FHA programs were effectively a developer subsidy, they were presented as assistance to the American consumer. [Car-dependent little-regulated] *sprawl became the national housing policy*” (Hayden, 2003, p. 151, emphasis added).

²⁴ In screening credit-worthiness, FHA followed the federal agency Home Owners Loan Corporation in mapping by “*red-lining*” (thus prohibiting) mortgage loans in neighborhoods of people of color or mixed neighborhoods, while reserving their highest classifications for all-white, Protestant neighborhoods. FHA subsidies thus enabled generations of “white-flight” from inner cities to suburbs.

²⁵ In particular, FHA “insured banks so that they could provide 80% production advances to developers who would purchase land, subdivide it, and construct houses on it with very little of their own capital.” In this way, developers could buy huge lands and build tracts of suburban single-family houses almost risk free, reaping huge profits afterwards.

Importantly and most relevant to my study, this sprawl's major legacy with lasting impact is the "two-tier" policy FHA developed, which fundamentally explains the "boring" suburban life many of my participants negotiate, as well as their lack of interaction with or understanding for contemporary urban desolation. The growth machine's powerful lobby against federal government's building well-designed towns and residential neighborhoods (with pedestrian access to schools, parks, shops and transit) successfully instituted FHA's "'two-tier' policy to subsidize housing" (Hayden, 2003, p. 151). In particular, "Cramped [public] housing for the poor and often black population would be constructed by public authorities, and more generous single-family housing for white male-head families (privileged by the federal redlining policies – see Note 24 again) would be constructed by the private developers with [tremendous] government support"²⁶ (p. 151).

The worst legacy of this two-tier policy, as Hayden and other historians see it, is that many working-class and middle-class Americans to this day still vehemently oppose public subsidies to the poor, with little understanding about how "their own [single-family suburban] housing was far more heavily subsidized" (p. 152). Many of my participants easily slip into the dominant discourses of "model minority" or "racial triangulation" (see Kim, 1999, 2000) when they do hint at the urban poor, or when they explain their own success.

²⁶ Similarly, Gotham (2002) documents how in Kansas City, between 1900 and 1930, the real estate interest group NAREB worked toward racialized home-ownership through the use of restrictive covenants and a public relations campaign. As the FHA was established in 1934, it furthered NAREB pursuits through the two-tier housing policy. The subsidized "white flight" and the inner city decline in Kansas (as in elsewhere) thus happened due to discriminative policies besides innocent desires (of middle-class people choosing to move to the suburbs for a better life).

The other disheartening legacy of the two-tier housing policy hurts the lower and middle-class consumers of these newly-built suburban houses, as the policy almost ensured a “boring” social environment for suburbs. Most private developers since the 1930s, while making huge profits from building acres and acres of single-family houses (backed by FHA’s insurance), were not required to build infrastructure for these subdivisions (ibid; Duany et al., 2000). Many in the beginning did not even build sewage system, not to mention neighborhood parks, schools, and civic commons. To this day, despite variance in suburban settings, most suburbs still lack community spaces²⁷. So suburban residents like my participants are left with few opportunities to gather and socialize among themselves to create a communal life²⁸.

The lack of communal/social spaces has in fact become so severe that Duany et al. (2000/2010) note that, for the general public in the U.S., “[s]ocial space [is] now almost

²⁷ We lived in a suburban townhouse complex where, during summer months, a dozen of the neighborhood kids would play outside together for hours everyday in early evenings! After moving away, when we visited again early December and I asked one of the neighborhood boys, a 12 year old, if he had seen the neighbor kids next door lately, he said “No I haven’t seen them for a while.” I resonated with his sadness and said, “Well, the weather is quite cold for playing outside these days. We really need a community center in this neighborhood, so everybody can hang out there instead.” He replied, “You mean a senior center?” I realized that even the idea of “a community center” has become so impossible, given the norm of an isolated suburban life.

Senior center is almost the only social space they/we have, and even that facility is not within walking distance in the neighborhood, but instead located (10 minutes driving distance) in the “township complex” at the intersection of major roads, as is now typical in American suburbs.

²⁸ Besides its lack of social sites, the ill-designed suburban development also creates huge inconvenience where families need to get into the car to go almost anywhere, hence the usual financial cost for each individual family to support two cars these days. It also discourages these families’ children’s growth of independence or integration into adult life, unlike children who grew up in traditional neighborhoods where they could walk to communal facilities in early age, helping with grocery shopping, laundry, or fulfilling their own needs for example.

exclusively the purview of the Walt Disney Corporation and the mall developers²⁹ (p.63).”

It is also little wonder then, that many elders in Central City now reportedly go have their walks in the suburban malls instead of on streets near their homes.

And weather concerns alone may not explain our “choices.” Duany et al. (2000/2010) write that there are more street-facing storefronts in Toronto than anywhere in the U.S.! There, a vibrant walkable street/community life thrives despite the cold weather³⁰. Government and real estate’s investment in sprawl in the U.S. have, for almost a century now, discouraged developing a street life or communal life in suburban neighborhoods (and destroyed existing street life in urban cities).

Lamenting the unregulated sprawl which has devastated the fabric of American lives in urban cities and suburban areas, Hayden remains deeply empathetic with the suburban population, unraveling the intricate cultural logics of desire (Constable, 2003; Teo, 2003):

²⁹ Library is mostly spontaneously for parents (usually moms, as dads are often uncomfortable there) of young children, or non-spontaneously for organized groups. So library is still barely a spontaneous social space for general public, and conversations are discouraged except in preschool area, as quiet is preferred in library.

³⁰ Downtown life, which used to be vibrant with storefront-ed streets, has declined across the U.S. due to federal-subsidized discriminative suburbanization therefore geographical segregation along the lines of social class and race.

Adding insult to the hurt, in the 1960s inter-state highways were often built right through and destroyed traditional city neighborhoods. The (again publically-subsidized) development of suburban malls and office parks along highways further depleted downtown vitality, as suburbanites barely have any need to go to downtown anymore. As in the quote at the beginning, many cities in the U.S. have suffered all these detrimental socio-historical processes of suburban sprawl.

Recently there has been a re-vitalization movement of urban cities, however with gentrification concerns, further marginalizing already disadvantaged inner-city residents.

Most confusing of all, suburbia is the site of promises, dreams, and fantasies. It is a landscape of the imagination where Americans situate ambitions for upward mobility and economic security, ideals about freedom and private property, and longings for social harmony and spiritual uplift³¹ (Hayden, 2003, p. 3).

Nowadays, this site of dreams is even more appealing, given the “two-tier” school system which in the U.S. is still locally-funded hence the tremendous difference between suburban schools and schools in depleted urban cities. My participants often seem to take for granted the social landscape of suburban schools, possibly due to the legitimizing myth of “model minority” hence their “deserving” of “good schools.”

Extending Hayden’s approach into a larger global picture, Mattingly’s (2009) review article notes that Beauregard’s (2006) *When America Became Suburban* made significant contributions in suburban studies in highlighting the global dynamics of what Beauregard calls “the short American century” in the process of American suburbanization. Specifically, suburbanization “underscored not simply American domestic and consumer values but promoted them worldwide as a manifestation of American power³² ...[as well] as a product of American democracy, especially in the Cold War propaganda confrontations (Mattingly, p. 420-1).”

³¹ The real estate industry have skillfully drawn from and contributed to this specific version of the American dream, thus private developers’ role in sprawl is just as significant as ordinary American people’s desires for better life.

³² Eventually, however, as the Sunbelt cities rose with U.S. growing dominance in information technologies, the Rustbelt cities decline. Mattingly however takes issue with Beauregard’s downplaying the role of “the rise of Third World cities and labor economics” in the decline of U.S. industrial cities, which I suppose he means that U.S. manufacturing has been increasingly relocated to the “developing” countries (with their governments capitulating to and profiting from capital’s desire for cheap labor and bigger markets).

Interestingly, Mattingly seems to want to rescue Suburbia from what he sees as unwarranted accusations of depleting inner cities of tax bases. Following Hayden (2003), he questions Beauregard's big-stroke account in asking,

Do federal officials (favoring highways over mass transit), political party priorities (pretending the economy was above political ideology), or urban power brokers (endorsing public housing but not small business enterprise) have any consequential part to play here, or are history and the national economy simply pawns of 'forces?' Where is the agency for historical change (p.)?

Mattingly is speaking of the agency of the historical actors on the side of "the growth machine," which has been thoroughly discussed in Hayden (2003), so now is a good time to turn the table and look instead at the agency of suburban populations, in particular, issues and critics of suburban identity.

4.2. Issues and Critics of Suburban Identity: Social Conformity, Victimhood, Complicity

Besides delving into these social historical developments, suburban studies have also looked at issues of suburban identity, which illuminates how my participants understand and perform being privileged migrants living in U.S. suburbs.

Social critics have come up with various names for the suburbs, such as "LonelyVille" "land of mediocrity, ... 'silent majority,' ... (Hayden, p. 43, p. 15, emphasis mine) all hinting at the lack of political engagement among many suburbanites, which may be related to their busy (and isolated) life as my participants repeatedly speak

of. Besides often commuting to work³³ during the week, they also spend much time on weekends working in their houses and yards. Women in suburbs frequently find themselves either relegated to the job of an isolated housewife, or overstressed by the double shifts of often commuting to work in the day and taking care of children and housework in the evening and on weekends. Suburban families have become so busy that “[n]o man who has a house and [a] lot can be a communist. He has too much to do³⁴” (quoted in Hayden, 2003, p. 135), as William Levitt, the co-developer of the (in)famous Levittowns, used to say, thus claiming “an ideological advantage” about his family’s helping build suburbia. In a sense then, lower to middle classes’ upward mobility and moving into suburbia actually became a curse to them – they lose time and social spaces and hence the collectivity of political awareness or organizing.

However, critics of suburban identities barely showed any “[d]istress over gender roles [or] concern about FHA practices that created federally-sanctioned racial [and economic] segregation (Hayden, p. 149).” Instead, “when Lewis Mumford complained about the proper design of neighborhoods and towns, his attacks targeted *social conformity* among subdivision families rather than the social and economic exclusion

³³ It is surprising that, as commuting increasingly has become the norm of work conditions, the 8 hour work day policy still holds its grip in the U.S., with no stirring of any movement suggesting shortening it. My participants who are usually professionals even consider themselves or their peers lucky if they do not need to work overtime beyond the 8 hour work day! I wonder if the increasingly flexible production – strategies of work-from-home or importing skilled workers disciplined by their migrant status – helps to maintain the status quo of 8 hour work day.

³⁴ The gendered suburban life is reflected in my participants’ voices too, when women often commented that on weekends their spouses would be busy taking care of the lawn or other thing around the house. And they themselves are most busy during weekends (grocery) shopping or chauffeuring their children to multiple enrichment programs.

behind the suburban developments (p. 149).” Therefore critics often blame the victim and condemn suburban families as *apolitical and consumed by consumerism*³⁵.

Conversations happening weekly at the Chinese school certainly sound “apolitical and consumed by consumerism” or parenting concerns most of the time. However, it is my hope that, in my analysis of my participants’ everyday struggles and joys, I stay alert in remembering how their isolated and alienated suburban life is social-historically formed, to avoid blaming the victims.

I also want to follow Paul Mattingly (2009), the other historian, in heeding to his worries that the critical discourse of the 1960s and 1970s about suburbs is too homogenizing portraying a consumerism-centered identity³⁶. In his (2009) review article “The Suburban Discourse,” he states his preference for ethnographic analyses such as Gans’ (1967) *Levittowners*, Stilgoe’s (1988) *Borderland*, Marsh’s (1990) *Suburban Lives*, and Bloom’s (2001) *Suburban Alchemy* which bring to light suburban residents’ own

³⁵ Speaking of suburban families’ enthusiasm in consumption, Hayden notes the prominent (physical and psychological) place of TV in a suburban home. Unlike in Britain where TV was introduced under plan, “with public educational and cultural programming,” in the U.S., competing commercial stations have dominated, flooding viewers with advertisement for consumption (Hayden, p. 148).” TV thus became a home product that has been used to sell other home products through commercials as well as sitcoms and films always shot in suburban environments “where every family had a house, a car, and a television (p. 149).” As TV gradually reached almost all households, it also sold suburban living as the “emblem of belonging and upward mobility,” the only way to live out the American dream. Therefore, ironically and sadly, even those many disadvantaged “groups excluded from the ‘sitcom suburbs’ of the 1950s, and from the public subsidies supporting” these suburbs, have thus also been subjected to ubiquitous TV messages of the superiority of suburban living (p. 149).

³⁶ “Until recently...most commentators engaged suburbs as exercises of escape, utopias, residential groupings of like-minded individuals, economic drains on the vibrant culture of the metropolis. The suburb became a place harboring an antiurban animus. In the discourse of the 1960s and 1970s suburbia became a place of fantasies, dreams, and self-serving mythologies. Suburbanites cultivated too much land, idealized the lawn and garden as country substitutes, then fenced themselves off from their neighbors and hunkered down by their firesides. Suburban husbands bifurcated their lives with commutation and distanced themselves from family life; female suburbanites overburdened and isolated themselves with domestic technology: vacuum cleaners, sewing machines, washer-dryer combos, and complicated food preservation and preparation.” (Mattingly, 2009, p. ?)

voices and organizations. I hope my study will convey similar complexities of my participants' experiences as privileged migrants living in suburbia.

At the same time, I want to take note of how my participants, in performing their migrant suburban identity, actively participate in and thus are complicit in legitimizing and maintaining status quo. Twentieth-century American novels and films, similarly, have often built on the theme of suburban emptiness, centered on middle-class consumption. Jurca (2001) traces the cultural meaning of suburbs in several influential novels such as Wilson's (1955/2002) *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. She argues that through lamenting their sense of displacement and boredom living in suburbia, members of the middle-class actually was able to foreground a victim mentality and thus avoid having to acknowledge or understand their unearned privileges³⁷. Such a sense of innocence is similar to the dynamic of complicity which Applebaum (2004) notices in her study of white discourses of moral agency.

We can also find a twist of complicity in the Othering of suburban discontent. Analyzing three movies set in suburban environments (*Pleasantville*, *American Beauty*, and *True Lies*), Gournelos (2009) notices the discourse all these movies seem to signify:

³⁷ Gournelos' (2009) reading of popular movies in terms of where they locate the source of suburban discontent is very intriguing. Analyzing three movies set in suburban environments (*Pleasantville*, *American Beauty*, and *True Lies*), Gournelos notices the discourse all these movies seem to signify: "It is not our lifestyle itself [- the "feminizing, boring, smotheringly normative suburban world (p. 514) -] that is unsatisfying or unsustainable nor is it the others that we find within ourselves but rather the constant threat of a true Other ... (p. 522)." Therefore, either sexuality or anti-terrorism (heorism) is used as the escape from and eventual retaining of (suburban) American "normal" home. Economic tension, racism, gender, isolation, and other social (sub)urban issues that surfaced in the movies are eventually submerged under the movies' sensational Othering of our own insecurities. Suburban identities thus only subtly revolves around the residents' own sense of social emptiness and economic insecurities but gets ostensibly resolved by projecting that discontent into the fear of the "Other" next door. Everyday trauma of suburban displacement and disappointment (by the failed promises of suburbia) is seemingly worked through and acted out, then the return to business/home as usual.

“It is not our lifestyle itself [– the ‘feminizing, boring, smotheringly normative suburban world’ (p. 514) –] that is unsatisfying or unsustainable nor is it the others that we find within ourselves but rather the constant threat of a true Other [living next door] ... (p. 522).” Economic tension, racism, gender, isolation, and other social (sub)urban issues that surfaced in the movies are eventually submerged under the movies’ sensational Othering of our own insecurities. Do my participants buy into similar Othering discourses?

Another intricate form of complicity in suburban identity stands out at the intersection of race and class. Twine (1996) notes that, for the African-descent girls she studied, growing up in the suburbs instilled in them a culturally-white identity which was intricately tied to their suburban identity, in particular, their middle-class purchasing power³⁸. Mimi, one of her research participant, for example “described being raised to see her *class* position, her position as a consumer, as more important than her color or racial heritage³⁹(Twine, p. 213).” Lacy (2007), in her acclaimed ethnography *Blue-Chip Black*, similarly documents how these middle-class blacks living in suburbia crafts their class-based identities. Do similar dynamics of complicity happen among my research participants?

³⁸ Twine’s (1996) article, “Brown skinned white girls: Class, culture and the construction of white identity in suburban communities”:

“A cultural and socio-economic milieu dominated by consumerism continues to characterize many, if not all, middle-class suburban communities in which shopping at malls constitutes one of the primary social and leisure activities. An economically and racially exclusive environment where identity is based upon middle- classdom and purchasing power is the cultural community in which [these culturally-white girls] described growing up and to which they felt a sense of cultural belonging” (Twine, p. 210).

³⁹ Mimi: “I think a lot of people of color in this country don’t have the opportunities that money affords them. We did. None of us ever lacked anything [materially] that we saw white people [buying] ...That’s why [racial inequality] is not an issue for [my parents]” (Twine, p. 213).

To sum up this section of my literature review, as Jackson (1987), Hayden (2003), Gournelos (2009), Jurca (2001), Twine (1996), and Gotham (2002) among others have demonstrated, the everyday lives of (and discourses of) suburban families cannot be well understood without a thorough understanding of the American urban-suburban socio-political history in the 20th century.

While there have been a few studies on the intriguing experience of black middle class in suburbia (Lacy, 2007, Pattillo, 1999/2013, Twine 1996), there is still few on Chinese academic migrants living in suburbia, even when the majority of Chinese immigrants now live in suburbs.

To that end, my research fills an empirical gap again, in the field of suburban studies, where the Chinese academic migrants as a social group still remain invisible. It is my hope that my study of this particular social group living in the American suburbs, with its unique positions of mainstream class privileges and migrant/racial/ethnic disadvantages, might contribute to the inspiring movement toward social-historical global consciousness and cross-class and/or cross-racial/ethnic affinities⁴⁰.

Conclusion

⁴⁰ Hayden (2003) puts it succinctly,

“Because federal supports for private real estate development, throughout the eras of the sitcom suburbs [and] the edge nodes ... have consistently favored new construction, Americans have abandoned existing built environments, willingly or unwillingly. The ... repair of urban and suburban fabric depends on a fuller understanding of why unplanned growth has prevailed (p. 17).”

Therefore, while Hayden applauds New Urbanists’ attention to the problematic physical and social environment in suburb and urban areas, she and others are concerned about their reliance on design as the primary solution (e.g., *Pocket Neighborhood*).

My study fills the empirical and theoretical gaps in studies with Chinese graduate students, Chinese school literature, migration studies, and suburban studies. Specifically, it addresses the concerns of a seldom-studied group in research with Chinese migrants (Walters, 2005) or within weekend Chinese schools or studies on suburbs, and it goes beyond the narrow disciplinary foci of current studies with Chinese graduate students. As such, I explored with my informants questions regarding our everyday realities that have found no answer (or even acknowledgement) in these literature yet have perplexed myself as a Chinese academic migrant. My approach to understanding our/their daily realities thus resonates with the critical branch of cosmopolitanism that attends to complicated power relations in our/their lives (Young, 2006; Glick-Schiller, 2005), rather than the liberal branch that overly celebrates mobility and progress (Appiah, 2006; Nussbaum, 1997).

Following the two historians on suburbs, Hayden (2003) and Mattingly (2009), I hope for my study to strive for a social-historical global consciousness, an awareness raising initiative, as the real potential for profound social change. The cure of suburbia (for all its comforts and ills) does not lie in victimizing the social groups living there, but in all groups (from suburbs and inner cities) coming together to envision what could have been, what could be. As Mattingly (2009) notes, in-depth ethnographic studies with different groups in suburbs shed light on the complexities of suburbia. While there have been a few studies on the intriguing experience of black middle class in suburbia (Lacy, 2007; Pattillo, 1999/2013; Twine 1996), there is still few on Chinese academic migrants living in suburbia, even when the majority of Chinese immigrants now live in suburbs.

Hence this study also contributes substantively to the poststructural theorizing of complex formations of identities, by looking closely at this group's socio-historically specific experience at the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and nation-state. What make their struggles particularly interesting are their paradoxical social positions (as "Chinese academic migrants in the U.S.") that simultaneously privilege and disadvantage them, which also make them at once courted and disciplined by both the Chinese state and the American one.

Just as intriguing are their experiences in a medium-sized city, as different from often-documented metropolitan ones. With few exceptions, when Asian(-American) voices do get heard, it is often about happenings in big metropolitan cities (or their immediate suburbs), among voices of other displaced and politically vocal groups, for example, Korean Americans in the Rodney King aftermath riot. Seldom do we hear about how Asian(-American)s negotiate their spaces and choices in smaller cities that seem less obviously politically charged around race and class, when with a historical view as in Hayden's we could see how the suburbs they live in are just as racially and class-wise charged.

More importantly, compared to other migrant groups in the U.S., the experience of Chinese academic migrants has been of less scholarly concern (possibly due to their relative privilege and the "model minority" myth). Instead, both Asian American Studies and Migration Studies tend to highlight either the "underclass" – disadvantaged Asian refugees and workers (and their offsprings) in Chinatowns or metropolis (Zhou 2009, Wong and Chan 1998, Xia 1993; Yu 1991; Lowe 1996, Takaki, 1989)– or the "overclass" – transnational Chinese businessmen (mostly from Hong Kong or Taiwan) conspicuously

settling in (and unsettling) white suburbs (Ong 1996, also, for both, see W. Li's (2005) review). They either ignore or barely acknowledge waves of Chinese students who have come for graduate study and often settled here inconspicuously since 1978. While a visible presence in industrialized countries and economies, Chinese academic migrants remain under-studied in migration scholarship (exception: Li 2007 gave a general view) as to their complex subject-formations.

Even in studies of weekend Chinese schools, we have seen that most studies are limited to the second-generation children's experience there. The few that look closely at adults' experiences there suffer narrow foci: some analyze how these adults negotiate their identity struggles through their parenting strategies at the Chinese school; other studies take a dive into their ethnic dancing practices on how they perform being Chinese with little attention to their everyday experiences.

Studies with Chinese or international graduate students, on the other hand, tend to compartmentalize their experience and examine their on-campus adjustment only. I choose therefore to explore ethnographically a group of Chinese academic migrants' locally-grounded and yet transnationally-lived experiences, how they understand and construct their identities vis-à-vis the larger social context of purported multiculturalism and persistent discrimination, through their involvement at the weekend Chinese school.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

In this chapter I offer a detailed description of my research setting, rationale for the use of qualitative methodology for my study, specific procedures of how I conducted my study, and finally, intricate stories of my methodological struggles in the field.

Research Setting: a Weekend Chinese School in Myles

I chose to conduct my fieldwork at this particular school for easy access – I volunteered for a year at the school as a teacher, and got to know some of the teachers and administrators there. The private non-profit school was founded by parents in 1999 in Myles, a suburb in this medium-sized city in upstate NY, a suburb known for its quality school district and a relatively high concentration of Chinese(-American) families. It has also been run by parents ever since. While non-Church-affiliated, to save expenses the school has rented Church space (at very low cost) to conduct their classes. In 2010 it had about 150 students. To teach Chinese language, they now have 10 grades of Chinese-environment teaching classes (where the teachers use Chinese as the instruction language) and 5 English-environment classes (3 for kids and 2 for adults). The Chinese-environment classes are for children who are from typical Chinese families. The English-

environment classes are for American or mixed-race families – children and adults who speak English at home, most of whom belonging to the association of adoptive Families with Children from China (FCC). The school also provides dancing, drawing and Pin Pong classes open to all children. As for the organization of the school, parent volunteers comprise the Board of Directors who then choose a principal and vice principal to run the school and manage everyday operations (most information above come from the principal's interview with the local newspaper).

All this work is fulfilled by regular volunteers (parents and a few graduate students) who work there as administrators and teachers, as well as by parents who only sign up to take turns for weekly services such as bell-ringing and cleaning up. They all put in work there with barely any compensation. This requires much commitment from parents, as many of them are taxed by their other obligations in life. For example, by choosing to live in Myles a suburb with good school district, some of them have to commute to their work every day (e.g., the principal works an hour's drive away from his home).

But parents do commit themselves to driving their children here most Sundays, and several social activities happen for them in this space too. Many parents only drop off their children and then go shopping or run other errands before they come back to pick them up. Still, most of these parents seem to allow themselves some time to chat (or play at the foosball table) with other adults and children at the school before or after their children's classes. Other parents stay at the school while their children are in classes. They often have long talks with other parents in the hallway. Or they might join classes

or activities the school has organized for them, such as regular ethnic-dancing or Tai Chi classes or the annual PinPong games. In the latter two activities, I have seen one or two non-Chinese male adults attending too.

Still other times, parents are invited to join their children's classes, when the children are doing a presentation. Sometimes even parents are invited to present on an aspect relating to "Chinese culture." Most school members also gather at the students' graduation (i.e., completion) performances before school year ends and summer vacation starts. And then as the pride of this Chinese school there is the annual Spring Festival event in January or February, which the school organizes and is open to the public, and attracts many hundreds of local attendees. For a relatively low admission fee, families get mostly home-cooked meals and a whole night's fun at the event, which includes performances, activities and small games (often played in China) by and for adults and children alike.

Methodological Start Point

I rely on qualitative methodology for my study. I want to start my methodological discussions with a snapshot. When an administrator shared with me his religious wisdom and discovery, I asked, "Back then how come you find religion so related to your life that you decided to pursue it?" My curiosity was justifiable, given that most Chinese here are non-religious. He nodded at my question and paused for a second to recollect his memories, "Oh," and then said in a very deep low voice, in slow sentences, unlike his usual upbeat tone,

Back then, in the U.S., churches are everywhere; Chinese churches are also everywhere. And, everyone was looking for a job, under pressure.

Back then I was having a particularly hard time, those few years.

Particularly for Asian guys, wanting to find a prof - a *teaching*⁴¹ [job], a *university* one, *academic* one, very hard to find one. But what I studied was very theoretical, ... [so I could not quite look for alternative jobs in industry.] So back then [my church-going Chinese friends here] said [to me], (higher pitch here, imitating the cheerfulness of what they said to him,) Church is very useful! (En, interview 4/19/2009)

In this scenario during our interview, there are two methodological points I want to highlight here.

The immediate point is about my researcher subjectivity. In his brief sentence, “[p]articularly for Asian guys, wanting to find a prof - a *teaching* [job], a *university* one, *academic* one, [it is] very hard to find one,” he was probably counting on my “insider” cultural knowledge in two ways. First, as he stated it matter-of-factly, he seemed to assume that as a Chinese migrant myself I would have some idea of this phenomenon he was talking about. Secondly, even though he said it in very slow sentences (and very low voice, together seeming to indicate his pain of thinking or speaking about this experience he had), he made no pause at all in between these sentences. Therefore I got the sense that he did not expect or invite any of my questions or comments in between, but instead wanted to move on quickly. He seemed to assume that I would know better than

⁴¹ Italics here (and elsewhere in similar situations) are English words participants actually used at the moment.

immediately probing that topic further with him, which seemed a not-so-comfortable topic (if not painful) for him, at least at that moment.

As one of my other key informants, a parent and a teacher there, also said emphatically, “Job-hunting here is the biggest insult to *your*⁴² dignity” (Xuan, fieldnote 5/31/2009, emphasis added). (Neither did she give me any lengthy account of her hurtful job hunting experience, even though she was very eloquent about her other experiences here.) So during my interview with the administrator, even when I wondered how his job search went, I did not feel comfortable pursuing it with him at the moment, but instead allowed his narration to flow forward.

It is certainly also possible that the administrator mentioned his job search struggle ever-so-lightly in order to quickly move on to really reply to my question – why and how he became religious – by talking more about his religious pursuits. Anyway, I did explore this statement of his with him at a later time, when he was more comfortable with my probing questions, since I had been hanging out at the school and talking with him and others. In that light, I am also negotiating the stereotypical image of Chinese as a more “reserved group” through my own cultural knowledge of when and with whom some people can feel comfortable to share while others may not.

The other important methodological point in the above scenario is that the administrator’s story illustrates how I was able to, through life histories, locate the intersection of identity formations – my key research interest. In this case, my informant’s religious identification was facilitated at least in part by his condensed struggles around his migrant identities as a Chinese academic man in the U.S. at the

⁴² She has used a distancing strategy which I will discuss in detail in Data Chapter 6.

moment of graduation from his PhD study. This was the time when he was expected by himself, family and friends to find a job so as to maintain his life and visa status here⁴³. Race and ethnicity, class, gender, and nationality all play into this snapshot of his life story.

Indeed class may not be an obvious factor, but it is exactly its invisibility that makes it so interesting – the informant taking my “insider” knowledge for granted meant that we both should know very well that “[p]articularly for Asian guys, wanting to find a prof - a *teaching* [job], a *university* one, *academic* one, [it is] very hard to find one.” That is, we both knew and emphasized that we were not talking about the other major branch of contemporary Chinese (im)migration here in the U.S., the sometimes undocumented Fujianese migrants who arrive through networks that usually supply Chinese restaurants with cheap labor. Ironically, many of these migrants have less difficulty finding a job here because of the networks that bring them here and their limited choices of taking on low-wage hard labor⁴⁴. Visa status is also a different concern for them, given that they

⁴³ Unlike Hong Kong transnational students in Canada, who are often expected by their families to go back to Hong Kong after graduation for their career development (Ley and Kobayashi 2005; Waters 2006), mainland Chinese migrant students, particularly those in science and engineering, are often expected by families and friends to be able to find a job here in the U.S., to be considered successful. This relates to the geographies of imagination and desires (Teo 2003, Fong 2006, Rhee 2006), but also to the fact that many middle-class families in China may not be as resourceful as Hong Kong families who can secure a good career start for their children once they come back to Hong Kong with a Western degree (Ley and Kobayashi 2005; Waters 2006).

⁴⁴ K. Chin, 1999. Chapter 8, “Life in the Mountain of Gold” in his 1999 book, *Smuggled Chinese: clandestine immigration to the United States*. Temple University Press, Philadelphia.
 J Sanders, V Nee, S Semau. 2002. “Asian Immigrants' Reliance on Social Ties in a Multiethnic Labor Market.” *Social Forces* (2002) 81 (1): 281-314.
 “... after the United States passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, [it] barred the entry of Chinese laborers, yet also ended up stimulating the formation of Chinese businesses through a system of visa preferences. Owners of particular businesses could obtain “merchant status,” which enabled them to enter the United States and sponsor relatives. After a 1915 court case granted these special immigration privileges to Chinese restaurant owners, entrepreneurial people in the United States and China opened restaurants as a way to bypass restrictions in U.S. immigration law. Flows of newcomers from China were diverted into the restaurant industry.”

either come on family reunion terms, hence already with legal immigrant status, or they arrive here smuggled in, without legal status to start with or to change from (ibid.).

Chinese academic migrants, on the other hand, faced immense challenge at the time of their graduation, in terms of their visa status. Many had a stressful time trying to find a professional job related to their field of study here within a legal grace period (usually 12 months) to switch their non-immigrant student visa into a work visa which allows immigration intention. If after 12 months they did not land on a professional job, their student visa would expire and they would have to go back to China, an option which for many would signal failure or a loss of face among family and friends⁴⁵. Thus enforcing job-seeking in professional tracks in the U.S., their Chinese parents seem to be working toward class reproduction for those from middle-class backgrounds and social mobility for many other families. So this snapshot the administrator portrayed for me also highlights his complicated privileges and disadvantages here as they are intertwined together. Interview data such as these have opened windows for me to witness their complex identity struggles in their life histories.

Observations on site at the Chinese school, on the other hand, spotlight how teachers and administrators navigate their identity formations vis-à-vis their own growing up “Chinese” and the second-generation children’s growing up “American.” In other

<http://journalistsresource.org/studies/government/immigration/untold-story-chinese-restaurants-america>

⁴⁵ Things have significantly changed for younger generations of Chinese academic migrants. First there is this new law which allows foreign students in natural sciences and engineering fields 36 months of grace period for them to look for a professional job related to their fields. Secondly, many among younger generations do choose to go back to China as per their own desire and per their family’s too. As Chinese middle-class families are doing better in China, and as many of these younger students are the only child in the family, more often after graduation here they are expected to go back to China to take advantage of the extensive network and privileges their parents have built up for them.

words, I observed how they understand being “Chinese,” or how they expect their children to relate to China. For example, the principal and others in the teachers’ meetings would discuss the Chinese classic text (which they have just started teaching upon the new principal’s insistence despite some parental objection). They would comment on how nice it would be, if their children know and gradually come to appreciate “our” classic Chinese culture. Several of their utterances regarding the children shed light on their negotiations and expectations: “I always tell my friends, when you grow older, and when your children grow up, why do you think they’d want to come back and talk to you? If they like your Chinese cooking, that might help (laugh), but, if they continue speaking Chinese, they’d feel the connection. They’d want to come back and chat with you.” “They would, when they grow into their 20s, suddenly remember the classic line you made them recite now and realize what great life philosophy it involves.” “I tell my son, when I take you back to China this summer, and let’s say, on the bus you can recite a few lines [from the classic Chinese text], you will impress even the old folks there! They’d be amazed how you know all these cultural traditions” (fieldnote //).

In our carpooling and before and after my observation of classrooms, teachers too were quick to tell me, with a good sense of humor, how it differs teaching here from teaching in China, “Here they just don’t sit and listen, like we did *back in China*.” But teachers also acknowledge the larger social context of teaching second-generation (im)migrant children in Chinese schools, “it’s basically voluntary learning. [These children] know they don’t have to, and you can do nothing about it” (fieldnote //).

“Sometimes they get the message from their parents too, who do not care so much (about

their learning Chinese).” Their comments hint at the “ideologies of language” we discuss earlier, which is intimately related to their struggles around their migrant identities.

My observations show that I can best answer my research questions through qualitative methods which help to unravel *the cultural productions* – the decisions and practices which diverse individuals and groups carry out based on the meanings they make of the challenges and opportunities they face in complex social relations (Willis, 1977; Bettie, 2003). I hope to document my informants’ life circumstances, in particular, what meanings and significance certain life-path-changing events as well as everyday happenings hold for them (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). Their migrant experience is layered with multiple power relations, meanings and struggles around their identity formations; most of this richness would be lost in a statistical investigation.

Within the qualitative tradition, I rely heavily on Symbolic Interactionism (SI) which is now informed by poststructural insights (Denzin, 2007, 2001). SI as a theoretical approach understands the macro as comprising “the micro-social world of situated *interactions*” (Schreiber & Stern, 2001, p. 114) with individuals creatively living out *symbols* (social contexts). It helps me focus on how Chinese academic migrants make meanings of the things in their lives through interacting with diverse institutions such as the Chinese school, media, schooling, government, all of which have major roles to play in their experience of migration. In this dynamic process of continuous interaction, these students and professionals constantly navigate multiple (and sometimes contradictory) meaning systems in their day-to-day often-seemingly-mundane endeavors. More importantly, SI puts an emphasis on the individuals as “always subjects of the praxis of their living” (Fischman, 2005, p. 151). So while SI does acknowledge power relations, it

is more interested in how individuals negotiate this web of institutional power actively and fluidly.

This approach also highlights the complex social formation of selves or subjectivities, which is a focus of my study. Blumer (1969) explains that symbolic interactions means that human beings constantly indicate to themselves what they perceive other's actions to indicate, and responds with their own actions which become indications for others to interpret and respond to. This means that everyone possesses a "*self*." This "self" Blumer understands in a *social* sense rather than a psychological one. One's "self" is an object which one makes complex meanings of, through "the process of social interaction in which other people are defining a person to himself [sic]" (p. 12).

Blumer cites Mead to note that this understanding of one's self is achieved through role-taking, where "a person has to see himself from the outside", "in the position of *others* and viewing himself or acting toward himself from that position" (p. 12-3). Only in these social processes of self-defining, one comes to "recognize himself, for instance, as being a man, young in age, a student, in debt, trying to become a doctor, coming from an undistinguished family and so forth" (p. 12). We are always in the process of re-defining ourselves depending on what kind of social relations we run into and hence different kinds of role-taking we draw upon to make sense of our selves.

Blumer's account of the social "self," when informed by poststructural insights which insists on the fragmented and constituted nature of our subjectivities, can shed light on what is distinctive about my informants' displaced selves in their migration experience. For these academic migrants, now they need to re-define their *selves* in a

drastically different context from what they were more used to in China – they need to re-imagine their selves in the position of other *racialized* (American and international) peer students, faculty, clerks, other drivers at the gas station, (nowadays often Indian) customer representatives on the phone, All these people become significant *others* in their everyday lives through whom they negotiate their own subjectivities.

The often productive but sometimes uncomfortable integration of SI and poststructuralism deserves more reflection here. Symbolic Interactionism focuses on how individuals or subjects make meanings through social interactions. This theoretical approach has been critiqued by poststructuralists for taking the subject for granted as if there is an “pre-discursive I” (Bettie, 2002: 213). Therefore SI can be complicated by poststructural insights of how issues of power shape social interactions and actively produce or constitute subjects themselves. Poststructuralism, on the other hand, has been met with critical concerns about subjects without anchoring points, who could potentially become grounded again by SI observations. Bettie (2002) for example, cites Bordo’s (1992) concern about poststructuralists replacing the objectivist epistemology of “The View from Nowhere” with “The View from Everywhere” (Bettie, 213). When the deconstructionist theorist assumes “seemingly inexhaustive vantage points,” then “none of [these points or positions] [is] owned” (ibid). Therefore, Lembo (2000) and others have attempted to rebuild the agent by synthesizing SI and postructuralism (Bettie 2002).

As Denzin (2001), who advocates a “performative, interpretive, interactionist” form of cultural studies, states very hopefully,

It should be clear that interactionists and poststructuralists need one another. Alone, neither theory is sufficient to explain and account for the complexities that occur in [subject formations such as race relations]. Poststructuralists need an interactionist concept of agency and self-interaction that is compatible with their notions of performativity and performance (see Dunn 1997). The poststructuralist view of [subject formation] as a speech act significantly extends interactionist notions of ... [subject formations]. The poststructuralists seek a framework connecting the ... subject with the politics of representation (Hall 1996c). The interactionists need a theory that can move back and forth between textual representations, speech acts, and so-called lived experience. (p. 244)

Similarly, in her study of the performativity of the “fatness” identity, Owen (2008) notes that SI and poststructuralism are fundamentally compatible in their focus on individualities in society, “SI is often referred to as microsociology, and poststructuralism ... provides a valuable tool for examining individuals’ and small group’s performances of cultural discourses” (p. 40). In particular, Owen appreciates Judith Butler’s account of “the embodied aspects of identities on the interactive performances of cultural performances. ... Like Foucault, Butler paints ... power as interactive and constructive” of subjectivities (p. 40). Relying on this combined approach, I pursued the multiple meanings my informants make regarding their social difficulties. For example, when one of my informants told me assertively, “Job-hunting here is the biggest insult to **your** dignity” (Xuan, fieldnote 5/31/2009), I could follow up and explore with her what exactly were her experiences interacting with potential

employers in her job search – how come this woman, who exuberates with confidence and was a successful professional in human resources back in China, would characterize job-hunting experiences here as insulting? How is her sense of self changing and being re-negotiated in her migrant life?

The way SI can complement poststructural insights is that it values the sense of self and agency that people do harbor. Poststructural understandings about subjectivities can leave us feeling nowhere – if all that who we are is constituted, where can we go next? So while I recognize that my informants’ complex subjectivities are themselves vehicles and effects of relations of power (Foucault, 1982), SI allowed me to still listen to “their” stories, how “they” understand their situations, instead of I as a researcher superimposing my poststructural understandings on them. To get more contexts and layers of their stories, I also conducted textual analysis on the Chinese school’s newsletters and listserv. In other words, I try to let both their voices and my accounts to flow together in my “writing up” their lives (Bettie 2003; DeVault 1994; Van Maanen 1988).

Procedures

In terms of access, I had obtained approval from Principal En, whom I interviewed twice and observed teaching one class when he substituted for a teacher there. I had also worked with Xia, a teacher, board member, and the school newsletter editor at the school. Xia and I have developed a lasting friendship since we two worked in a team project elsewhere. She is the kind of person who commits herself to anything she puts her hand on, and her enthusiasm is contagious. She is the one who introduced my study to

Principal En and got us in touch. She had also given me her copies of the school newsletters for my textual analysis.

In terms of recruiting other participants – to start with, I had known some of the teachers there, since I myself had worked there as a volunteer teacher for a year, first in an intermediate-level adult’s class (mostly white Americans interested in learning Chinese), then in a children’s class (mostly Chinese(-American) children). I also had known a few of the volunteer administrators, since I had met them once a while at a Chinese church. And I had re-familiarized myself with them through hallway observations, participating in teachers’ meetings, getting and giving rides, observing two of their classrooms and substituting for one teacher. I had taken my time to bring up interview requests with them, not wanting to make them uncomfortable and turn some of them away, given that one of the important reasons for them to have become involved in the Chinese school could be to find comfortable and familiar spaces.

Having become more familiar with them, I then started asking parents, teachers and administrators for interviews which I completed in 2 years. Instead of sending out an official flyer, I used snowball sampling method, again to maintain level of comfort during my recruiting. With teachers, I asked the one I was introduced to by the Principal (both of whom are very articulate and became my key informants), and the ones I carpooled with. I also asked verbally for participation when I was in a teachers’ meeting with the two principals, and stayed afterwards to talk with the teachers who did not leave immediately, asking them individually for participation. They all seemed hesitant at the time though, so I did not pursue on the spot, but instead waited to ask again during informal conversations at the hallway. Individually I asked 6 teachers in total, and only 1 of them

(who was the only male language-teacher there) replied negatively to my request for participation. With parents and administrators, I usually asked them while they are hanging out informally in groups of 2-6 in the hallway of the Chinese school. Often one or two parent or administrator would look particularly supportive or interested, and would stay afterwards to check with me about details of my research and then agree to participate.

So as I mentioned elsewhere, this study is limited because I was mostly only able to observe dynamics of the groups more involved in Chinese school activities and to interview parents and administrators who often hung out at the Chinese school. But I was able to recruit 3 parents (a couple and a mother) who usually did not hang out at the school, and one of the mothers considered the sole purpose of their going to the school was “to have [our child] learn Chinese there of course” (Interview with yinzi, 8/5/2009). I call these parents “outliers” for my study, and address their experience with the school briefly in my first data chapter.

The “target” or spotlight group in this study, as is clear by now, is the Chinese graduate students and professionals who are teachers, administrators and parents at the school, not the children studying there. It is my hope that my own migration experience, in some ways similar to theirs, has allowed me better understandings of their struggles around identities and meaning (or claimed meaninglessness). I also hope that my own gendered position and my teaching experience there has helped the teachers (most are females – gender dynamics again) to relate to me more. Also, I am a “native”/insider researcher speaking Chinese language too, which should have facilitated our communication.

A note on my choice of research participants: originally I was going to do the study with just the volunteers at the Chinese school. I thought that the Chinese school involvement matters most for this group than for parents in general at the school. As I immersed myself more in the field, I realized that even for those parents who do not volunteer there, Chinese school still matters so much in their life here.

Below are detailed procedures for my participant observation, open-ended interviews, and textual analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003):

Participant observation – With consent from the Principal (a participant himself), I observed at teachers’ meetings, as well as happenings and chattings at the school before and after the classes on Sundays. With teachers’ permission, I observed some classes. When they organized festival celebrations, I also observed the decision-making and other discussions and the actual preparation work. I carried out these observations 2 to 4 times a month for almost a year.

With familiarity and some trust built up between me and these informants through on-going participant observation, open-ended interviews (to draw out life histories) has helped me get a more holistic view of their struggles in their migration experience. The interviews were conducted between spring 2009 and summer 2011, each for at least one to two hours, a few between two to three hours. Interviewees include primarily volunteer teachers and administrators whom I had worked with in my participant observation. I also interviewed their spouses (those who are not teachers/administrators themselves), and parents who sent their kids there but were less involved in the running of the school, to bring out other perspectives.

Participants were interviewed individually, with the exception of one interview with two school administrators (as they two decided on the co-interview for convenience). Total interviewees were 23 in number, each interviewed once, and then follow-ups with three of the interviewees who were my key informants. (In particular, 1 follow-up interview with 2 parents each, 1 follow-up with a volunteer teacher, 2 follow-ups with the school's principal.) These 4 participants became my key informants because all four of them reflected profusely on their own migration experience as well as on what they understand their own and others' Chinese school involvement to mean in this group's everyday lives. All of them were also very articulate in voicing their reflections. With participants' permission, I tape-recorded most interviews. Topics such as graduate study, career, family (marriage and children), age, religion, leisure, length of stay here, and background in China all came up.

The interviews I conduct with Chinese academic migrant volunteers and parents aim at drawing out their life histories and their understandings about themselves around migration, Chinese school, and beyond. Appendix D is a list of initial questions presented as an open-ended guide which have evolved during the interviews themselves and during my research in general, through my ever-deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives.

I asked for their preference as to where each of them would like the interview to take place. Mostly we did our interviews at the Chinese school for convenience, but I did interview a few at their home or their office or a dining place. With all interviews but one

conducted in Chinese⁴⁶, I did the translation myself instead of hiring someone or some translation agency. In my data analysis I have also paid close attention to which English words or expressions my informants use in between the flow of Chinese words. It is interesting that many Chinese here prefer certain English words over their Chinese counterparts, or use them when Chinese lacks a comparably expressive utterance.

I understand that lots of valuable information could be “lost in translation.” However, I tried to best compensate for that through careful nuanced translation. I did not ask my participants to check my translation of our interviews, for concerns of their time spent on my project. I did not ask for this favor because they all emphasized at one point or another how busy their life is. I understand that this puts a limit on how valid my understanding of their expressions is. But even for interviews conducted in English between native English-speakers, there is always the epistemological concern about how to verify our understanding of or interpretation of qualitative data. It is therefore important that I acknowledge that my ethnographic study is in the end my narrative of their lives and their stories⁴⁷.

I used textual analysis on data gathered in written format, such as the school’s newsletter collection, and the school’s email listserv. These impersonal accounts help supplement my fieldnotes and transcripts. Among these textual materials, due to their sheer volume and frequency, I only translated those data I used in my dissertation chapters.

⁴⁶ One interview was with a participant’s spouse who is white American who often drove their daughter to and from the Chinese school, and sometimes took their Chinese colleague friend’s children there and back.

⁴⁷ K. Narayan, 1993. How Native Is a “Native” Anthropologist? *American Anthropologist*, Volume 95, Issue 3
September 1993, Pages 671–686.

The final stage included coding and analyzing all the transcripts, fieldnotes and other data to recognize themes and meaning-makings significant for my informants. I used manual coding, with color coding system. Specifically, I used open coding, writing codes on the margins throughout my interview transcripts, fieldnotes and memos. These codes gradually merged into themes and then the themes eventually joined together to become groupings/topics.

Included in Appendix A are first an overview of key themes and subthemes, and then a (what I call) “messy data map” - an intermediate step during my data analysis, where I listed all the recurring codes which had emerged during my open coding, without imposing any order on them, but instead allowing these codes to speak to each other, directing me toward noticing connections between them and hence recognizing subthemes and then themes.

Insider/Outsider Researcher Positions, Dis/comfort, Within-group Differences

Qualitative researchers often struggle with the insider/outsider dilemma. As a Chinese international student in the U.S., I might seem an insider to my participants most of whom also came from mainland China as academic migrants. In many ways they and I can relate to each other about our migration experiences, particularly the privileges and disadvantages that intersect in our lives here. However, we also find ourselves constantly negotiating (sometimes apparent sometime subtle) differences that infuse our conversations and my participant observation at the school. For example, while ethnographic work emphasizes trust-building by “just hanging out, being there,” for me it

was difficult to just “hang out” at the Chinese school, one of the few “public spaces” where many local Chinese gather. Chinese-looking and Chinese-speaking, I certainly blend in easily there. However, besides the classes going on there, most of the conversation in the hallway revolves around children, house, and family gatherings, which I do not have much in common with, given that I am a student without a child or house. Parents are also always busy, coming and going in between often short conversations, running errands or taking their children elsewhere for further extracurricular activities. So my very “luxury of having time to” “hang out there” can highlight for my research participants the differences between us. In this section I explore these quagmires of rapport-building, including various differences such as gender, age, geography, religious or other beliefs, and life circumstances, all of which my participants and I have to constantly make decisions as to how much to exchange ideas about and empathize or disagree with in observations and interviews.

No matter how much I see myself or they see me as an insider, there are tensions between me the researcher and my subjects, between our different interpretations of our life here as well as of the international political economy our life is socio-historically situated in. How do I research against the grains of some typical ways of thinking among Chinese academic migrants without alienating my subjects? On the other hand, how do I highlight their voices of resistance without over-valorizing or over-identifying with them? I have tried to strike a balance between becoming too distant from and coming too close to their perspectives and experiences.

My insider/outsider positions have implications for how I conduct my research with this group. Like Tolman (2002), I did not use grounded theory as my methodology,

but instead asked specific questions about issues that other research and media stories were silent about. In our interviews, I asked my participants what they struggle most about in their work, study and life here in the U.S.. However, I did not approach my participants with this question straightforward. I was afraid of sounding nosy and causing distrust from the members of the Chinese school. As an insider, I know how seldom I had heard at the school any discussions of their everyday struggles except for issues in raising (second generation immigrant) children here. I have been aware of and respected this reluctance to talk about struggles.

But this reluctance does pose challenges for my entry into the field. To address their unease at the beginning of our interview, I would first chat with them a little about their children or spouse or work. Then I would take out my list of Interview Qs, so they know we were starting. To further relieve their anxiety about being interviewed, I would preface the interview by reiterating my research interest as explained in the consent letter they had signed earlier, “I’m interested in what you usually do at the Chinese school, and also in how your life/work/study has been like since you came to the U.S., how you have adjusted” – (I do not want people to know I am trying to make the connection between these two, but I cannot quite explain to them why I am interested in these 2 seemingly discrete question then.)

Also, with these two questions I hope to address a concern my advisor and I discussed earlier, i.e., how to go beyond ethnicity as migration scholars such as Nina Glick-Schiller urge us to do. We wondered how I could ask about my participants’ other social circles beyond ethnic groups, and these two questions along with other detailed

ones allowed my participants to think and talk about their life in general besides the prominent issue of ethnicity.

My point is to get them to understand that I am not interested in the Chinese school's operation or their take of Chinese school operation per se. On the other hand, if I go straight to, "hey, I'm interested in your life/study/work experience here," they may become very careful with me. So at the start of our interview my entrance through Chinese school works like a buffer. But it can back fire, as some participants might think, "oh, you are in the field of Education, you must be interested in the technicality of the Chinese school." Or the administrators might get cautious (for example maybe Chunteng), "I don't want to talk about the topic of the politics among us administrators of the school. It's too complicated."

Scholars have noted that it is relatively easy to "research down," that is, for middle-class professors and students to get access to study the poor, the immigrants, and the refugees. One reason could be that these researchers could easily tell the participants that the research might bring resources or help for the group. Yet with my privileged resourceful participants, of course this incentive would not work⁴⁸. Also I gradually came to realize that for this group it matters to maintain the look of "we are ok here" and so we don't need help. We don't even need to talk about struggles. The hard-working bootstrapping (Ono, 2005) "model minority" mentality pervades this professional group. Even after rapport-building and when they had finally opened up with me and talked about

⁴⁸In a conference I heard about another interesting story of why some incentive does not work with a specific group. Cat the researcher told her Somali refugee participants as incentive that she would give them the tapes of their interviews: "You can pass on the tape of your life history to your kids." "But of course I'll tell my kids all these stories of mine!" – they have an oral history tradition, so for them the tape is no incentive at all.

their struggles here, often they would still add, life is ok here, or, you just need to get used to it.

Mistrust in general therefore is not personal in nature directed toward the researcher, but often results from larger systemic injustice. Mistrust happens in the “research down” studies. It also happens in the “parallel research” I do with my middle-class professional migrants. They do not want to talk about struggles probably because they are supposedly competent professionals. Therefore, the IRB consent form also really hinders my access to this group, with its required paragraph on informing the participants of possible risks of the study, which I stated as “you might feel uncomfortable recalling and telling about certain memories.”

My insider/outsider dilemma also relates to how I write up my dissertation. In the beginning, I realized that I was mainly thinking of my academic disciplines as an audience here. I have since moved on in my efforts to include my subjects and other Chinese academic migrants among my audience.

From an “insider” perspective I experience certain aspects of the school in certain ways, triggering my “researcher” antenna in specific ways. As a perceived “insider” for example, I got asked by the principal “Have you seen Yun upstairs?” when he was looking for her for keys to the meeting room. I simply replied I had not noticed – the fact was I still did not know who Yun was yet (until after the meeting later that day), but I did not want to bother him with that at the point. Similarly, I had to find out who Teacher Yin was by double checking with Teacher Xin while watching the children’s class. This again

alerted me to the informal structure of the school with no formal channels to get to know the school personnel.

Sharing with my participants some “identity markers” but more importantly, similar experiences alerted me to their situation better. For example, when in the same set of fieldnotes I first read how we had just teased how nice Xueren was with her spouse (missing the bus), then on the following page I read how nice and considerate I was with my spouse (cellphone issue), and I cannot help but notice the interesting similarity which alerts me to the invisible labor we as “women” perform day in and day out (fieldnote 5/17/2009).

Another interesting methodological consideration is how I positioned myself at the school: While most administrators called the principal by his full name, when I realized that most teachers called him “Principal,” I followed suit. And in teachers’ meetings with the principal(s), I also made an effort (although inconspicuously) to sit one seat across from the end of the table where the two principals sat, so that another teacher could sit in between. This way, I hoped to present myself to the teachers as not “on the side of the principals.” Even though I had not observed much disagreement between the teachers and the principal except about how to teach a Chinese classic text at the school, I did notice sometimes a subtle preference for teachers to sit somewhat away from the principal. So I tried to not sit too close either.

When I introduced myself to Aian at the Chinese school, he asked thoughtfully, “so what questions are you interested in?” His question showed his familiarity with research. However, I also noticed how careful my participants were about being taped. As

well-educated middle-class migrants, they seemed very conscious of their legal rights and often sounded uneasy about the consent letter – possibly a put-off for many. Any contract-looking piece of paper can feel like a trap to them. When I asked my participants to sign the consent letter, almost every one of them read it through carefully. And when they read to the point where they needed to check the boxes as to whether they agreed to being tape-recorded or not, almost everyone would hesitate and then only agreed after checking with me first. With Dan for example, he asked, “Tape-recording, so what are we talking about?” Then he said, “It should be fine, right?” I assured him that we could turn off the taping any time. I then laughingly told him about my friend who asked to turn it off to gossip a bit and then told me to turn it back on. Only then did he say ok and check on the consent letter.

Methodological Reflections as Epistemological Openings

Methodological reflections often point to new ways of analyzing our data. For example, in my proposal’s method section I cited my insider knowledge to explain why I avoided asking the principal to elaborate on his struggles here which he had mentioned (as an Asian man looking for a job here). My advisor wondered with me whether this restraint on my side was indeed due to my cultural knowledge about our struggles here, or does my restraint seem in line with popular stereotypes of East Asian people being withdrawn and introvert. I acknowledged that they might be unwilling to talk, but I insisted on my insider knowledge, “I think because they have gone through so much struggle here, they may not feel comfortable sharing or just talking about it. It’s painful.

So it may NOT be due to a stereotypical introvert ‘Asian culture’.” But this discussion with my advisor left a tinge of uncertainty on my mind.

Also, I had this question written down in my fieldnotes early in my fieldwork, “Can I ever ask, ‘what do you struggle with in work, study, family, and other aspects of your life here?’” Indeed, “do I sound probing” was a constant concern on my mind. In the beginning of my research, I was very unwilling to ask about what my participants struggle about, even though that was my major research question, and I was having their/our best interest in mind. It has been my hope to bring those struggles into highlight through my research and writing, so that together we can think about possible political solutions. But I had often felt tongue-tied whenever that question came to my mind again during my conversations with them.

Later on, as I was collecting more data, I increasingly noticed this “I’m ok” talk among my participants even after they had related to me their struggles here. I began to realize that they might reason away their struggles (or the need to talk about their struggles) by resorting to an individualistic approach: “technically I can handle it” (as I’m privileged with knowledge) and “mentally I can live with it” (or “A Q spirit” as one participant names it, details in Data Chapter 6) (as “it was my own decision to come here to the U.S. anyway”).

Here we witness again an intertwining of privileges and disadvantages. With their social class privileges they saw no need for contesting their disadvantages here, as they can solve their own problems. Unwilling or unable to see their decisions to migrate as being influenced by the power imbalance between the western and eastern cultures and

countries, they owned up totally to their migration decisions. Therefore they saw no reason to challenge the social inequalities they experienced here, believing these to be the consequences of their own decisions, for themselves to ingest and digest, however distasteful these might be. After all, they were the elite and privileged, they had the choice, and they chose to come here. It can be difficult to start complaining about their own decisions. And possibly they would like to maintain that privileged look (“I’m doing well”) to outsiders and to themselves. So it seemed to be their privilege/disadvantage double-bind that made them un-willing to talk about struggles.

Other Messy Struggles and technicalities in the field

I had three inter-related struggles with my fieldwork during participant observations and in-depth interviews:

1. I constantly wondered that, during my participant observation, where/what/how much to tell and not tell my participants about my research?
2. For our interviews, I worried about how and/or what to ask and not ask my participants. It took me a while to finalize my list of open-ended questions.
3. During my fieldwork, I also consciously negotiated the tension between rapport-building and productive fieldwork.

Below I elaborate on each of these struggles I often experienced during my fieldwork.

Fieldwork Nitty-gritty #1: During my Participant Observation, Where/what to Tell and Not Tell my Participants about my Research?

In the beginning of my fieldwork, I became very concerned about where and when should I tell or remind people of my researcher role, as I mingled with them while observing in the Chinese school hallway and during carpool. I wrote down my reflections as such:

Below I elaborate on each of these struggles I often experienced during my fieldwork.

How to tell them that even our conversations while carpooling might be incorporated as my research data? - I don't want the young teachers I carpool with to become super conscious. Plus, carpooling sounds such a fun time for them. I would not want to spoil that!

The same with hallway conversations – how could I make sure I let everyone know that my hang-out is not innocent but research-oriented? If I do not let them know, I feel like spying; if I do let them know, I have several concerns.

The following were thoughts going through my head and that produced tensions for me. First, I would have to repeat my research intentions hundreds of times to each and everyone, because there was barely any official occasion where all parents, teachers, administrators gather where I could easily announce my research. Usually they just come and go, so every week I saw different groups of parents at the school. Even when there were gatherings (e.g., teachers' meetings or graduation event in June), I would feel intrusive taking the spotlight to announce my research. Plus, if I had introduced my research in such public light, everyone would become super-conscious of my intention

and/or presence there. Maybe hallway time would not be so much fun for some of them or for me then.

So how could I tell them that I would be interested in their casual hallway and carpool conversations as well? Just say that I work like an anthropologist? Still needs explanation right? I should not assume that everyone knows exactly how an anthropologist works. Anyway, they might still ask, why would I be interested in their hallway and carpool conversations? Is my stated general research question “What Chinese school experience means in your life (as an academic migrant)?” enough for them to understand my interest in all their conversations?

When I asked my advisor for advice on my above misgivings, she suggested, “Start by telling them, ‘I’m going to hang out ...’ ‘I’m interested in your experience (*ti hui/gan shou*) teaching at Chinese school, and also in your adjustment in the U.S.’” She then advised me to try tell them once a while during my fieldwork ‘I’m just learning so much from you.’ I tried these and people seemed to have been very amenable toward my presence at the school and I gradually relaxed about it too.

Fieldwork Nitty-gritty #2: for our Interview, How/what to Ask and Not Ask my Participants?

With my first few interviews, I struggled as to how to get more focused on/through my interview questions. How to zero in on my participants lived experiences? It helped me a lot by reading studies like mine. Carolyn Chen’s (2008) detailed interview questions got me concerned, but when I checked with my advisor, she said those were great questions. And indeed, it must be these questions that brought out her rich data, even though I have my critique. So reading someone else’s work similar in gist, even

though it might be different in topic to yours, is important. You know how detailed or probing you should or can get with your interviews.

As a result, I cut off several questions from my initial list of interview questions, because they were too general, not getting me anywhere. These questions included,

How do you understand Chinese culture?

What meaning does this Chinese school have for you?

What does “being Chinese” mean to you?

With Carolyn Chen’s (2008) study, for example, she never asked her participants, “What meaning do you think religion (Christianity or Buddhism) has in your life?”⁴⁹ In order to get at my research questions such as “how do they understand being Chinese (in the U.S.)?” I cannot just ask my participants straightforward. Instead, I got more out of following up with their fleeting comments such as “Job-hunting here is the biggest insult to your dignity” (Xuan, fieldnote, 5/31/2009), by asking them, “What do you mean?”

So instead of my general questions, I added many more detailed probing questions:

What do you think of your teaching at (or sending you child(ren) to) this school?

What do you like most, and what do you struggle with?

How do you think coming to the Chinese school relates to your life?

What do you like about your study/work/life here?

⁴⁹ On the other hand, her study, I read it, and I was left with a very vague idea of what these Taiwanese folks do for work, professionals? I remember one man struggled with losing jobs and get one from his church member as a motel manager. I remember the folks talked about how they would be the first one to be fired from job, have to work extra hard to prove themselves, but that was it. I don’t remember exactly what they do, how they live their day to day work (and life). I don’t remember them ever discussing frustrations/apprehensions about their visa/citizenship status either, when these are a big deal for Chinese – I guess they can come and go back to Taiwan with less apprehensions?

About happenings in China, which aspects or things are you usually interested in?
How do you see Chinese society and American society? What do you appreciate most, in each? What do you struggle with the most in each society?

Interestingly, I also cut out another question not because it was too general, but because I realized how different the question sounds to my Chinese participants as compared to my (only) white participant:

How would you describe yourself? Who are you?

Upon hearing this question, every Chinese I interviewed hesitated and often agitated. Yet with the white American male, he went smoothly ahead! I was impressed by the difference, and reflected upon it. I realized that Americans who grew up in the western culture have done this kind of self-introduction all the time. No wonder they are comfortable with the question. I recalled that at our new student orientation at my university, I had marveled at how much ease the western students introduced themselves with. They always have informal get-to-know-each-other social occasions, while as Chinese we usually rely on grapevines or others to introduce us.

Fieldwork Nitty-gritty #3: The Tensions between Rapport-building and Productive Fieldwork

My obsession with rapport-building also oriented me away from some meaningful conversation. For example, once while I was standing in the hallway and watching the dancing practices going on in the auditorium, Yueru a key dancer joined me watching there, and then commented “(The dancing) looks really beautiful from here. How come yesterday (it) didn’t look great at the performance?” I gathered that the group probably

performed for the larger community somewhere yesterday. Instead of asking her about that experience, however, I simply nodded in compliment, “Sure looks good here.” When I went over my fieldnote afterwards, I pounded myself hard asking “why did she say so? Was the audience not receiving well, or was she not dancing yesterday but was in the audience and found it not so beautiful watching there? Why didn’t I ask her about ‘yesterday’? I missed an opportunity for her to either vent or tell. Instead, I merely complimented the ‘now.’”

Conclusion

My study is limited in that my group of informants includes only those Chinese graduate students and professionals who have involved themselves in the weekend Chinese school (as parents, teachers or administrators). It does not include those who were studying or working in Central City but never got involved in the Chinese school, even though I had access to some of them because of my other affiliations. Therefore my informants’ understandings of self and community is specific, and in many ways possibly different from those who involve themselves in other social activities or groups. No understanding can be complete and full anyway, so I will strive toward complexities instead of completeness, in terms of participants’ stories AND my narratives.

An important contribution I hope to make through my study is in my methodological and epistemological use of Symbolic Interactionism as complicated by poststructural insights (Denzin 2007, 2001). It allows me to navigate through the less-explored muddy spaces between governmentality and everyday lives. Governmentality and subject-making are often explored in discourse analysis which relies less on real

subjects' personal voices than on philosophical explications (Foucault, 1977, 1982; Butler, 1990). While some anthropological, sociological and geographical accounts have aimed at documenting governmentality in its everydayness (e.g., Ong, 1996; Bettie, 2003; Pratt, 2004), we need more research in this direction. My study builds upon and extends from these endeavors.

In working on my Methodology exam I was reminded to problematize my assumed "familiarity with" their circumstances and struggles. We all have vastly different social positions and experiences despite our ostensibly similar situation here as Chinese academic migrants in the U.S.. There is no monolithic Chinese group here, and every family or individual's story is distinctive. In assuming "familiarity" I could be desensitizing my researcher antenna to multiple issues they struggle with and make meanings of, which I am in no position to impose my understandings on. Just as researcher memory is problematic (Biklen, 2004), my migration experience is but "a source, not uncontested evidence, that may lend in" my reading of the informants' migrant lives and their involvement at the Chinese school (Steet, 2000, p. 15).

So while I have specific life story questions and my own larger research questions to explore with my informants, I encouraged the participants to remain actively directing my antenna and further question-posing. I expected them to offset my assumptions and misconceptions about their/our lives, from their perspectives. I took note of these moments, to recognize the impact of my own subjectivity on my research. As Clifford and Marcus (1986) appreciates Price (1983)'s pieced-together account, "acute political and epistemological self-consciousness need not lead to ethnographic self-absorption" or a give-up gesture saying that we cannot know anything certain (p. 7). I remain respectful

of my informants' choices, decisions, understandings, and let mine stay in interaction with theirs. Making a difference in their own lives and in others, their struggles and stories are worth telling and drawing upon. This is the beauty of qualitative research, with its bottom-up instead of top-down stance.

In the end I will remember that my story of their complex life stories is always a partial one, incomplete and evolving (Alcoff, 1991/1992, Biklen, 2004, Clifford & Marcus, 1986, Haraway, 2003, Narayan, 1997, Trinh, 1989). But it is a story, hopefully, that will bring into broader light the social existence of a group of people in their diverse struggles as they came together to create a meaningful space to better negotiate their often privileged yet also displaced subjectivities and experiences. To that end I have tried my best to honor "the ontological politics of staying true to complexity" (Landstrom, 2000, p. 475, quoted in Adele Clarke, 2005, p. xxiv).

Note: Participant names (coded into pseudonyms) and brief biosketches

In total, 23 participants interviewed with me, 15 of them women, and 8 men. Except for the 1 white American, all 22 others were in their mid or late 20s to late 40s (maybe a couple early 50s). All are college-educated.

So this group of Chinese academic migrants was of a particular profile and a particular era. Coming from a firmly-communist China, their migration experiences can be vastly differently from the younger generations nowadays, many of whom have wealthy parents (who have garnered their wealth from the unstable capitalist transitions in China) and have come as consumers of American college education. And this group's

experiences can also be strikingly different from older academic migrants who came before the 1950s, many of whom had come from a China when it was seeking to transform into a republic and was in a good relationship with the U.S. government.

Individual profiles:

Chunteng was in her 40s, a senior researcher in a lab at the medical school. She had been a professor at a medical school in China, and had come to the U.S. twice for her postdoctoral work before finally deciding to settle down here. Her son had come to join her in his high school years, and was already out of college. So Chunteng and her spouse had been empty-nesters. Chunteng had been volunteering at the Chinese school for many years, teaching children dancing and/or teaching adults cooking or parenting. She has a slightly heavy built, often wore skirts and walked with a brisk pace at the Chinese school, often greeting people briefly because she knew so many there.

Dianyan was younger in her late 20s or early 30s, a Master's student in language arts at the university. She individually teaches Chinese to an American at the Chinese school but does not really volunteer teach classes there. She is of a fit figure with an almond-shaped face, speaks straightforwardly, talks fast and laughs often, with an overall light-hearted cheer-leading air to her. She had given up her Master's study at a top university in China to join her spouse in the U.S. who had started his PhD study here. She became pregnant very soon with their first son, and didn't start Master's study again until her spouse graduated and found a professional job in Central City and her two sons were in preschools. At the moment she was finishing up her Master's study and struggling to decide whether to continue on to a PhD study or not. She was exhausted and preferred

not to continue studying, but was concerned about her job prospects with a Master's degree (and relatedly, the difficulty of obtaining a work visa). On her current student visa she was legally allowed to work on campus. She was adjunct-teaching at the university and thus could take home an income. Not pursuing a PhD study might mean that she would need to stop working and forgo the income, because after graduating from her Master's study she would need to switch from a "student" visa into a "spouse" visa in order to legally stay in the U.S..

Jiemin was in her 40s. She had been mostly a stay-at-home mom since her family migrated to Canada (and then to the U.S..). She looks of medium built, speaks softly and warmly, and often stops to talk to people in the hallway at the Chinese school. Back in China she was a professional in the field of education. Now her older daughter was in college, and she was considering getting a teaching job again, but was discouraged by her family members.

Jieting was in her 30s and a stay-at-home mom. Her two young children were in preschool years. Like Jiemin, she looks of medium built, speaks softly and warmly. She has a somewhat round face, with glasses, and a warm smile. Her spouse had suffered a job lay-off, and had found a job in the South. After moving there for a couple of years, Jieting decided to move back to Central City with her two children while her spouse stayed working in the South, because she liked living here much more, particularly happy with the Chinese school which to her was much more unitary than the ones in the city they moved to.

Jun was younger in her late 20s or early 30s, a PhD student in the medical school. Jun is of a lean built, healthy and upbeat, with a darker skin. She usually speaks straightforwardly and firmly. She was graduating, married for a couple of years already, to another graduate student who recently graduated here and went back to work in China. They had a new-born son. She had volunteered teaching at the Chinese school for several years.

Kong was younger in her late 20s or early 30s. She is of medium built, has a somewhat round baby face, looks really young as if a college student. She speaks very slowly and very softly, smiles often, very warmly, with much peace and grace around her, for her age. Later in our interview she said that she had suffered a serious disease and had come out strong and healthy. She was a stay-at-home mom with 3 young children, all under 6 years' old. She did not volunteer at the school, but would sometimes stay to socialize while her older children were taking classes at the school.

Qin was younger in her late 20s or early 30s, with a 2 year old child. She is of an athletic built, has a somewhat round face, speaks gently and firmly, laughs often, with some bittersweetness though. She had come to the U.S. to accompany her spouse for his PhD study. Then she started her own Master's study in Computer Science here, graduated and found a professional job on campus. Her family moved back to China after her spouse finished his PhD study and found a professional job in China. She volunteered teaching at the Chinese school for a couple of years.

Wenzhuo was in her early 30s, with young children. She is of medium built, seems very curious about life, inquires gently and responds warmly. She was a

professional working in the field of Computer science here in the U.S., but gave up that career to become a stay-at-home mom. She did not volunteer at the school, but would sometimes stay to socialize while her children were taking classes at the school.

Xuan was one of my key informants. She was in her early 30s, with two children under the age of 10. She is of medium built, seemed very passionate about life, and reflected profusely about her life and about teaching at the Chinese school. She talks often, speaks firmly, laughs frequently, often with bittersweetness though. She had been a professional in China before her family migrated to Canada (then here). She had then become a self-identified stay-at-home mom, even though seldom had she not worked outside home, mostly teaching at Chinese schools close to where they had lived, sometimes even commuting across U.S.-China borders to teach.

Yinzhi was in her late 30s, with a young child 5 year's old. She is of medium built, also seemed passionate about life, and very satisfied with where she is in life. She had earned a PhD degree in social sciences from the university, was a staff member at the university, and married a white Professor. She speaks gently and firmly with a warm smile usually. She did not volunteer at the Chinese school, and barely ever stayed to socialize while her child was taking classes at the school.

Yongze was in her early 40s, with two young children under 10 year's old. She is of medium built, wears glasses. She had earned a PhD degree in social sciences from an Ivy League university in the U.S., and was a professor at a university. She also speaks gently and firmly with a warm smile usually. She did not volunteer at the Chinese school, and barely ever stayed to socialize while her children were taking classes at the school.

Yueru was in her 40s, with two children one in college and one only 4 year's old. She is of medium built, speaks gently with a warm smile usually. She was a professional in the computer science, and often overworks. She did not volunteer teaching at the Chinese school, but usually stayed to practice dancing with the team while her younger child was taking classes or hanging out at the school.

Yun was in her early 40s, with two young children under 10 year's old. She is of a lean built, speaks gently and firmly with a warm smile usually. She works as a professional. She volunteered as the vice principal at the Chinese school, and usually stayed to practice dancing with the team while her children were taking classes or hanging out at the school.

Zhen was in her 30s, a technician in a lab at the medical school. She is of an athletic built, speaks fast and firmly with a warm smile usually. She also laughs frequently, often with bittersweetness though. She had been a professor at a medical school in China, and had come to the U.S. with her toddler to accompany her spouse for his postdoctoral work. She had struggled to find her place in life again, and finally made the difficult decision to settle down here. She had volunteered teaching at the Chinese school for a couple of years.

Zukai was young in her late 20s, a Master's student in the social sciences, with no children. She is of medium built with a very round face, speaks slowly and firmly with a warm smile usually. She had volunteered teaching at the Chinese school for a year or two.

Anyun was in his late 30s or early 40s, with two children under 10 year's old. He is of an athletic built, speaks firmly and carries a more serious air than many who regularly socialized at the Chinese school. He volunteered regularly as an administrator at the Chinese school, yet seldom stayed to socialize while his children were taking classes at the school. He has a PhD degree and works as a professor in social sciences at a university.

Dan was in his late 30s or early 40s, with 1 child under 10 year's old. He is of a medium built, speaks gently and smiles often. He volunteered regularly as a club teacher at the Chinese school, and sometimes stayed to socialize while his child was taking classes at the school. He has a PhD degree and works as a professional in natural sciences.

En was in his late 30s or early 40s, with two children under 10 year's old. He is of a medium built, speaks gently and smiles often. He volunteered regularly as the principal at the Chinese school, and sometimes stayed to socialize (usually with mixed gender group by the reception desk) while his children were taking classes at the school, often greeting people walking by briefly because he knew so many there. He has a PhD degree and works as a professor in natural sciences at a university. En was one of my key informants. Like Xuan, En reflected profusely about life and about the teaching and learning at the Chinese school.

Kuan was in his late 30s or early 40s, with 1 child under 10 year's old. He is of a slightly lean built with a somewhat round babyish face, speaks gently and smiles often and warmly. His family had recently moved to Central City, so he had not started volunteering at the Chinese school yet, but he sometimes stayed to socialize while his

child was taking classes at the school. He has a PhD degree and works as a research professor in social sciences.

Rong was in his late 30s or early 40s, with two children under 10 year's old. He is of an athletic built, speaks firmly and smiles sometimes. He has a PhD degree and works as a professional in computer science. He volunteered regularly as an administrator at the Chinese school, and often stayed to play foosball with his male buddies while his children were taking classes at the school. He often wore athletic pants and walked with a brisk pace at the Chinese school, often greeting people briefly because he knew so many there.

Yanke was in his late 30s or early 40s, with two children under 10 year's old. He is of a medium built with a somewhat round face, speaks gently and smiles warmly. He volunteered on errands at the Chinese school, and sometimes stayed to socialize (usually with individual men or women) while his children were taking classes at the school. He has a PhD degree and works as a professor at a medical school.

Zinuo was in his late 30s or early 40s, with two children, one teenager and one under 10 year's old. He is of slightly heavy built, speaks gently with a warm smile usually. He works as a professional in medical sales. He volunteered on errands at the Chinese school, and once a while stayed to socialize (usually with men) while his younger child was taking classes at the school. He often greeted people with a nod or talk briefly because he knew many there.

CHAPTER IV

BLENDING IN, STANDING OUT: THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL-PERSONAL MAKING OF THIS SUBURBAN CHINESE SCHOOL

The theory of segmented assimilation advanced by Portes and Zhou (1993) suggests that the children of contemporary immigrants to the U.S. have been incorporated into different sections in the host society through 3 different patterns of adaptation. While some immigrant groups follow the classic straight-line upward assimilation into the white middle-class mainstream, other immigrant youths might experience downward mobility and join the American underclass. In between, some groups strike a third path through a strategy which Portes and Zhou (1993) call “a paced, selective assimilation” (p. 96), when immigrant parents and children selectively adopt the host country’s language and certain mainstream cultural values while retaining certain ethnic culture and values through a close-knit ethnic community. This so-called “selective assimilation,” the third adaptive pathway of immigrants, seems to resemble the “strategic assimilation” approach which middle-class blacks who live in American suburbs often take up (Lacy, 2004). Specifically, middle-class black Americans “[prefer] ... socializing in the black world and academic [and economic] achievement in the white” (p. 10). Outlining 3 patterns of assimilation, the theory of segmented assimilation has thus made great contributions in

tracing the third path of immigrants by considering the possibility of an ethnic identity as a resource to draw on rather than a liability to shed.

Nevertheless, the application of this theory usually suffers from an essentializing of the culture of the host country and immigrant cultures. Immigrants do not “retain” their home culture and values; neither do they “adopt” the host culture. They are creating and recreating not a single home culture but “a sense of home,” and at the same time participate in the ongoing remaking of the host culture.

For my research participants, of course as recent immigrants they want to recreate “home” in their host society, but the way they did it, the way they shaped and were shaped by the Chinese school, is a very specific way of performing being Chinese in the U.S.. My study seeks to show that, by joining the ethnic community at the weekend Chinese school, this group of Chinese academic migrants recreate an imagined “home culture” at the complex intersection of identity markers such as gender, social class, race and ethnicity. In other words, gender, class, race and ethnicity intertwine in how this group experience and shape their Chinese school for various reasons.

In Aihwa Ong’s (1999) landmark study of Chinese global capitalists, she notes the importance of exploring the “cultural logics” of “transnational practices and imaginings” (pp. 3, 5). “Culture” here again refers to “the active ways that people living together in a community [make] meaning” (Burkholder, 2008, p. 538) of their everyday lives situated in the international and local political economy. It is such cultural logics that “inform and structure border crossings” (Ong, 1999, p. 5). Scholars have since drawn upon Ong’s study to investigate how transnational practices such as “mail order”

marriages (Constable, 2003) or skilled immigration to Canada (Teo, 2003) became “thinkable, practicable, and desirable” (Ong, 1999, p. 5).

Along the same path, in this chapter I probe the cultural logics of desire among these Chinese academic migrants, in terms of how their American dream (and their migration desire) was shaped and imagined, and how once here they aspire to stand out as a specific kind of Chinese. Specifically, I first set the context by looking at how geography and demography matter in what my case study with this particular Chinese school in a U.S. suburb might mean for Chinese academic migrants in the U.S. in general. Secondly, I explore how my participants started to imagine coming to the U.S. and why many of them became disheartened once they came here, turning to the Chinese school as their major site of socialization. I then delve into the three specific cultural logics of desire that their Chinese school experience is implicated in, that is, the reproduction of social class, reconnecting to their essentialized cultural roots, and reconnecting to their professional selves. Finally, I go through the general social function of the Chinese school, before noting that there are outliers there who experience the school very differently from how the majority of my participants do.

1. “So Few Chinese here, it’s Easy to Make Friends” – Geography and Demography do Matter

Both my fieldwork observations and demographic data identify the location of the school as in a largely white suburb except for the Chinese families there. The school operates in a church’s youth facility on Sunday afternoons. There were typically few

signs of the overall white neighborhood except for the drivers passing by me as I drove there.

There were several occasions, however, when I did observe some demographic features of the neighborhood. When a teacher and I stayed behind to talk outside after school was over and the church's entrance door was locked, a group of athletic white teens came along, opened the door with their set of keys, and very obligingly told us that we could go back into the school if we would like to. So these middle-class white youth are the regular users of this church facility. Another time when there was not much happening at the school and I walked out into the windowed corridor between the two entrance doors, I saw a young white man skating on the parking lot. A group of other young white men were standing by a car trunk with sport instruments inside. Still another time, when I carpooled with volunteer teachers and got to the school really early around 12:40pm, I saw a group of mostly white and a couple Asian men in the room where I usually saw the Chinese school's Taichi practice. Yet another time I walked into the school after classes had started, and the hallway was quiet. The big Taichi practice room was on that day occupied by an all-white orchestra performance, and about 30 people – all white and middle-aged – were sitting in there enjoying the music. The Chinese classes and the white orchestra performance seemed to co-exist in such peace.

Peaceful co-existence, however, seems to be all there is in the relationship between the predominantly white suburb and the Chinese presence, at least as far as my observation at the Chinese school could tell. I did not witness any significant interactions between a white resident and a Chinese, except for a few interactions between white

adoptive parents (who may or may not reside in the neighborhood) and Chinese teachers or parents there (ditto).

Geography also matters in that this particular Chinese school is situated in a medium-sized city and the school registers just about 70 Chinese families. Many participants told me that the other Chinese schools they had been to in bigger cities did not have the closeness they felt here. As I told one male administrator in our interview about what another administrator told me, “he said, New Jersey’s feel is [like this]: so many Chinese, then, but then, everybody actually just speaks a few words at the Chinese school and then leaves. Unexpectedly (*fan er*⁵⁰), they don’t connect [with each other] afterwards, because they each have their own work circles or friend circles. ... [While] here at this Chinese school, often you will see home-masters (meaning parents mostly), and teachers, talking to each other for very long” (Interview with Dan, 11/22/2009) Earlier, this male administrator also told me, while we chatted in the hallway after the Chinese school’s graduation party,

... this is a tight community. We don’t think about it much, but people who have left have always told us so. Like Kun, he told us it was not like this, where he has moved to. People are not so close there. It’s a bigger city, with more people, but he doesn’t feel the same. And also, Zhen, they just moved ... away. S/he also said it was not like what we have here.

People are not so connected as we are here. (Fieldnote 6/14/2009)

⁵⁰ Italics used here (and elsewhere in similar situations) to signify the original Chinese word(s) participants said, when it is an interesting word whose intricacy may get somewhat lost in translation.

I agreed with him immediately and shared what I heard too, “Yanke was also telling me – he moved here couple of years ago – and he said, when he first came here, he was so impressed by how warm people here were toward each other.”

Anyun, another male administrator, summed it up succinctly, “So few Chinese here, it’s easy to make friends.” (Interview with Anyun, 11/1/2009) In a big city which he had lived in, he noticed that “Chinese are many, but the [social] circles are small.” When I related to him my spouse’s similar experience living in that big city right now, he said, “He must feel this way, that is to say, everywhere you look there are Chinese all over the place, but [it is] impossible for them to make friends with you.” He also described the culture of the Chinese school there, “Over there . . . , say, I come to Chinese school, . . . many adults over there go to play – adults go to play cards, play balls – they have all kinds [of activities]. But afterwards, forget it (*La dao le*). ‘Byebye⁵¹’” (ibid).

Therefore, at the Chinese school in the big city, people form fewer close connections at or beyond the Chinese school. Anyun explained it this way, “[b]ecause [in that big city] they are relatively *busy*. And then the *travel*, the *loca-* – the *distance* is relatively far [from each family’s home to that Chinese school].” Following his explanation I said that, “So everybody comes from afar to send their children to [that] school, and then, . . .” and he took over to finish off my sentence, “. . . that’s it. (*Jiu Wan Le*.)”

But then according to Anyun, most professional Chinese in that big city had their friend circles either among their previous college classmates who have (like them) moved

⁵¹ Italics here (and elsewhere in similar situations) are English words participants actually used at the moment.

to the U.S., or among their colleagues at work, usually again Chinese. So most Chinese there are just as isolated and limited to socializing with Chinese friends as Chinese are here in Central City (even some of my participants who or whose Chinese spouse work in academia here like Chunteng and Jiemin say that their family barely socializes with non-Chinese academic colleagues). The only difference is that there are more Chinese in the big city, so they did not feel the need to rely on weekend Chinese schools to locate Chinese friends.

So tight is the community feel here, several families have even managed to move back after moving away to another state for a couple of years. Besides Jieting's family who moved to the South then came back (about whom I learned from my interview with Dan quoted earlier), Anyun the male administrator also indicated that another family moved back here for the sense of community the Chinese school was able to provide:

For many, after moving away – [because originally] they had come straight to Central City [from China or after graduating from their PhD study elsewhere], [so they] never had a feel of what it's like [in other cities], [and now,] as soon as they move over there, [they'd think,] 'Oh, it's impossible to make friends.' And they'd want to come back. Another family also came back this way. They went to Buffalo and they came back. (Interview with Anyun 11/01/2009)

According to Jieting, her family moved back here because the school district was better than the one where they moved to, but also because the Chinese school here was

much better, even though in the Southern city they moved to there were more Chinese people and hence more Chinese schools:

I found out that there they have 2 or 3 Chinese schools! But it's not good. They have competition between each other, sort of. So even though they have more Chinese there, they are actually not as well-organized as here in Central City. For example, I went to that Chinese school and asked, "So when is your Spring Festival event?" and they looked at me and were like, "We don't have it." Would you ever think of that? They don't even do Spring Festivals! (Interview 06/07/2010)

Spring Festivals have signified for members of the Chinese school an important social and cultural occasion, and Jieting was shocked to find out that the Chinese school in the area where they moved to did not even organize Spring Festival celebrations. Early on in her interview with me, Jieting stated that "you've asked the right person when you asked me (to interview with you about Chinese school here). We have moved around so much, I know the difference."

Also beaming with pride, Dan the administrator told me about this Chinese school's annual publication,

Even with many big schools, they do not have what we have, for example, the [publication] *Central City Old Chinese*. [Folks like our volunteer editors], they have devoted quite some time into editing this publication. Folks from other [cities] come and see our publication, "*ei ya* (tone word

expressing admiration), all you folks wrote so many interesting articles!”

And [they] even take our articles back to their place to distribute.

(Interview //2009)

Anyun also powerfully connected the size of the city with the tightness of the community,

[In cities where there are] many Chinese circles, you will actually feel bored. In [a place with only] a few Chinese circles, you will feel instead, ‘*ei* (a tone word in Chinese meaning a pleasant surprise), it is very easy to get close (*Qinjin*) [with each other].’ ... All folks are easier to open up their hearts (*Chang kai xiong huai*).

He then concluded that his and others’ experience had affirmed the intricate relation between how close Chinese circles were and how big the city was,

[If] you study carefully ... Chinese in the U.S. culture, often this phenomenon is very prevalent. ... Not that us being here will often recognize this, but that many people after moving away come back to tell us this feeling. And for those of us who came here from elsewhere [in the U.S.], I know this phenomenon.

So geography and demography matter for how Chinese academic migrants connect with each other at their local Chinese schools. Right at the beginning of our interview, Dan already gave me examples of Chinese schools in three other states that he found to be no match to “what we have here.” My study of this particular Chinese school

thus in no way claims to be representative of all Chinese schools in the U.S.. But I still believe there are major dynamics in this school that also illuminate Chinese academic migrants' overall experience here in the U.S., at and beyond the Chinese schools.

It is also significant that this Chinese school is located in a mostly-white suburb instead of the new “ethnoburbs” that have drawn attention from both the media and scholars (Ong 1996), or the old Chinatowns in metropolitan cities that till this day still draw sociological interest (Zhou, 2009). As my introduction chapter has emphasized, more than half of Chinese immigrants in the U.S. now live in the suburbs (Zhou & Kim, 2006), yet their experience is under-studied. By choosing to live in a privileged white suburb, these Chinese academic migrants find themselves particularly caught in between mainstreaming and ethnicizing/Othering. How so? Many of them came to the U.S. to live the *American* dream (which for most Chinese academic migrants means suburban living⁵²), and their privileged background seems to have allowed them great success in this pursuit, so why do they now bother with a *Chinese* school? Chen (2008) argues that many Taiwanese became American in the U.S. by becoming religious – joining Taiwanese religious communities in the U.S., which helped them to negotiate their difficult migration experiences. My dissertation work reveals that my participants have similarly turned to the suburban Chinese school community to address their everyday struggles as Chinese academic migrants here.

Community of course is a misleading word, even though this group can seem homogeneous in terms of their ethnic and education background. I will talk more about fragmentations within community. For an example, the annual camping outing the

⁵² Chunteng said, “well, life is good here. Our house is big” (interview 6/14/2009) ...

Chinese school organizes was actually not publicized for all to know or join. I also found out another aspect of differences within the group in regard to whether the member is engaged in a full-time employment or study or neither. At first when I invited people to do interviews with me, after I stated my research interest (“Why do you folks bother sending your children here or teaching here?”) I would always add, “when you are so busy with other things.” After my experience with Xuan, Jiemin and Xueren, I learned that not everyone was (or considered themselves to be) “that busy.” Those who were not (or did not consider themselves to be) were often not very comfortable about it, struggling to salvage their sense of professional self. So my assumption which seems to be a bad start actually helped me to realize important differences within the community. For now, however, let us return to tracing their footsteps as to how, participating in cultural logics of migration desire, they decided to come from China and how once here they then turned to the Chinese school.

2. “I Always Knew I would Go to the U.S. ...” – the Cultural Logics of Migration Desire

Yinzhi came from a privileged⁵³ background – both her parents are professors at a university (DU) in her hometown in China. She told me in our interview that she “always

⁵³ My friend suggests that I use the word “advantage” wherever I use the word “privilege,” which he thinks usually means something granted, to the detriment of others. But this is exactly why I use the word “privilege” – being born to a professors’ family, for example, carries “unearned privileges” for this participant, to the detriment of other children not having such backgrounds, even though she does not personally intend so. It is the institutional discrimination that matters for her and her disadvantaged peers. Just like being white is an unearned privilege in a white-centric society. See, for example, McIntosh (1988), Haraway (2003), Applebaum (2003), Purkayastha (2010).

knew that [she] would come to the U.S.” When I asked “how come?” she explained by recounting her educational path which actually included a series of “I always knew ...”:

When [I was] young – when I was in primary school I KNEW I was to go to DU (a local university in her town) [per my parents’ expectations] (smiling). In junior high, I KNEW that I would go to DU’s Foreign Trade department (laughing). (interview 8/5/2009)

I laughed with her, with my insider knowledge about how desirable the major seemed for many parents⁵⁴ back then in China, shored up by China’s adoption of the Open-door policy since 1979. She then went on to explain that the idea of going to the U.S. had got into her only because she had felt lost after getting into college:

I think that China’s education system is a big failure, you know? [U]pon entering college, [I] got no more goals [laid out for me anymore], you know? [I went to that college] not because I really liked something, but that, I was not to leave Tengde (her hometown) [per my parents’ expectation], then within Tengde, the best school, it is DU for sure (*lo*).

Then, within DU, the best department, it is the foreign trade department

⁵⁴ Wenzhuo also told me how she never had a choice as to how she got into a Computer career: “back then, actually our parents made the decisions [about a college major] for us, right? They just picked it for me, and off I went on that road.” When I told her that this was not the case for me and that my mom actually gave me the choice instead, she said, “Is that so? Your mom is really nice to you.” (fieldnote 6/7/2009) Clearly she did not think that it had been a common practice back then in China for parents to allow their children to choose their own college majors or career directions. Instead, parents strongly pressured youths to choose the more “desirable” majors – usually ones connected with ideas and practices of western superiority such as foreign trade or computer science or natural sciences which presumably would lead to a good job given China’s open-door policy starting in 1979.

Io. Right? Once you were studying it, you realized that the things you were studying – were of no use at all. (ibid)

Her very privileged family background actually had caused her educational experiences to be externally-driven, and had limited her choice or imagination as to where her life could lead her. The maintenance of a family line of privilege and honor was an assumed agreement between her and her parents, so much so that she “always knew” where she would go for her next educational endeavor, until she got into college. It was at this critical point of her sense of loss and confusion that she started to entertain the idea of going to the U.S. which had been popular among college students in China since the 1980s, “Then, among my classmates, there were some students – talking about going abroad, ... “then let’s go to the U.S.” That is, [the migration desire came to us as] a very *natural* thought⁵⁵” (ibid, emphasis added).

And she believes that her experience of how the migration desire came to her was not unique but representative, “I guess for most BU (Peking University) students too, maybe the same.” She concluded by saying that as a result, she decided to come to the U.S. based on a vague vision,

That is to say, [in my youth] never did I myself ever consider what I really liked ... I think it was also because in china there was not this condition, for you to think for yourself, “whether I like this, or that,” but instead, a very *general idea*, “I just like to go to the U.S.. (laughing a bit)...”

(Interview 8/5/2009)

⁵⁵ Privilege and cultural logics of desire taken for granted by her.

It would seem that, lacking opportunities or experiences to cultivate internal-driven pursuits in life, Yinzhi had just rode the wave and come to the U.S. based on very unclear visions, or, in her own words and said in English a very “general idea.”

Several of my other participants gave similar reasons for how they had come to the U.S.. For example, in response to my question, “So, why did your hubby⁵⁶ want to come abroad?” Jiemin sighed, “*Eih*, what do you think, why did he? *Chinese were like this! (Laughing.) Just, [I want to] go to the U.S.!*’ *If he didn’t come abroad, that would’ve been weird!*” (Interview, 5/23/2010, emphasis original). Zhen told a parallel story about her spouse’s coming abroad: “He graduated from [a university in China as prestigious as Peking University], biochemistry department. During his undergrad years, half of his class(mates) left (for abroad) already. Then, during his graduate study, PhD, almost everyone went abroad” (Interview, 7/7/2010).

Similarly, Qin told me, “... my hubby always wanted to go abroad. He wanted to. ... So we came abroad.” When I asked her, “... now that you think back, how does he understand, or how do you understand this decision of yours back then?” she replied in a low voice, “Quite impulsive (*chong dong*).” I laughed and she laughed with me. I then asked her to clarify, “How so?” She explained, “Because, actually, coming abroad, [we] just wanted to come and take a look, And also beneficial for myself, that is, coming abroad to study *lo* (a Chinese tone word indicating ‘of course’). Can get a degree *lo*. So

⁵⁶ Many of my participants use the informal Chinese words “*lao gong*” “*lao po*” to refer to their husbands or wives. So here I translated her use (and my copying her use) of “*lao gong*” into “hubby” instead of husband, hoping to convey the informal and sometimes intimate tone when she and others refer to their husbands. As some of my participants appreciate, coming abroad seems to have made many marriages into closer relationships, as couples often feel that they have to rely on and support each other, with few places to go for entertainment, and often with no family members and few friends to turn to in times of real struggles.

why not (*he le er bu wei ne*)?.” She finished by saying that her spouse’s original intent was simply “to open his horizons (*kai kuo yan jie*)” (Interview, 3/22/2010).

Confused and at a loss, Chinese students of this generation also witness the gradual disintegration of certain socialist practices in China. The Chinese education system has been ideologically oriented with controversial messages for students since the 1970s. This has been in line with the Chinese political and economic system which, though it has taken a resolute capitalist turn, still upholds some socialist ideas as a way to legitimate the power of the state. As the popular joke in China goes, “President Deng Xiaoping took a sharp right turn (with the state vehicle), but still signaled left (with its light)!”

So at the same time that textbooks and classes like Chinese language or Ethics class still teach socialist communal ideals, what is more often practiced and extolled is a pragmatic individualistic orientation with a focus on natural sciences and industrial development. This new orientation was best illustrated by another popular saying my generation grew up with, “Master math, physics and chemistry, and you can travel around the world without fear.” Social class relations have been turned around by new policies, and the income gap has grown significantly ever since, as data in the 21st century note China to be one of the most economically unequal countries, with a Gini coefficient as high as 0.51⁵⁷. Chinese people seem to have now learned to “look either up or down toward someone else, but seldom horizontally” (personal communication, Liangyue Lu).

⁵⁷ Edward Wong, Survey in China Shows a Wide Gap in Income, *New York Times*, July 19, 2013: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/20/world/asia/survey-in-china-shows-wide-income-gap.html?_r=0

As a result, many among this generation were driven to enter college and select a “good” major despite significant confusion over fundamental values and beliefs. While these students were in college, they began to think about what they wanted to do with their lives, at a time when they were bombarded by pervasive messages of Western superiority (Teo, 2003; Fong, 2006). The accessibility of Voice Of America, the U.S. government’ radio channel targeted at international audiences (registered as www.voa.org, therefore disguised as a non-governmental voice instead of what some might call official propaganda), the sprouting of foreign-owned enterprises and banks in china, the ubiquity of U.S. and western romanticized movies and music, all signaled for these disoriented students a desirable direction in life.

New laws in the U.S. and in China facilitated student migration from China to the U.S. too. In 1978, China resumed educational exchanges with the U.S.. With the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, a 1983 report of President Reagan’s National Commission on Excellence in Education which argued that American education system is not performing up to par, the U.S. aggressively pursued more professional labor from the world. Its 1990 Immigration Reform Act speeded this trend by tripling quotas for skilled immigrants, mostly from Asia (Sharpe, 2000, p. 119; Rumbaut, 1997)⁵⁸. This has further encouraged Chinese college students’ interest in going to the U.S. for graduate study and then pursuing an American dream.

Max Fisher, Study: Income inequality skyrockets in China, now among world’s highest, Washington Post, December 11, 2012: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2012/12/11/study-income-inequality-skyrockets-in-china-now-among-worlds-highest/>

⁵⁸ Jenny Sharpe 2000. Henry Schwarz, Sangeeta Ray (Eds.) *A companion to postcolonial studies*. ISBN 0631206620, 9780631206620 Pp. 112-125. Wiley-Blackwell.

The formative years of many of these students' lives had been constituted by such cultural logics of desire, situated in the imbalance of international and domestic power relations⁵⁹ both in the discursive realm and in the material one. Therefore, the best next step after college, as many college-educated Chinese youth perceived it, was to go abroad for more individual advancement through graduate study. Some of these college graduates had to provide years of "service" working in China before they could go abroad, according to a (now-outdated) policy of the Chinese state. The purpose of the policy was allegedly to make the college graduates pay back their free college education by contributing to China's development. One participant told me blatantly, "That was a waste of 3 years of mine there" (Interview with Rong, 12/06/2009). Knowing that he had been determined to come to the U.S., he saw this stipulated service time as a hindrance in fulfilling his destiny.

So although Chinese students had often come to the U.S. for its better research environment, for many academically-advanced college students in China since the 1980s, going abroad was also a clear dream with unclear visions. "[Go]ing abroad must be very good," as Jiemin, the volunteer teacher, expressed the migration dream her husband had harbored, after she said, "Chinese were like this! (laughing.) Just, '[I want to] go to the U.S.!' " She then added, "Actually, after coming abroad, you will see, it may not be as you imagined, 'going abroad must be very good' (Interview 5/23/2010)."

⁵⁹ After WWII, as much of Europe and Asia became devastated, and the U.S. rose to the position of world power through a very profitable war economy as well as after-war financial workings on a global stage (Rupert 2000), China's leadership at the same time became increasingly taken over by elites who were leaning toward capitalist model of development.

Her conclusion highlights how, once these Chinese academic migrants fulfilled their American dream, many would feel uneasy about their life again, as they had felt after they were able to make it into college. In the next section I will elaborate on how the pursuit of “the American dream” retained its ideological and practical charm for many among this group of Chinese academic migrants, but also witnessed many at the same time suffering different degrees of disenchantment or even feelings of loss and disorientation.

3. “Is this the Place I Should Reside in?” – Living the Bubble of “the American Dream”

As Jiemin’s comments in the section above illustrates, my participants frequently note the gap between the cultural logics of their earlier migration desire and then the everyday realities living as Chinese academic migrants in the U.S.. It almost seems that they are living in the bubble of “the American dream.” Feelings of floating high on their accomplishments (and looking bright and rainbow-y on the outside) intertwine with a deep sense of loss due to un-rootedness and an ever-nagging sense of precarious security as the bubble might pop any time. The Chinese school seems to be a tree where they could happily float to again and again, and where they could temporarily rest and feel rooted and supported, however evanescent that feeling is.

After coming abroad, many Chinese academic migrants in fact would feel lost and disoriented again, as in their college years. Yanke, a male participant who is usually cheerful and upbeat, somehow started this painful topic while telling me why he would like his children to learn about “our Chinese background,”

[P]articularly when living abroad, if without this kind of [knowing our background], in some circumstances, *you might wonder whether this is the place I should reside in*⁶⁰. If in this situation, what could you do? If so, [you] must [in the] *back of your mind* – you need to know where your *background* is. This, I think – if without this, [you] will feel relatively *lost and frustrated (shi luo)* (Interview 9/27/2009, emphasis added)

His account seems to hint at the feelings of alienation and dissatisfaction among Chinese academic migrants when they first got here. Even though they had once been determined to come to the U.S., once here they often realized that life living in the U.S. as Chinese academic migrants was not like what they had imagined.

So concerned about many among this group of academic migrants who became disoriented that the principal of the Chinese school made his analysis of how this disorientation came about (and even offered his solution). He shared his reflections with me when he explained to me why he was advocating teaching “traditional values” while teaching children Chinese language⁶¹ at the school. He seemed to have thought through the issue of disorientation for this generation of Chinese academic migrants, as he started by saying with full confidence, “In fact I think of myself as having successfully felt/taken the pulse of the [Chinese] school. So where is the issue?” Applying a metaphor taken from traditional practices of Chinese medicine, he positioned himself similar to a

⁶⁰ Note that this participant also used the distancing strategy by using the pronoun “you” instead of “we/I.”

⁶¹ In my introduction chapter I will specify that this school teaches Mandarin Chinese in particular, but elsewhere in my dissertation I will just use the phrase “Chinese language” instead.

competent Chinese doctor who could diagnose a person's health issues by simply feeling out the pulse of the person at his/her wrist. From there he gave his detailed diagnosis,

The issue is, it is a problem for this whole generation of us, mostly aged 45-35⁶². They are a generation who do well technically, and always strive hard (*fen dou*) in their lives. But they have their advantages and disadvantages. Their advantages are, like I said, they are good at technical stuff, and at exams. They all get good scores. But their disadvantages are, they themselves don't know much about Chinese culture, about philosophy in life. (Interview 3/22/2009)

He then went on to make a comparison between this generation and the older generation in China, referring to the historical changes that have happened since China's re-orientation toward capitalist development, "The even older generation, they did have their ideal (referring to communism), but it collapsed" (ibid).

So the principal was saying that a lack of clear values or ideals characterizes this generation of Chinese, particularly these Chinese academic migrants who excel in natural sciences and engineering, but who are short-changed in their knowledge "about Chinese culture, about philosophy in life." He thinks that this lack gets manifested in their struggles here, and he hopes to address it by advocating teaching "values" at the Chinese school, to benefit both the children and the parents.

⁶² I think he is saying the age group backwards because he is thinking in terms of how long people have been here. So he is speaking of older-younger migrants here.

The principal's diagnosis does not address the feelings of displacement many among this group experience in the U.S. though. An interesting episode at one teachers' meeting illustrated that many Chinese academic migrants continue to stand out as Chinese and not Americans despite their legal status change. As En the principal of the school and I waited in the meeting room for more teachers to arrive, we talked about his upcoming trip to China. He mentioned that he had been busy with preparation, in particular, that he needed to go get Chinese visa (implying that he has changed his citizenship to American). Teacher Xueren, thin-chinned and cheerful, joked with him, "*Oh, right, you are American! You are not us,*" waving a hand dismissively as if to brush him out of our group (fieldnote //, emphasis added). We all laughed heartily. Everybody seemed to get and enjoy the joke, no explanation needed⁶³. It would not be funny at all, however, if the teachers at the meeting had indeed thought of En as American instead of Chinese, or if En were a white or black American himself. In those cases, the teacher's utterance would be merely stating the obvious facts, nothing to feel amused about.

Therefore, this fun moment for the group actually reveals how the group shared an understanding that none of them would ever really be "American," or be thought of as really "American" in the host society. While the joke was taken with light-heartedness among the group, upon deeper reflection I realized that it was in fact black humor well-spoken and well-taken.

⁶³ The group simply went on to talk about how China does not allow dual citizenship anymore, how it used to (probably in the Nationalist Party era before the 1950s), how Taiwan allows dual citizenship, and how the U.S. does too. The conversation thus continued by discussing in technical legal terms instead of political terms (national interests and international relations). Depoliticized is usually the nature of conversations that happened at the Chinese school.

Not all participants have expressed feeling lost and disoriented in their hallway talks and one-to-one interviews with me though. In fact they have different views regarding their decision to come and live in the U.S.. Some like Anyun do feel lucky that they have made this choice, appreciating the simple life they were able to find here, as compared to “complicated networks” they would have had to negotiate daily in China. The binary they construct here relates to the significance of *guanxi* (connections/social relationships, in particular, the extensive use of these networks to exchange gifts and favours) in Chinese society, which scholars of China studies have often noted (Guthrie, 1998).

With many of my participants coming from lower middle class professional family background (teachers, professors, doctors, engineers instead of government officials), they had limited *guanxi* to start with. In terms of cultural capital, many of their families had only educational resources to rely on, so a college education in China and then graduate study abroad seemed the best path to make the best of their cultural capital. Also, because of China’s rapid transition to a capitalist economy, much of traditional folk knowledges and networks do not even work anymore, substituted with new rules of game unfamiliar to most of this generation of Chinese academic migrants. Therefore several of my participants voiced their understanding of how different life would have been for them, had they stayed in China.

Still, many seem torn about their feelings. They would say that life was ok here and that they would not be able to re-start in China anyway. One of the participants explained their limbo status to me,

Given all these years we've lived abroad, we don't have many connections in China now. We've lost all those years of *guanxi*(connection)-building, as compared to our classmates who stayed in China. So it's not like we can go back now and easily re-start again. (Interview with Chunteng 6/12/2009)

As her comments illustrate, palpable pain is in this group's making sense of their migrant life in the U.S., in particular about their loss of *guanxi*-building opportunities in China and hence the little possibility for them to return to live in China. She also subtly regrets the loss of her professional development when, in response to my question, "How is it different working in China and working here?" she laments, "In China I would be a 'doctors' mentor' (medical professor), but here, you know" (ibid).

Others felt they had totally made the wrong decision to migrate here. One participant, when I asked her how she felt in general about her life here, said in one word loudly and laughing, "*Regret!*" Then she elaborated for me, still laughing in keeping with her good sense of humor, "My life would have been good in China. I would have all those friends and social life that I don't have here. And the constant struggle over keeping my legal status here. It's difficult" (Interview with Dianyan, 3/29/2009).

Similarly, Zhen asserted that she and her spouse "gave up many things [in China]. If we were in [the big city they came from], we'd be living very well too," therefore about their decision to migrate here she says "[I] can't say it was a very wise choice" (Interview, 7/7/2010). Like it or not, as migrants they are always – consciously or

subconsciously – comparing their life with a good life they might have had, had they stayed in China.

One of the hallway conversations I heard alerted me first to this aspect of their life. A casual conversation started among about 5 or 6 people who were hanging out in the hallway around the reception desk. They talked about someone's recent trip back to China, with topics centered primarily on food and also clothes, as to how Chinese people in China are now very conscious of what they wear and when. They talked about how we, when visiting home, would be seen there as the tasteless ones in terms of our clothing. Then they talked about how life is very different there and here, how extravagant it can be there, and how simple life is here. A parent (who is also a member of the dancing team) told the others (mostly males), "Haven't you heard this saying yet? *Those who go abroad, regret about all their lives; those who haven't, all their life regret it*⁶⁴" (fieldnote //, emphasis added)! Even though the distinction between the two kinds of regretting was not clear to us, everyone laughed anyway upon hearing this. I think it is because we listeners have our insider knowledge about the regrets on both sides of the Pacific. The principal, still laughing, asked her, "Really? There's a saying like this? But what's the difference between the two? I don't see any." She insisted, "Yes, there is a difference, think about it, you'll see. That's the beauty of the Chinese language." But she did not explain for the group what exactly is the difference, which is indeed hard to tell in Chinese. And the group moved on, picking up her last sentence about the Chinese language instead, and talked about how one adult student at the Chinese school is from Bangladesh but speaks very good Chinese because of his determination and persistence.

⁶⁴ The first "all their lives" is a noun (meaning regret about their lives thus spent living abroad), the second "all their life" is an adverb.

After coming home and taking time to digest the parent's words, I now realize that this concise saying actually reflects the transnational imaginations and negotiations on both sides of the Asia-Pacific. Students in China have for decades been exposed to ideas of Western superiority, and many have hoped to be able to come abroad, so if they had not been able to, they would "all their life" keep thinking about it and regret it. For those who were able to come to the U.S. to study, however, the everyday struggles they experience, and the limited social mobility they perceive themselves to have as compared to their classmates who stayed in China, would make them regret about "all their life" thus spent here. These are struggles around their experiences of displacement that most probably have brought them together at the Chinese school.

However, in hallway conversations at the school, although my participants cannot ignore these struggles of theirs, often neither can they openly acknowledge them. This might explain why the group did not engage further the parent's reference of the interesting saying around "regret." This word, however, does come up often in my in-depth one-on-one interviews with some participants including Dianyuan, the one I quoted earlier who said laughingly the word loud and clear. The way Chinese academic migrants make communities at the Chinese school – often around making the children learn Chinese, "celebrating our ethnic roots" through ethnic dancing, Taichi, or Ping Pong, or only sharing struggles of suburban parenthood – all of this often prevents them from discussing deeper struggles around identity and meaning in their lives.

But the Chinese school is almost the only social site for most Chinese academic migrant families with children here, and it does in important ways address the gap between their cultural logics of desire for migration and the everyday realities of living in

the U.S. as privileged migrants in disadvantage. The ways they address the gap through participating at the school also reflect their new cultural logics of desire after migration, at the intersection of gender, social class, race and ethnicity. Even though some of them were led here by unclear pursuits, once here, these students and their spouses typically keep their academic edge and then move into professional jobs and residential suburbs. After seemingly blending in, they begin to look for ways to stand out positively, in multiple ways concerning social class and ethnicity. Many of them also experience a profound sense of displacement or disorientation, and look for ways to reconnect to their sense of (cultural or professional) self.

The suburban Chinese school, in its fluid formation, provides answers (although partial) to all these endeavors. I will next outline the three major ways the school is made to serve this group's specific needs and desires. And then I will discuss the general social function of the school, then moving on to take note of the outliers who do not involve themselves as much at the Chinese school.

4. How the Chinese School Addresses their New Cultural Logics of Desire, Now in the U.S.

The principal told me about how the teachers or administrators came to the idea of “school money” (as rewards in class which students can later on use to buy small things at the “school store” operated by other students): “for one thing, the children learn to be business savvy. And also, the design of the ‘school money’, [it was] gorgeous!” He went on to tell me how the school actually asked the Chinese students there to design it, and how the school money now proudly incorporates traditional Chinese symbols such as the

dragon, panda, or *Mudan* flower (Interview 4/5/2009). As this example illustrates, the school harbors many different meanings for the participants. Besides helping with the reproduction of class status for this group of academic migrant parents, the school also helps to address their sense of displacement as Chinese in the U.S., both as individuals and as parents. For many Chinese academic women who are deskilled after migrating to the U.S., teaching at the weekend Chinese school provides a valuable channel to reconnect with their professional selves. For a few outlier participants at the Chinese school, sending their children here merely means to cultivate their children's embodied selves as Chinese-speaking Chinese Americans.

4.1 Reconnection to their essentialized “cultural roots” and reproduction of class status

I will start this section by discussing how the school helps to address this group's sense of disorientation and displacement as Chinese in the U.S., both as individuals and as parents. As a group they seem to look to the school for a possible re-locating of themselves (and their children). One volunteer teacher has made such observations, comparing this group's Chinese school experience to church experience here in the U.S., *“I think they go to church here for a kind of inner sustenance (ji tuo). Same with, at the Chinese school, the people such as the dancing group, they also find ji tuo there”* (Kuang, fieldnote 5/10/2009).

At the Chinese school, through activities such as dancing, these academic migrants try to perform a distinct group identity, to help counter the prevailing othering processes which are either negative (as in explicit or implicit discrimination) or

consuming (as in liberal multiculturalism⁶⁵). This is “a gathering place” in one administrator’s words (Interview //2009), a place that has specific meanings and provides anchoring for the participants. As Yanke, one male participant, put it when he explained to me why he wanted his children to go to the Chinese school,

Uh, I think, we grew up in China, were educated in China. That is to say, in terms of all aspects – one is that we hope that – our culture – [our] roots – are in China, right? We hope for our own children to keep our own tradition, family’s *legacy*, country’s tradition. (Interview 9/27/2009)

Claiming “our roots” in China, Yanke hoped for his children to learn to appreciate and keep those roots,

Not just because China’s economy is developed; even if China’s economy is not developed, we still have to keep up this aspect. Because this is a culture, this is China’s thousands of years’ of culture, so let the children know it, know our own *background*. (ibid)

Qin, a previous volunteer teacher at the Chinese school, told me that her spouse and her actually had come to the U.S. intending not to stay here, but only to “experience different things,” “knowing that [we] would not be here [for long] – because after all it is not [our] own place” (Interview with Qin, 3/22/2010). Qin did not elaborate on why they

⁶⁵ My friend comments here that his understanding of multiculturalism is that it is an alternative to the othering that goes on in mono-cultural, non-pluralistic societies (personal communication, Harvey Teres). I want to make the distinction between liberal multiculturalism and critical multiculturalism. Liberal multiculturalism tends to celebrate recognition without challenging the center (the dominant group). Critical multiculturalism understands this liberal tendency as reinforcing the othering process that it supposedly contests.

had thought of the U.S. as “not [their] own place” before they came over, but in Yanke’s case, he seemed to indicate that many had wanted to come and stay, and then after coming here, many would feel “lost and frustrated” and then started wondering “whether this is the place I should reside in.” For Yanke in particular, the wondering might be even more painful – he studied in a European country and realized that he would always remain an outsider there, so afterwards he chose to come to the U.S. which is supposed to be more welcoming toward immigrants. One could tell that he was once again disappointed.

Instead of addressing the sense of loss or isolation, Yanke suggested, however, “so, ... you need to know where your background is.” In other words, instead of questioning how come he still felt like an outsider in this country (and thus getting to the root of a multicultural U.S. which is still plagued by implicit or explicit racism and/or separation), he chose to turn to an essentialist celebration of “our cultural roots.”

Similarly, many other participants at the school addressed their feelings of disorientation through insisting on “Confucius values” among children, or through participating in Chinese ethnic dances or Taichi club. Even though many acknowledge that the weekend Chinese school is their only social space, they do not seek to question or expand beyond the limits of their social isolation. Suffering the culture of white supremacy, some of them even resort to a reverse cultural supremacy by claiming “Asian values” in parenting.

In the same vein, the “traditional values” the principal advocates (to address Chinese academic migrant parents’ feelings of loss and disorientation in parenting and

teaching) seem on the surface to be mostly about children's familial piety and respect for teachers. For example, he and teachers were unsatisfied about the fact that students often seemed to perform disengagement in the Chinese classes, talking with each other as their teacher was trying to start teaching, and packing up schoolbags long before the teacher dismissed the class. So he suggested and started the traditional practice of having students all stand up with respect and say "Good day, Teacher!" or "Goodbye, Teacher!" before and after each class. Also, DiZiGui, the traditional texts he advocated for teaching in the Chinese classes, does teach many aspects of moral education. However, in the teachers' meetings that the principal regularly convened, their discussion around the benefits of teaching DiZiGui often emphasized maintaining cultural connection between Chinese academic migrant parents and their children. It seems that by advocating the teaching of "traditional Chinese values," these Chinese academic migrants were in fact wrestling with the so-called "Americanization" of their children because of the marginalization of Chinese language and Chinese groups in the host society. So we might say that for this group, the teaching of DiZiGui was not so much about "retaining" "immigrants' home culture and values" as about interacting with and in the process remaking "the American culture."

At another teachers' meeting, interestingly En himself also put forward a similar forceful argument, about feeling out of place as migrants here in the U.S.. In explaining our need to hold on to "Chinese culture" as the only possible connection to our otherwise all-"American" children, he stated outright that "we are not Americans":

But the point is, *our kids are Americans*. They grew up here, and their life is very different from ours. *For us, we are not really integrated into*

*American society. We can have American friends, we can get together with them and have fun, but still, we grew up in China and we learned our way there, and we are not Americans. So for our children, the only link we can expect to have with them, is through Chinese culture*⁶⁶.

(Fieldnote 3/22/2009, p. 17, emphasis added.)

Their transnational migration and feelings of displacement thus also figure into their perceived need to celebrate their “roots” near and dear, even though most participants in the dancing and Taichi club tell me that they had never tried ethnic dancing or Taichi before in China. Immigrant group’s efforts to recreate a sense of home, therefore, often romanticize and stabilize the “home culture”⁶⁷ (Shukla, 2003), instead of simply “retaining” it as the concept of “selective assimilation” suggests. The teaching of DiZiGui (the ancient Chinese moral text for children) and the design of the school money with the essentialized Chinese cultural symbols also tell us about their romanticizing and pursuit of “authentic Chinese culture.”

⁶⁶ Qin, Desiree B. (2006), “Our Child Doesn’t Talk to Us Anymore”: Alienation in Immigrant Chinese Families, *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 2, pp. 162–179.

⁶⁷ Veronis, L. (2007). “Strategic spatial essentialism: Latin Americans' real and imagined geographies of belonging in Toronto,” *Social & Cultural Geography*, 8(3), pp. 455-473.

Cho, Lily. (2007b). Diasporic Citizenship: Inhabiting Contradictions and Challenging Exclusions (book review). *American Quarterly* 59(2): 467-478.

Surak, Kristin. 2006. “Ethnic practices’ in translation: Tea in Japan and the US.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29(5), pp. 828-855.

Also, a fun story one teacher shared at the teachers' meeting led to the principal noting that the design of the school money does not include any simplified Chinese characters, but instead, only the traditional ones, which again signals their pursuit of "cultural roots." At one teachers' meeting, a teacher told us about how for lack of small change in "school money" to distribute in her class as rewards, she had had to accumulate reward points and distribute in \$10s and \$20s instead, and the children had since learned to dismiss \$1s or \$2s and only want \$5s or more. The teachers and principals at the meeting had a good laugh over the "inflation." Then another teacher said,

Our class are young (kids), [so,] give him/her any piece of paper, s/he'd take it." Everyone laughed again, and the principal said, "*Oh right. We only have the complicated Chinese there* (printed on the school money), no Arabic figures. No wonder they cannot tell!" Someone said, "*Not the simplified Chinese?*" Principal said, "No, not even that on the money!" (Teachers' meeting notes, 4/26/2009, emphasis added)

With the school T-shirt the Chinese school had designed and adopted too (for their teachers and students to wear for the graduation ceremony 2009), the color they had chosen was "Chinese red," signifying for themselves the "authentic Chinese culture" again.

Therefore it appears that Chinese(-Americans) in this Chinese school also willingly take up the notion of essentialized "culture," and often feel the urgency to help maintain "Chinese culture" in the community. The administrators and teachers seem to

understand culture as fixed, essentialized in ethnic language, food and performances (just as the American multicultural mainstream understands it).

It matters what specific stories the teachers and administrators chose to share with students and with each other about how (they imagined) teaching and/or learning or life in general had been like back in China. In their urge to “pass on cultural heritage,” they chose for example to teach the Chinese classic text *DiZiGui* to the children in the school. The culture they try to pass, however, what they try to preserve of China, is a back-then picture which they found useful in their negotiation of their current transnational life. In a similar case, Shukla (2003) documents how migrants from India create a “home” “here” (in the U.S. and Britain), romanticizing their “home” “there” (in India).

After discussing how the school serves to address this group’s feelings of loss and displacement (usually through essentialized cultural efforts), I now move on to elaborate on the second purpose of the school many of my participants note, i.e., the school helps them in the reproduction of their class status through facilitating a competitive edge (speaking and knowing Chinese) for their children’s future.

4.2 Reproduction of their class status through facilitating a competitive edge for their children’s future

Many of my participants actually see providing a competitive edge⁶⁸ as the major function of the Chinese school. One participant expressed her appreciation of this function of the Chinese school this way:

... parents all want their own children to have some, that, *edge*, right?
 [My husband] thinks that China in the future will be a strong country. So mastering this language, for the children, whether for their intelligence, or for their future, would be beneficial. [They] would have an *edge*. An *advantage*. (Interview with Yun, 5/15/2010, Italics spoken in English.)

Similarly, Dan another administrator of the Chinese school explained that he sent his child to the Chinese school for the cultivation of a competitive edge in their children besides “keeping up the Chinese tradition, Chinese culture,” which he believes explains the schooling success of Chinese children in the U.S.:

Obviously you see that in schools [in the U.S.]. Chinese children [in the U.S.] are doing – in studying – normally speaking – none doing bad, always doing well. This is influenced by Chinese traditional culture [emphasizing academic pursuits] (Interview with Dan, 11/22/2009).

His next comment also resonated with Yun’s spouse’s hopes for the children to learn Chinese and gain an advantage in their future path:

⁶⁸ The operation of “school store” and “school money” works toward the purpose of class reproduction too, familiarizing these children in the workings of market economy so they could become “business savvy”.

On the other side, we have seen China progressing. [With] China progressing, with its future development, its impact on the world, then if children can learn the Chinese language, [and] Chinese culture, s/he can... – in between Chinese and western culture – move smoothly. This will be a great help for his/her future.... (ibid)

Many participants thus justify their decision to have their children learn Chinese by saying that 1) the influence of Chinese culture in their families will facilitate their children's edge in schooling, and 2) the increase of China's power in the world means that speaking Chinese would be another edge for their children in the future job market.

One parent was also hopeful that the children's language capacities in general would become enhanced from learning Chinese at the school. He told me that he has read research that shows that children who keep up with their home language also do better in English than native-born students. He then gave an example for me, "Therefore, many people – like the *Pope* (?) – he can speak dozens of languages. Not that they *memorize every language*, not that. He – from learning one language – mastered a knack (*ji qiao*)" (Interview with Yanke, 9/27/2009). Hoping for the children to master the knack for learning languages too, this parent concluded that "in this aspect, [learning Chinese] must be good for the kids."

The use of "school money" at the Chinese school is another thing that might add to their edge in competition. Despite the school administrators' best intentions, the introduction of "school money" as a reward in class could also encourage the competitive-jungle worldview in a society often understood as individualistic and

meritocratic. For example, when Teacher Chen told us in a teachers' meeting, "the children actually check on each other [to ensure Chinese-speaking in class]. If one child slipped in an English word while telling [his/her story of the week], they'd say, 'Teacher, s/he spoke English!' They'd even ask [me] to deduct his/her school money points, and then 'give it to me! I noticed him/her speaking English!'" (When the laughter in the room faded, the Principal said with a lingering smile to the teacher, "When you get a chance, you might want to tell them, 'helping each other out is good, and it is not about impeaching and exposing (*jian ju jie fa*).'" Teacher Chen nodded, "I told them so.") (Fieldnote //2009) So while the school money idea is implemented as a motivation for the children to learn Chinese, it does have the side effect of cultivating among these children the competitive mentality that operates in the meritocratic ideology in the larger society in the U.S. and in China nowadays, "to each person what s/he deserves."

The school also recently initiated a Chinese AP class and a fun math class, also aimed at advancing the children's success in American schools and American society in general. Both of these were "very popular among parents" (Teachers' meeting, 4/5/2009). After intensive learning in this new Chinese AP class, these children can take the AP test and once⁶⁹ they pass it, they will have enhanced their college application. AP class is a big sell for the school; this demonstrates that many parents are into tangible benefits, with their private concerns for their children's (college-admission) future. The offering of fun math class tunes in well to the parents' hope to further their children's math edge. So well, in fact, the principal told the teacher who was offering it, "so many families are interested

⁶⁹ I say "once" not "if" because this new class has been very successful: every student in the first two years of this class did pass the AP test, as the teacher proudly told me in our phone conversation.

[in the math class], I have to tell them we cannot accept all [applicants] at this time”
(Teacher’s meeting, 4/5/2009).

While this account might reify the popular imagination of “pushy Asian parents,” it is interesting that many participants claim that they do not expect too much from their children (see Data Chapter 6, section 3 for details). Other accounts from the children, and also the principal, however repeatedly refer to pushy parents. For example, when after a teachers’ meeting the principal was trying to help a teacher who had offered to teach Fun Math classes for the school to feel no pressure in teaching the class, he again hinted at the high expectations of some parents, “You know parents – they spend a lot of money, send their kids to lots of classes, and many of those classes really don’t help them learn much. So our point is to help the children learn” (Teachers’ meeting, 4/5/2009)⁷⁰.

And Chinese parents routinely exchange information about programs and resources in the educational arena. Again as Dan made it clear for me, (when I asked him how their family learned about a certain summer camp,) “... it was all brought up at the (Chinese) school. Like with us with bigger children, Chinese parents communicate with each other (*jiao liu*). ...” He then went on to say,

Actually most communication between Chinese parents are indeed –
particularly like – [like] for me, I take care of (guan) [my son] less – but
like with my wife, [her] communication with these parents is mostly

⁷⁰ Here his point is not trying to distinguish between the quality of their program and other schools’, but to help the teacher relieve any pressure she felt about teaching this new class. While his comment might backfire and make the teacher more nervous, his made his case for the no-pressure class this way, “... don’t over-exert yourself. If those children who were not good at math become good, and those who didn’t like math now like it, and those good at math become better, then this class is good, accounts well for the \$xxx class fee.”

about children's education. Between Chinese folks, it is this [topic] that is communicated about. (Interview 11/22/2009, emphasis added)

He concluded by appreciating this constant sharing between Chinese academic migrant parents here, "Because, this way, we all can share experience, and provide each other with quite a lot of information.[We] [r]eally learned a lot." The sociologist Min Zhou (2009) has studied extensively how such a system of complementary educational resources served to shore up Asian immigrant students' academic performances.

His account also indicates that it is women who do the bulk of the communication and sharing at the Chinese school about their children's education. I was able to confirm this with many other participants and also through my own observation at the school. It constitutes the invisible labor Chinese academic women habitually carry out for the family. I will discuss this in greater detail in Chapter Six.

Importantly, some outlier participants at the Chinese school however seldom mention any feelings of displacement, nor do they emphasize the desire for their children to develop a competitive edge through their experience at the Chinese school. Instead, they tell me that they send their children to the Chinese school for the sole purpose of having them study Chinese. Yinzhi, the female participant I quoted earlier, declared straightforwardly that it was a common-sense thing that she wants her child to learn Chinese, "*because she's half-Chinese*" (*speaking to the fact that her spouse is a white American*) (Interview 8/5/2009, emphasis added).

It is interesting that Yinzhi claimed that her child was half-Chinese, whose racialized logic would indicate that most children at the Chinese school, whose parents

were both Chinese, would be all-Chinese. This contrasts sharply with En's earlier statement that "our kids are Americans," based on their experience growing up in the U.S. So Yinzhi instead described an essentialized identity as her only concern in sending her child there, and in her eyes the Chinese school has no other business in relation to her life.

For many other Chinese academic migrants, however, in deciding to have their children learn Chinese, or for themselves to participate in multicultural activities that are popular in the U.S., the local and national cultural dynamics in the U.S. (rather than an essentialized identity) was an important motivator. As the Principal put it at a teachers' meeting, "Our children will be asked, 'Why don't you speak Chinese?' right?" (fieldnote, //2009) Chinese migrant parents know very well that, despite their children's American citizenship and American-English accent, second generation Chinese-Americans will always be considered the Other and expected to perform the Other in the U.S. society, through similar discourses as noted in Francis, Archer and Mau's (2010) study at a weekend Chinese school in Britain.

In the words of a prominent sociologist of early 20th century,

... the chief obstacle to assimilation of the Negro and the Oriental are not mental but physical traits. It is not because the Negro and the Japanese are so differently constituted that they do not assimilate. If they were given an opportunity the Japanese are quite as capable as the Italians, Armenians, or the Slavs of acquiring our culture and sharing our national ideals. The trouble is not with the Japanese mind but with the Japanese skin. *The Jap is not the right color.*

-- Robert Park, 1914⁷¹, emphasis added.

⁷¹ "Racial Assimilation in Secondary Groups," *Publications of the American Sociological Society* 8 (1914): 66-72.

In spite of his assimilationist assumptions characteristic of sociology at the time, Park astutely notes that the physical looks of Asians and African-Americans is not in the right color, in the dominant group's mentality. So Asian's "yellow skin" signals (for many white and black Americans) their being the "Other" – not one of "us" – in the U.S.. Thus the issue is really "not with the [Asian] mind but with" the white-centric mentality whereby black, yellow and brown skin colors become the trouble. My participants recognize that their class privileges will not shelter their children from these racializing expectations from the dominant group. They see a need for their children to learn Chinese to be able to live up to (instead of contesting) these expectations (such as "Why don't you speak Chinese?")

Probably for similar reasons, the school chose to open adult classes for these migrants in ethnic dancing and Taichi only, and periodically they get invited to perform in the larger mainstream communities. Delectable "cultural roots" such as ethnic dancing and martial arts (such as Taichi) have become known as the essence of other cultures in most Americans' mind, partly through popular Hollywood movies. For comparison, Chinese Calligraphy, much like ethnic dancing and Taichi, also benefits both the mind and the body, and is also often celebrated on TV and live entertainment programs in China. And just like Taichi and ethnic dancing, Chinese Calligraphy is seldom practiced by most Chinese people. Yet unlike Taichi and ethnic dancing, Chinese calligraphy has not become popular among Chinese academic migrants through their Chinese schools. While I am sure that there must be participants at the Chinese school who are good at it), we do not see calligraphy classes offered at the school. The material cost of learning Calligraphy (i.e., special brushes and paper) might be a factor, but it is very plausible that

Chinese calligraphy's lack of popularity among mainstream America does not provide incentive for people at the Chinese school to share and learn it. Ethnic dancing and Taichi instead are widely popular among Chinese schools in the U.S..

These feelings of cultural belonging among Chinese academic migrants are also actively shaped, pursued and co-opted by the Chinese state through “nationalist fictions of racialization” (Cho, 2007, p. 473). As the work of Louie (2004) shows, at the same time that Chinese Americans in the U.S. suffer discrimination due to “essentialized notions of Chineseness,” the Chinese government “relies upon equally problematic assumptions of [their] Chineseness” (Cho p.474) as a tactic for attracting foreign investment from this group. Through the overseas edition of *People's Daily* (a prominent establishment at the reception desk at the weekend Chinese school), the Chinese state “emphasizes cultural and racial heritage over political⁷² belief” (Louie p.50, emphasis added). Headlines such as “Overseas Compatriot: How to Retain ‘Cultural Roots,’” (2008-02-15 issue) work hard to solicit sentimental and monetary ties from its world-wide readers. Many Chinese academic migrants seem to perform the essential Chineseness that the Chinese state promotes, in their insistence on their and their children being “(half) Chinese” and keeping “Chinese roots” by joining weekend Chinese schools for language and cultural learning.

⁷² Significant for some of my participants but not so much for Chinese-Americans who have been in the U.S. for generations, is the Chinese state's courting of contemporary Chinese academic migrants' *political* sentiments and empathy particularly around issues of international politics when China is involved. This effort is evident in the *People's Daily* newspaper reports. While I rarely hear these Chinese academic migrants discuss at the Chinese school their political stances regarding Chinese state, many interviewees (particularly males) tell me that at home they often read about Chinese politics on websites targeted at overseas Chinese.

Besides addressing these Chinese academic migrants' feelings of disorientation and promoting a competitive edge among their children, the Chinese school can serve another important purpose in some of my female participants' life. Several of their accounts alert me to this third function of the Chinese school⁷³. That is, how going to the Chinese school matters to their sense of self: in compensating for the loss of their earlier professional identity which they had enjoyed back in China, many Chinese academic women who had become stay-at-home mothers after migrating here started teaching at the Chinese school.

4.3 Reconnecting to their professional selves in gendered ways

The kind of deskilling Man (2004) documents among Chinese Immigrant Women in Canada is also prevalent here in the U.S., as illustrated in Xuan's account below:

All of a sudden I wasn't working anymore, after I came over! ... [I] didn't know back then (how much a struggle this would turn out to be)! ... All of a sudden I felt so much time on my hands. I got disoriented (*shi qu fang xiang gan*). ... and I realized how boring it could be. (Xuan fieldnote 5/31/2009)

⁷³ So is here another aspect of differences within the group: at first, when I invited people to do interviews with me, when I stated my research interest ("Why do you folks bother sending your children here or teaching here?") I'd always add, "when you are so busy with other things." After my experience with Xuan, Jiemin and Xueren, I learned that not everyone is "that busy" and those who are not are often not very comfortable about it. Teaching at the Chinese school gave them an important sense of "becoming busy." So my assumption as a bad start actually helped me realize important within-group differences, between women who have regular professional jobs and those who no longer do after migrating to the U.S..

Xuan has obtained a Master's degree in Humanities from a top-tier university in China, and had a successful professional career before migrating abroad. She told me how supportive it was for her husband to tell their children "MaMa is now very ShiLuo (lost and frustrated). *Before, her salary alone would be able to sustain our whole family, but now, she can't even get to do anything (emphasis added, as with other conversations with her below)*" (fieldnote 4/26/2009). In the conversations I had with her, she made repeated references to her previous professional status probably to salvage a sense of personal worth from her current loss and constraints. A recurring theme in her sharing with me is "*Before, ... but now, ...*" i.e., her life before and after migration. For example, once she stated, "the struggle for me is that, the way we *now* 'count the money [we have and the money we spend].' *Before, money wasn't an issue for us. I simply threw my earnings into our drawer, and he did his. I was that unconcerned with money*" (fieldnote 5/31/2009)... Her narrative about her earlier financial capacity was still about her sense of loss of her earlier professional identity and privileges.

Probably to address this sense of deep loss, my participant worked to communicate to me that she had always been a busy person, often saying for example, "*I have always been busy, my study, my work, always like this*" (fieldnote 5/31/2009, emphasis added). In another conversation, she also stressed for me how busy she was when teaching at Chinese schools in another city, and she said she liked it when she was busy – every day there was something new to do. (fieldnote 5/3/2009). "So through these activities, *I kept myself busy and felt recognized.*" (Fieldnote 5/31/2009). She seemed to be working hard to "fight against annihilation" (Sari Biklen, personal communication,

spring 2010). Teaching at Chinese schools (and also finding people to talk and connect with) was a valuable way for her to regain her sense of “professional self.”

Similar to Teacher Xuan’s migration experience, Teacher Qin who came on a F2 spouse-visa (the visa status of an accompanying spouse of an international student here), noted that teaching at the Chinese school had provided a cherished venue for her to feel competent and contented again:

... going there I was very happy. Sometimes, the whole week, I’d feel very tired. But every time I went there [on Sunday], I was very happy. Every time I went there, it was - with the class - everyone giggling and laughing (*xi xi ha ha*), very very happy. Once back home I’d tell my hubby what had happened at the school, and he was very willing to hear. (interview 3/22/2010)

Qin had worked in a professional sales position at a Foreign-owned company back in China. When she first came to the U.S. to join her spouse, she “was very lonely, [staying] at home.” Originally she applied to teaching at the weekend Chinese school because she “wanted to labor (*da gong*) and earn some small change.” Even though she gave this reason jokingly, her wording indicated that coming to the U.S. to keep her spouse company had meant that she had, at least temporarily, given up her previous professional identity (until she started her graduate study and obtained a Master’s degree here). Therefore, she could then only resort to “labor[ing]” to earn a little money. After she started teaching, Qin began “going out more often,” and also she really likes children, so she “taught there for two years, very happily.” (Interview with Qin, 3/22/2010)

For many Chinese academic migrant families, a gendered pattern seems to persist. Usually the husband applied for and came to the U.S. to pursue an advanced study or career path and then the wife joined him later, giving up their own career advancement in China or elsewhere. These women had successfully navigated China's education system and harvested a coveted college education after scoring high in a very competitive national examination for college entrance. Yet by their undergraduate years their focus switched from academics to securing a life companion due to youthful desires but more importantly under pressures from parents, relatives and society at large. Once the men they chose came for a graduate or post-doctoral study in the U.S., many of them – by then already professors, professors-to-be, doctors, professionals, managers – came on spouse visas despite prospects of their own career advancement in China. Zhen for example gave up her esteemed job in the medical field in China to join her spouse here. So drastic was the sacrifice for her that after migrating here, "I felt back then I was about to get depression, ...felt that the whole person was about to collapse" (interview 7/7/2010).

Whether the wife or girlfriend endorsed her husband's or boyfriend's move abroad or not, her sacrifice is usually the norm among this group of Chinese academic migrant families. And even for those women who joined their life companions very "willingly," it is hard to conceive of their migration as totally their own choice and their own decision. As discussed earlier, for many college students among this generation, an education and a career or living in the West had been culturally constructed as superior to studying and living in China.

Some of these women, after joining their spouses here, went for graduate study here themselves too, and were able to land on professional jobs afterwards, but many also

gave up their study or professional jobs after having children. Often they lacked the child-care support from grandparents which many could count on had they stayed in China. Child-care is notoriously expensive in the U.S. and its public school system still operates with closing hours at 3:30pm so that even when children are old enough to go to school, families still juggle work and after-school care. Because of the gendered labor system in the U.S. in the public realm, men are often paid higher and hence again sacrifice from women in the academic migrant families are the norm, particularly when in the private realm women still do the bulk of housework and child-caring at home⁷⁴.

Fortunately, for some of these Chinese academic migrant women, the weekend Chinese school provided a venue to help offset the sense of loss accompanying their sacrifice. Like Qin, Teacher Dianyu told me that she too started teaching at another Chinese school “[b]ecause back then I was on an F2 [visa]. So I thought, ‘I don’t want to lose my thing (meaning skills).’ And this was also a chance to get to know more people.” (Interview 3/29/2010) Teaching there had helped to offset her frustration of staying at home after migration (as compared to her previous enjoyable life as a graduate student in Beijing, one of China’s most privileged cities). When I commented on how supportive her spouse was of her teaching, she explained,

I had been to graduate school in China for one year before I came over [in order to join him]. I didn’t graduate there. So he felt that I gave up my academic work to come here, and he felt very sorry [about my sacrifice].

So he – because I stayed home alone and was feeling lonely and

⁷⁴ For ease of discussion I have relied on the traditional distinction between “public” and “private” realms, but it is important to point out that feminist analysis has long since debunked the distinction to show that the public and private are intertwined.

suffocated (*men*) – so he tried everything to find these [outlets for me].

(*ibid*)

For Dianyan therefore, teaching at the Chinese school addressed her loss of a professional self⁷⁵ (and the accompanying sense of financial security) since joining her spouse in the U.S.. She explained to me how insecure she felt after migrating here, as compared to when she could study and earn a lot of money all by herself in Beijing,

... Let me put it this way, maybe it was an insecurity, [feeling] unsafe, not sure how it would be like ahead, always in suspense. ... Because back when I was in China, every month I could make 8000 RMB (roughly \$1333). That is, between 5000 to 8000 (roughly \$833 to \$1333). We earned instructor pay. And, I was still taking [graduate] classes then. ... So I felt, I myself – I knew how much money I made, and how I spent it. I felt very secure. ... (*ibid*)

After she dropped her study and came here to join her spouse, she “just felt [financially and professionally] insecure.”

⁷⁵ Here I also noticed an important identity issue, for Meizhuo, Xuan, Jiemin and others too. For example, when I told Meizhuo I was doing my PhD study, she replied: “I cannot do that. I never went back to study.” While Meizhuo and others like her might have made informed choices about either staying home to better take care of their young children or going straight to work, they tended to express their decision as based on an inability, thus signaling for me their persistent sense of lack. When they said that, “I never went back to study,” their wording indicated that they were once (proudly) in academia, and they gave up that path after migration. Their migration on spouse visa status thus seemed to have dealt them with a big blow in their confidence. But they usually said it light-heartedly, adding “it (meaning more advanced study) would be too much for me!” another instance of distancing strategies at work.

How much does teaching at the Chinese school help them re-establish their sense of self-worth and self-confidence? It really depends on individual experiences. Xuan for example, was able to feel like she worked full time at the Chinese school in a big city, but now she has so much less to do here in Central City. Women also find meanings at the school by compiling and publishing the school journal, making use of their talents as editors and writers. So these women shape but also are shaped by the Chinese school.

How about men? Do they find their sense of self there as administrators and volunteers? Typically, men talked about their involvement at the Chinese school more often as service instead of self-affirmation. The principal said laughingly that he “was tricked into it by” a veteran administrator there, but then said more seriously that he wanted to give the community “some good things,” meaning cultivating some (Chinese) values through the Chinese school. Yanke was the male participant who only moved to the area a couple of years ago but already volunteered some time at the school despite his busy schedule as a faculty member at a local university. He talked about his volunteering in a jokingly depreciating way instead of self-affirmingly, “I’m really only a busboy (*da za de*) here (smile). Sometimes I run errands for them. Sometimes I check with them what they need help for. *That’s all we can do*” (interview 9/27/2009). Rong, the male administrator in charge of property and security at the school, explained how he finally started volunteering for the school, also jokingly and in incomplete sentences adding to the casual tone: “our family has 2 children. We had always enjoyed others’ services. ... [I was feeling] a bit guilty [taking but not giving]. So (I) came on board, kind of meaning to compensate [for always taking advantage of others’ services]” (interview 12/06/2009).

So men and women may understand their volunteering experience at the Chinese school very differently, depending on whether or not they struggle with retaining a sense of (professional) self after migrating to the U.S.. Women teachers and volunteers usually acknowledged their gains in participating in Chinese school teaching and activities, while men administrators and volunteers often spoke of their time spent for the school as first and foremost contributing and other-benefiting. Outside the Chinese school these men routinely found themselves limited by racialized opportunities of promotions in their career due to the “a bamboo ceiling.” Once while observing and chatting with a few men who were playing at the pool table, I asked one member what his job was. He smiled with an air of “feeling good,” and before he could answer me, another player – one of my interviewees – spoke for him, “Old Long? He is in a managerial position!” with a tone of “Can you believe it? How great is that!” (fieldnote //) Despite the group’s struggles with the bamboo ceiling, few men at the Chinese school openly recognized the joy associated with being in an administrative position here, or with simply being accepted and appreciated by other group members for your presence in and contributions to the group, which they may not feel as much in their job positions.

All in all, the weekend Chinese school provided its parents and volunteers venues for *reproduction of social classes, reconnecting to their “cultural roots” and reconnecting to their professional selves*. Besides these three specific functions I have noted above for this Chinese school, it certainly also serves a very general social function which most member parents noticed. I will quickly go through it in the next section.

4.4 General social function of the Chinese school

Many participants claimed that the Chinese school was simply where they came to socialize. When I asked Anyun, the chair of the board, how they initially thought of starting a Chinese school, he made “two points”: “The first one, that is to say, this is a chance for children to learn Chinese, right? ... The second is that it is really a social [place], that is to say – with cities like this type – because we only have so many Chinese” (Interview 11/1/2009).

He went on to emphasize his second point that “*this site as a social one is very important*. ... it is a social occasion.” He then referred to his own experience to illustrate:

Because when we came here, we didn’t have a Chinese school. So our social occasions were very limited. Just the few folks on campus, and some students, that was it. Very few interactions (*lai wang*) with folks outside [campus]. (ibid)

Although he did not say it explicitly, I understood him as probably saying that before the start of a Chinese school, his family’s social occasions were limited to the few *Chinese* professors and students on campus. He further explained that originally their social circle was limited because “you didn’t have any opportunities to, any groups to

interact with.” So the Chinese school, once started, became “an opportunity for Chinese (*hua ren*) – basically you can get in touch with all Chinese here⁷⁶” (ibid).

Asian migrants seem to the American public to socialize primarily among their co-ethnics. Also, the “model minority” myth has conceived Asian migrants here as a group not interested in politics (ignoring the historical records and ongoing struggles of many Asian Americans’ and groups’ political demands) and has even valorized this alleged group attribute (Kim, 1999). This seems to make them a self-isolating group. However, we need to take into consideration the legacy of decades of United States’ anti-Asian policies, Hollywood portrayal and popular sentiments as well as the state’s Cold War propaganda against the former Soviet Union and China, which have left many Americans unsure how to relate to people from China. Several of my participants, mostly female ones, told me how their American acquaintances had asked them if men in China still keep their hair in one long braid, or if they still wear the long dress-kind of everyday clothing. So it is little surprise that many Chinese academic migrants find it hard to break into American social life. Instead, they seek comfort and acceptance at the Chinese school. Unfortunately for them, as I analyzed earlier, by resorting to celebrating cultural essentialism at the school instead of addressing racism and/or separation head-on in larger society, the group reinforces ethnic isolation.

By socializing primarily at the weekend Chinese school, however, the social circles that started at the Chinese school usually do function to bring many of these people closer in everyday life too, as Anyun later pointed out, “for the social [function],

⁷⁶ But in fact, many members of the Chinese school almost never get to meet or talk with the local restaurant workers or owners at the school. The ethnicized social space is marked by distinctions of social class too, as I discuss in more detail in Chapter 5.

firstly the Chinese school is a site, then it [meaning the socializing] is extended beyond it [meaning the school]. So in your daily lives you'll have more interactions" (Interview 11/1/2009).

Younger participants who were teaching there told me that they looked forward to when their children would be bigger and they could start socializing at the Chinese school with other parents too. One such mother told me that she had found it hard for one to make friends once one started working in the U.S., except for making family friends around child-caring. She narrated her reflections to me in broken sentences in Chinese (as compared to her usually bubbly and fluent speaking), signaling for me that she was giving it very serious thinking and she was struggling very hard to put her thoughts into words (Interview with Dianyan, 3 /29/2010).

She concluded by explaining for me the difficulty of having time to make personal friends (that is, not based on family as the unit), "*Because a lot of your energy is put toward your family, your children.*" Similarly, a male administrator also told me that, "family-wise, we are often 'both-spouse working.' So after work, most time is for family, and for children" (Interview with Dan 11/22/2009). The lack of support for child-care from extended family and also long workdays and often unpaid professional overwork for many of them meant that they frequently felt as if they only had enough energy for work and family, nothing else⁷⁷.

⁷⁷ I did not realize how significant the change felt for these families, until I went through the change myself. Since my spouse started working a full time job and then we had two children, I have usually spent my limited social time with other parents (for advice, for fun sharing, for commiserating, and for children's playdates), struggling to keep in touch with my friends who have not become parents. At a professional conference in ohio I met someone who I felt strong karma with and who happened to live

What is taken for granted here though, is the suburban ways of living, which many social critics have studied in its controversial historical and political contexts (Hayden, 2003; Duany et al., 2000/2010; Jackson, 1987). As William Levitt, the co-developer of the “matchbox” Levittown suburbs, declared, “[n]o man who has a house and [a] lot can be a communist. He has too much to do (quoted in Hayden, 2003, p. 135).” The busy suburban family life did not happen out of nowhere. Not only are men often busy working on home improvement projects or yardwork, and women taking care of family needs, but also during weekends and after-school hours, the parents are busy chauffeuring children to educational programs, since the suburbs have been typically designed with little room for social spaces among neighbors (Hayden, 2003; Duany et al., 2000/2010; Jackson, 1987). Of course the like-mindedness of the (upper) middle class living in suburbs (who are isolated from lower social classes) tend to encourage the intense parental efforts at reproducing their class privileges through enforcing their children’s academic edges by enrolling them in all kinds of enrichment programs.

Even for families that live in a neighborhood with several other Chinese families, their social time with each other is very limited, so they still resort to the Chinese school for social interaction. My conversation below with Jiemin illustrates this point well. She started by telling me,

After coming here, [for me] too – maybe most [people] come [to the Chinese school] to find a place to communicate with each other, because like where we live, close by are all Americans, [not Chinese, so] not much

minutes away from where I live in NJ. After we exchanged contact information I thought to myself, “if only she already had children too! Then we could meet as often as we would like to!”

to talk with them about. [Even with my Chinese neighbors,] you can't always go [social with them] – everyone is busy with one's own things. Then, only here [at the Chinese school], like when we finish teaching, all [of us] just talk here. (Interview 5/23/2010)

And when I asked Jiemin if the Chinese families in their neighborhood would ever carpool for grocery shopping, she clarified for me it was hard to do things together because of the children's after-school and weekend enrichment programs: “now each of us [family] has its own [schedule]... After starting to work, Chinese families, the kids learn so very many things! [So the parents are] constantly sending [them] there and picking [them] up! ... Chinese have all spent their money on this.” Her child, for example, studies “Everything. [Laughing], what say, Ballet, piano, Karate, swimming.” (ibid) ... And because her child's swimming lessons are at a different level from one of her Chinese neighbor's child's, they could not arrange for carpooling even though their children both go for swimming lessons.

Given how Chinese academic migrant families usually center their after-work life around their own family and children, sending their older children to the Chinese school for language study actually serves to bring them together. It produces valuable spaces at the Chinese school for making connections and possibly even friendship between families.

Many participants have also pointed out how the dancing team at this Chinese school serves a social function. Even many not on the dancing team have noticed this phenomenon too. Dianyan for example is a young female teacher who said she “very

seldom” had time to talk with other teachers or parents at the school. She has two young children who were not going to the Chinese school yet, and she typically went to teach her 3-5pm class and then left. However, after a lengthy explanation of how she thought the school’s language classes were not structured well between grade levels, she concluded with what she thought the Chinese school was better at, i.e., community-building:

So, within Chinese school, I feel that this Chinese school is more like a *Chinese community*. Not, that is to say ... – I feel that the dancing team is quite good, and the folks [in the team] are quite bustling/lively (*re nao*).

(Interview 3/29/2010)

Although not explicit in her statement, she seemed to be saying that at the Chinese school the dancing team was one of the liveliest groups in community-building among their team members. I agreed with her observation and shared what I learned the day before, “Right. Yesterday it was Yun and someone else’ birthday [party]. Every month they gather birthday dates and have one *party* together. Very good atmosphere.”

From Dianyan’s experience we can tell that although many Chinese academic migrants were able to find most of their social life at or through this Chinese school, many others remained at the fuzzy edges of the Chinese school’s social life⁷⁸. In the coming section I will give two more examples of such experience.

⁷⁸ She remained at the fuzzy edge because she “very seldom” had time to talk with other teachers or parents at the school. Every Sunday she only went there to teach and then left. She had only two very young children not going to the Chinese school yet.

5. “Some of these people, they have their life here!” – The insider and outliers’ view of and experience at the Chinese school

As the previous discussion shows, the “community” that the Chinese school helps to build matters for many families. When I explained my research interest to a volunteer administrator at the school, about how I myself enjoyed the Chinese school community, he smiled nodding. Then he told me that Zhang’s family actually just moved back here (from a southern state to which they had moved a couple of years ago for a new job) “primarily because of our community here.” He added, “of course there are other reasons, but this is one major factor in their decision-making” (interview with Dan 11/22/2009).

Some of my participants, however, do not identify with the Chinese school as much. Due to the limits of my method of enrolling participants, I was able to get close with only a few of them, mostly through my own connections or friendships I had established before my project began at the Chinese school. Yinzhi and Yongze, for example, two female participants who work in academia and live around the local university, do not feel that the Chinese school matters much in their lives. In fact, the school is an uneasy presence in their life, as they related to me their struggles: They go there primarily to send their children to learn Chinese, for the convenience and the collective Chinese-learning environment. In these two aspects they considered this school a better alternative to teaching their children at home. However, they both find the location of the school to be a real headache for them, particularly on snowy winter days.

Unlike many of my other participants, they also have never mentioned to me anything like feeling lost or frustrated here as Chinese in the U.S. (which as discussed

earlier was a primary reason for many who turned to the Chinese school). The intersection of gender and migration seem to matter here too. Both of these women, during or after their study here, married white males who have established distinguished academic careers, so they themselves by association of marriage seem to feel accepted among their white friends. Compared to how these two women expressed their experience here, two male administrators at the Chinese school who also worked as academics sounded very different from them. One male administrator explicitly spoke of how difficult it is for an Asian male to find an academic job. The other one talked about how language was always a hindrance. The gendered stereotypes in the U.S. of Asian women as sweet and submissive and of Asian men as boring and weak certainly serve to constitute how these two sub-groups experience their migration here and how they negotiate the racialized American cultural and social landscape.

In Chapter Six I will talk in detail about how these two female participants related to the Chinese school and the larger American society. For now, suffice it to say that, although they seem more resourceful and more integrated into the mainstream society than most of my other participants, their sense of identity seems to be at times constituted against the background of many Chinese academic migrants. As Yongze shared with me in our interview, tipping her head toward the auditorium where the dancing group were practicing, “Some of these people, they have their life here!” She smiled and almost winked at me, assuming that I would share her perspective, possibly given that I am, like her, engaged in academia. (Interview 9/13/2009)

Other “outlier” participants might feel differently from how Yongze and Yinzhi feel about the Chinese school. Many of them work in the corporate world and could be

simply too exhausted or uninterested to hang out at the Chinese school. Some of them still volunteer a little at the Chinese school, for example, by signing up to help out with cleaning up and ringing the bell (to signal the start and end of classes) one Sunday during the semester.

But couples who sign up for a particular week's cleaning and bell-ringing do not seem to be full members of the Chinese school though, in the sense that they seldom socialize – and hence lack familiarity – with the people who often hang out there. These parents usually do not serve or stay at the Chinese school regularly during their children's class hours. Even at the end of my one year teaching and another year of fieldwork there, I still did not know most of the names I saw on the weekly sign-up sheet. I myself had often had a hard time approaching these volunteers or initiating a meaning conversation with them.

The sense I typically got from them was that the man or the woman was not familiar with the Chinese school milieu. For example, one Sunday when I grabbed the woman vacuuming the basement classrooms and asked her if she knew where Teacher Xuan was, she shook her head with a very reserved smile, so much so that I almost felt bad for sounding as if that she should know Teacher Xuan. I had wrongly assumed that here every volunteer knew the teachers. Another Sunday,

I asked the woman (parent volunteer who signed up for cleaning this week) who just started vacuuming the auditorium, if she saw Yueru (a key member of the dancing group which practices weekly in the auditorium). The volunteer looked shy and confused. She said, "I saw

some children downstairs in the PingPong room, yours might be among them?" I told her, "no, Yueru is an adult; do you know her?" She looked hesitant, smiled and shook her head apologetically. I smiled and said, "sorry, I'll look for her downstairs." (Fieldnote 6/6/2010)

It was the last week before the graduation ceremony for the school year, and yet this parent volunteer had never got to know even a key member of the dancing group who regularly hung out at the school. Still another time, when I saw the bellman for the week looking lonely by the reception desk (- it was class time so barely anyone hanging around in the hallway), I tried to talk but our conversation soon waned and then he (not so obviously but certainly consciously) walked away from me. This happened at the end of a school year too, and the male parent volunteer seemed barely familiar with the men who regularly play at the pool table and hang out at the school, as I noticed in my observations that day later on.

The (what I call) "outlier" participants sometimes do join the Chinese school's events, but they maintain the "come and go" mentality toward the events as they do toward the Chinese school regular classes. That is, they arrive, they get their part of the business done at the school, and they leave. An example is the annual graduation party. In 2009, the year that I observed there, Yinzhi did come with her white-American spouse, but only to watch their daughter perform. Throughout the ceremony they both sat in the middle of the rows of seats for audience, and barely moved about or socialized with other parents or volunteers. As soon as their daughter was finished performing with her class, I saw the family walking past me toward the auditorium door. When I asked if they were

leaving already, Henry the husband shrugged his shoulders, “Yes. Pretty boring, don’t you think?” But I did not feel the same, because I had enjoyed the company of Kuang, a female volunteer teacher there. We two had so much fun talking all along while watching what interested us on and off stage. Henry then smiled, “The speeches [that the Chinese school administrators gave before the performances] were 20 minutes long!” I smiled, nodding. He then teased, “You Chinese folks are really good at giving speeches!” I shook my head at his joking. He laughed and left with his family soon after (fieldnote 6/14/2009).

So how the “outliers” such as Yinzhi and others experience the Chinese school gatherings can be very different from how people like me (or more regular participants at the school) experience them. On my side, not only did I have such fun talking with Teacher Kuang during the performances, but also I had double fun out of the graduation party by hanging out at the hallway even after all the performances were over. On my way back home I also enjoyed “recounting to my spouse how much fun⁷⁹ Kuang was” (Fieldnote 6/14/2009).

Conclusion

This chapter examines how these migrants seek to become American (feel at home) by becoming “Chinese” in a specific way at the weekend Chinese school. It looks at how they address the gaps between their cultural logics of desire for (im)migration to the U.S. (constituted by international political economy and personal privileges and

⁷⁹ Teacher Qin also liked to recount to her spouse every Sunday what she enjoyed at the Chinese school after her teaching there, and her spouse was very willing to hear.

“choices”) and the everyday realities of life as an academic migrant in a medium-sized city in the U.S.. Narrating the pleasures and pains of migration, my participants explained to me why they had decided to come to the U.S. with a clear dream yet unclear visions, how they had usually felt lost or disoriented again, and what their participation at the weekend Chinese school meant in their migrant life here. In particular, I demonstrate how their Chinese school experience in three important ways addresses their gendered, classed and ethnicized cultural logics of desire: *the reproduction of social class, reconnecting to their cultural roots, and reconnecting to their professional selves.*

Importantly, as professionals or ex-professionals, this group of Chinese academic migrants works out their sense of self and home at the suburban Chinese school by shared efforts to reproduce their class privilege. They note that learning Chinese will provide their children a competitive edge, and also they share educational resources and information with each other extensively. Despite their visible social class privileges and efforts of class reproduction, they take these for granted and usually speaks a language of individualism and meritocracy instead of social classes. For example, the principal of the school once said in an interview with me, regarding their generation of Chinese academic migrants, “We are clever, we are hard-working, we came and we succeed” (interview 3/22/2009). There is no acknowledgement at all of their/our privileged background of a college education in China at little cost with the previous socialist system, (or of the gendered sacrifices and labor Chinese academic women migrants usually perform to ensure their family’s economic success here, or of the privileges Chinese academic migrants enjoy in an increasingly stratified host society).

Furthermore, collectively they have used the Chinese school space to address their feeling lost and disoriented in their migrant life by reconnecting to their “cultural roots.” Despite the fact that they recognize they are frequently over-worked and most vulnerable to job loss or relocation, they barely ever attribute their struggles to their disadvantages, i.e., their racialized position in the host society. To this group, race is still the elephant in the room. As I will document in more detail in Data Chapter 6, in their conversations at the Chinese school and in their interviews with me, often they do not even talk about their troubles unless in a distancing, joking, individualized or technical way. Ideas of bootstrapping self-reliance might explain some Chinese academic migrants’ discomfort in sharing stories of their struggles, so the “Chinese school” and “ethnic culture” became a safe space to re-gain a sense of proud and control in their uprooted migrant life. In a similar sense, Cary (1991) and others note that the black community became “a place where ‘there is a comfort and a sanctity that makes it almost possible to forget that there is a white power structure touching lives at all’ (Graham, 1999, pp. 152-3, cited in Lacy, 2004, p. 8).” In the case of middle class blacks living in the suburb, “race matters for blacks because society has decided that it does. But race also matters for blacks because they relish their associations with other blacks and their connection to black culture” (Lacy, 2004, p. 3). Observations about black communities also helps me understand how my participants find comfort at the suburban weekend Chinese school to the extent that they could almost not remember or address how they are marked by their racialized bodies here in the U.S..

Also importantly, gender, race and ethnicity matter in how this group experience and shape the Chinese school, particularly in how some women used teaching at the

Chinese school to reconnect to their professional selves. Some of my female participants, in following the career needs of their male counterparts, had a harder time finding a professional job in their own field of expertise, and for them the Chinese school teaching experience becomes a venue for semi-realizations of their professional selves. Several of these female participants came to the U.S. on a spouse-visa, sacrificing their career advancement and financial security in China, only to find themselves trapped in a lonely confined stay-at-home life. Thus a Sunday trip to the bustling Chinese school for them also means a valued get-away from the everyday loneliness and sense of loss, and a site of commiserating and mutual comfort. Most female participants also extend their emotional labor from their homes to the site of the Chinese school, making connections and addressing their family's multiple struggles through collective problem-solving at the school. They also find nurturing for themselves from talking and dancing with female friends at the school. Male participants were able to enjoy administrative titles and experience at the Chinese school, even though few were in administrative positions at their professional jobs due to "the bamboo ceiling" (Hyun, 2005) in the racialized American economic landscape. Interesting enough, none of my male participants acknowledged how their Chinese school experience mattered to them in this aspect, while several female participants lavishly articulated the significance of their Chinese school experience in compensating for their disadvantages as migrants here.

To conclude, it seems that the group of Chinese academic migrants – through their gendered, classed and racialized Chinese school experience – also created a specific way of relating to other Chinese folks. As Portes and Zhou (1993), cited in the beginning of this chapter, insightfully point out, for migrants it is indeed not a dualistic picture of

choosing a path of either assimilation or ethnic preservation. Instead, it is fluid transnational practices and discourses at work, at the intersection of gender, social class, and race.

CHAPTER V

EMBRACING ALL, PLEASING SOME: THE EVERYDAY MAKING OF THE SUBURBAN CHINESE SCHOOL

Space is fundamental to any exercise of power.

- Foucault 1984(1982), p. 252

This chapter is about the regimes of the social for this group. The normalizing power of the social (Foucault, 1979; Butler, 1997) comes from the set of publicly-enacted and sanctioned practices, procedures, conditions, rules, idealizations, cultural or social norms, etc., which are often not neutral but politically charged, which regulate or dictate interactions among people and institutions (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regime>). In their socializing at the Chinese school, I witness the making of a private-minded public place. While the school is announced as a place for all community members, it is experienced very differently by different members. It is in fact a normative place, highly regulated with embedded implicit rules and expectations for its members.

The sociologist Thomas Gieryn (2000), in his review article, “A space for place in sociology,” states a forceful argument for understanding place in terms of the meanings individuals and groups make of it:

The very idea of “neighborhood” is not inherent in any arrangement of streets and houses, but is rather an ongoing practical and discursive production/imagining of a people. “Locality” is as much phenomenological as spatial, achieved against the ground of globalization or nationalization (Appadurai, 1996; Crain, 1997; Koptiuch, 1997; Lippard, 1997) (p. 472).

John Agnew (2011), a renowned geographer, calls for a “more holistic view of places as the geographical context for the mediation of physical, social and economic processes,” instead of the simplistic “view of place as a location on a surface where things ‘just happen’” (p. 3-4). A place therefore is no static “mere container,” but a fluid “taking place” (p. 13).

“[P]laces give as well as acquire meaning” (ibid, p. 13). Agnew notes, however, that empirical studies in this vein are very few and limited. My study can be understood as a response to his call for such research. Examples of meaning-imbued and meaning-giving places are abundant in the suburban Chinese school I study: the hallway, the reception desk (with the school journal and the Chinese newspaper), the pool table, the Taichi auditorium, parking lot, cars (as in carpooling), and the listserv (virtual space) at the Chinese school are all shaped and experienced at the intersection of gender, sexuality, race, nationality and social class. All these mini-cosmos places give meaning to and acquire meaning from my informants’ specific ways of involvement at the Chinese school. All interactions and communications happening there are part of the “place-making projects” (p. 26). They turn the suburban Chinese school into a particular kind of place which itself then participates in the “subject-making projects,” constituting these academic migrants into particular kinds of subjects (topic of my next data chapter).

In an empirical study, the anthropologist Li Zhang (2010) writes of the politics of race, class, citizenship and place in China's urban luxury apartment housing (p. 3), a new sprawl. Unraveling how the construction and occupation of this kind of housing produce and regulate certain "regimes of living," she argues that both the place-making and the self-making fit into neoliberal governmentality. In particular, she notes the interrelation and the mutual-production of the spatial form, the embodied subjects, and modes of community governing. Like Lazzarato (2009), she documents specific "mechanisms and means whereby neoliberalism has transformed society into an 'enterprise society' based on the market, competition, inequality, and the privilege [or responsibility] of the individual" (Lazzarato, 2009, p. 109) particularly through "strategies of individualization, insecurity and depoliticization" (ibid)⁸⁰. Neoliberal policies, as many note, ensure the supremacy of market (to be enforced by the state oftentimes under the pressure of the so-called "international community"). Private markets and individual boot-strapping are held up as the savior of societies gone wrong. And "if market do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution), then they must be created, by state action if necessary" (Harvey, 2005, p. 2)⁸¹, as in the case of the newly created Chinese housing market (as housing was previously public property in socialist China). In Zhang's (2010) study, the neoliberal place-making of Chinese urban luxury apartment communities was intimately tied to subject-making.

In my study, I also note very specific place-making: how the Chinese school is constructed and experienced as an extension of private space and families, instead of a

⁸⁰ Lazzarato, M. 2009. Neoliberalism in Action: Inequality, Insecurity and the Reconstitution of the Social, *Theory, Culture & Society* November 2009 vol. 26 no. 6 109-133.

⁸¹ Harvey, D. 2005. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.

public-minded space. Since many of my participants readily acknowledge that this is the only social space they have, the Chinese school thus features importantly in the regime of the social (life) of this group of Chinese academic migrant families. Its spatial formulation – that is, how it operates by *borrowing* church or school facilities *in the suburb*, and how the spaces within the school is occupied and used – becomes part of the subject-making process for individuals (how these subjects are embodied and hence understood themselves in certain ways), along with the school’s organizational structure, and the volunteering and informal social interactions that take place (how the community⁸² is governed in certain ways). The school is built by and for suburban Chinese professional middle-class parents. My observation at the school and its social events reveals how this group of Chinese academic migrants shape their Chinese school into (and experience it as) a mostly private-minded place through subtle and often unintended politics of exclusion and inclusion.

Suburban Diaspora: Place, Power, and the Other (Race, Gender, Class, Sexuality)

From the website of the Chinese school I found a description of the school’s mission:

[Central City Chinese School] provides Chinese language and cultural services as its core function ... available to all members of the [Central City] community. (citation omitted for confidentiality).

⁸² Community however is a misleading word, as I noted in the previous chapter.

So what does “the Central City community” mean here? The language certainly sounds inclusive. My observation and experience at the school show otherwise. How is the school cultural produced to be other than inclusive then?

Vivid examples of cultural production at the Chinese school can be found in my own paradoxical experience there as an “insider researcher.” One question I was often asked by people who did not yet know me well was, “So which class is your kid in?” or “how old is your kid?” I would respond that I did not have a kid yet. They would look puzzled about my presence there. I would explain to them, “I taught here before, and now I am doing my research here.” With that explanation but sometimes even before this conversation, they would often ask, “Are you a graduate student at xxx university?” Other questions I often got were “When are you graduating? When are you thinking of having kids?” Or reassuring comments such as “No hurry. You’ll have them.” With Kai, we talked a bit about her practice in Chinese medicine, and she started asking me if I have kids, then sharing with me information about a pre-natal vitamin (fieldnote 3/23/2009). My participants thus often assume that my presence at this suburban weekend Chinese school means that I am, just like them, an academic migrant, heterosexual, and that I (will) have children learning Chinese there too.

This point once even came up in a funny encounter I had with a father and his child. I was getting a ride from the principal, and he and his daughter waited while I finished up a conversation with someone else at the school. When I finally got back to them, the principal was laughing, and he told me, “My daughter just asked me, ‘Dad, whose mom is she?’”

I laughed too, “She asked that?!” He laughed more with me. His daughter just stood there looking confused and smiling shyly. She probably had not expected her father to have so much fun out of her innocent question, which she must have often asked about other women she saw at the Chinese school. Almost every woman there was a mom, except for a very few young volunteer teachers. Although it might seem expected that members there would assume most people there were parents – after all it is a school – I argue that much more was going on here. That is what a regime of the social means – it normalizes and in this case it is normalizing suburban parenthood.

My insider/outsider position also made me aware of the familiarity and the non-hierarchical relations among the administrators, when in our hallway conversations I referred to the “principal” whereas the administrators insisted on referring to him by name⁸³. When I told Rong and his wife that I was “waiting for the principal,” they said, “oh, for En.” This was illuminating to me. I thought to myself, “Oh, they are on a first-name basis with the principal.” Even though when I taught there teachers also referred to then-principal as “Kang,” I was still somewhat surprised to hear volunteers say “En” this time. I had become so detached and perhaps armored as a researcher that I could not really count myself as an insider anymore! In fact, to get myself prepared, I searched online for information on the principal, read the local newspaper article about him, and checked the photos out too. The administrators and some volunteer teachers instead, know about each other’s life very well. For example, both Rong and Xuan offered a ride at the end of my first field day, without even asking me if I had a car. They must have

⁸³ This reminds me of how in the teachers’ meeting everyone laughed when Zhen said that the Fujiannese sounding person asked for the phone number of the “Principal’s office.”

been quick to notice that there were only 3 cars left and recognize that none could be mine.

Also from my own unique insider/outsider position I was alerted to how little the non-parent teachers socialize in the Chinese school circle. A great example was how people positioned themselves physically on the graduation day June 2009. This is an important annual event of the school that most Chinese in Central City join. (As we stood together and watched the happenings on and off stage, Kuang, a volunteer teacher, actually giggled to herself, “I feel like this event is a gathering for Chinese people. Normally we don’t see so many Chinese, but today, all are here!” (Fieldnote 6/14/2009) The graduation ceremony and performances were always held in the auditorium. This year I went in early and chose to stand in the back of the auditorium, for a better vantage point for my observation. I watched all the parents and teachers and administrators and children socializing and getting ready. Then the four young teachers, who were – like me – not parents but either students or spouses of students at the local universities, one by one all joined me standing there. And except for one (Zukai who came with her mother) like me they never took a seat all the way through the performances for about an hour, and barely socialized with the many families there.

At the time, three of these four young teachers seemed to have joined me standing there not even in order to socialize, but more possibly for fellow-feeling. Several female teachers (myself included) in their 20s or 30s were able to make deeper and lasting connections with each other through carpooling experiences. The male teacher Kan who came first was not at all familiar with me given his usual reticence at the Chinese school, but he still joined me right there in the back of the auditorium, instead of mingling with

the audience of families or with school staff. Same with Teacher Zukai – she and her mom joined us without much conversation, and then Teacher Xueren too. (Kuang was the last to come and the only one I had more interactions with during that school year, and later on we two spent time together during the performance and had more fun talking.) The first three teachers probably felt that they did not have much to talk about with the parents or parent-teachers anyway, so they might as well join me, the other non-parent, on the margin of this Chinese school experience which is centered around parents and children. So marginalized are non-parent teachers there, Jun, another student in her PhD study who volunteered there for two years said that while she did talk with parents when answering their questions about her classes, “actually talking with sincere exchanges of heart (hen jiao xin de na yang tan) never [happened]” (Interview 12/1/2009).

I also became aware of how the Chinese school was a space for parents when I felt much more accepted there since people started to notice that I was pregnant. For example, after over one year of my observations there, one Sunday afternoon I finally got to talk with Teacher Han, one of the female teachers who always looked more serious and inaccessible than other teachers or parents there. She was talking warmly and happily with Kuang, another teacher and a friend of mine, when I walked into the Chinese school that day. I did not feel comfortable joining their conversation out of nowhere, so I waited first with a little bit of distance. Then they started saying goodbye to each other, and Teacher Han started to engage me, noticing my pregnancy, asking me how far along I was, signaling with her head toward my belly. After a fun discussion about how much weight we gain during pregnancy, she laughed, “...after raising two kids, you certainly lose it – *you’ll know*” (fieldnote 6/6/2010, emphasis added).

The fact that this was the first time Teacher Han initiated a talk with me, even though we had seen each other many times along the years, indicates that full membership at the Chinese school is implicitly reserved for families with children. Even a baby still in my belly gained me some legitimacy! So much so that Teacher Han felt comfortable enough with me to share stories of women's visible and invisible labor in building families – carrying the extra weight during pregnancy and then losing it due to the hard work of raising children. And she ended her noted with a “you'll know,” involving me as future companions of suburban parenthood.

The Chinese school therefore is a space for parents more than for younger volunteer teachers. And with the school journal they publish annually too, it is called tongue-in-cheekly *Central City's Old Chinese Folks*⁸⁴. The articles in there are primarily written by volunteers or parents for other parents. Recently they had a new issue out, mostly consisting of children's writings and possibly still targeted at (middle-class Chinese academic migrant) parents rather than children as potential readers.

One typical conversation that I often hear between two mothers in the hallway at the Chinese school goes like this: “I've been wanting to call you during the week, but I know I'll see you today – so, which swimming class does your child go to? Could you give me a phone number?” If not about a swimming class, they would be exchanging information about a piano teacher, an art class, or something similar.

Therefore the school, while officially an informal voluntary inclusive institution, is actually a highly-regulated biased space encouraging participation from and self-

⁸⁴ “Zhong Cheng Lao Zhong” in Chinese.

identification of a particular group of Chinese migrants and inadvertently discouraging others.

With the annual summer barbeque, the Chinese school had always set the site at a county park, the same one every year (at least for the ones I had been to). When my spouse and I wondered about their unchanging site, we realized that the park was right in the middle of two good school districts. Therefore the site is also in the middle of two neighborhoods with many Chinese academic migrant families, because of their typical choice of house locations. The site is convenient for most families at the Chinese school to travel to, and it is a very family-friendly park. The barbeque scenes had also always felt like a family circle, with few Chinese students there, even though there were a few students volunteer-teaching at the school every year. I did not see the student volunteers this year there. Surprisingly, the barbeque seemed to provide little space for socializing except for people who were already familiar with each other through their Chinese school involvement or at least had some connections to start with.

One exception I noticed though, was when people offered advice to new-comers to Central City, in particular about the topic of houses, where a couple learned from two women all about adding a balcony, installing a storm door for winter, and switching to screen door in summer. The couple then sought more advice from the two women on house structure. So the Chinese school barbeque too is an extension of the Chinese school space where middle-class concerns are legitimate and popular topics, even among total strangers. In this case, even though the two older women and the young couple were not familiar with each other to start with, they were able to have an extensive conversation about how to improve the structure of the house the couple had just bought.

The communal services at the Chinese school are therefore most tailored and accessible to those Chinese professional migrants who identify with *suburban parenthood*, and to a group of white middle-class adoptive families who are as resourceful. One comment from a parent illustrates this point well. Kuan, in his 30s, whose family moved into the area only last year, told me in deep frustration,

Somehow I haven't been able to make friends at the Chinese school. It seems that I still haven't struck the right chord when conversing with the folks there. ...Oh yes, I can ask them about the problem with our house leaking rainwater. That should work; they'll have a lot to tell me about. (Interview 9/29/2009)

I was surprised to hear that this parent was not able to start meaningful hallway conversations. I had come to know him to be a very knowledgeable person with broad interests, who reads widely on sciences and on life in general, and who is also very expressive in sharing his ideas. In fact, he is so knowledgeable that, the two times that I interviewed him, every time he talked about so many interesting topics for more than 2 hours, often apologizing to me for "wandering off your topic." So his comments quoted above alert me to the fact that the most welcome conversation in the hallway conversations are around child-rearing and the home/house, the two main (gendered⁸⁵) responsibilities of Chinese middle-class suburban parenthood.

⁸⁵ Usually women focus on daily child-care and schooling, while men focus on fixing issues within the house or outside in the yard.

Chinese academic migrants at this *diasporic* space⁸⁶ of the Chinese school thus routinely expect, enact and share *suburban parenthood*. Operating at the intersection of race, class, gender and sexuality, the ideals and practices of suburban parenthood is an important part of how they participate in the “model minority” discourse. A collective diasporic middle-class identity is produced and reproduced in the seemingly innocent hallway conversations.

I will, in this chapter, discuss in detail how the Chinese school is made into and experienced as a specific kind of place, by going through first how the informal organization of the Chinese school inadvertently structures an invisible divide of social classes. Then I move on to unravel the cultural production of the suburban parenthood through typical encouraged conversation topics at the Chinese school hallway or events. Finally I highlight the gendered spaces and activities at the school, which in next chapter I will connect to how diasporic stress is handled in gendered ways through the families’ involvement at the Chinese school.

1. Invisible Divide between Social Classes: the Informal Organization of the Chinese School

Besides parenthood, social class also stands out for this suburban diaspora that the Chinese school enacts and embodies. An important issue of access relates to the large group of Chinese migrants who work at local Chinese restaurants. Except for one white male student in my adult-level class in 2007, I have never met another member at the school who identifies him/herself to me as working in a local restaurant. And this is the

⁸⁶ Diasporic here relies on Cho’s notion of “diasporic cultural citizenship,” which understands diaspora as not just there, but a process of subjectification.

case during the more than 30 extended visits (lasting 2 to 5 hours each) I have paid to the school since I started my research there, or during my weekly teaching visits for a whole school year in 2007-2008. One of my participants, who is a veteran volunteer administrator at the school, told me in a casual conversation on the way of his giving me a ride home, “You know the local Chinese restaurant folks, right? They have many Chinese people there. We [at the Chinese school] just haven’t quite been in touch with them” (fieldnote //2009).

Certainly the Chinese restaurant owners’ exhausting schedule and everyday overwork can hinder them from sending their children to the Chinese school on Sundays. One volunteer teacher recounted at a teachers’ meeting how she had to often help pick up or drop off the children of one restaurant’s owners. “Otherwise, they would frequently simply miss class because their parents do not have much time or energy to send them around.”

As for the large group of (often male) workers at the local Chinese restaurants, most of them are single or do not have their families with them (due to the always-demanding schedule at the restaurants)⁸⁷. They also lack transportation, since their life is typically organized by the restaurant owners in one single line between 2 dots: from their shared-living in a house to co-working in the restaurant, and back and forth every day. Some of them have one off day per week (but certainly not on Sundays when businesses are best for Chinese restaurants), which they usually spend staying “home” watching Chinese DVDs or chatting or simply sleeping away their fatigue.

⁸⁷ Such typical work and living conditions of Chinese restaurant workers in the U.S. are learned through my personal communication with owners and workers at 4 local Chinese restaurants during my years of PhD study.

So as non-parents or as lower(-middle)-class, the group of Chinese restaurant workers and owners, while significant in number, are de facto excluded from the Chinese schools' offering of "Chinese language and cultural services" on Sundays. *Suburban parenthood* is thus inadvertently enforced at the institutional level.

One wonders if there is some lack of engagement with the restaurant owners (not to mention the workers), in the organizational structure at the Chinese school as well, despite the school's proclaimed openness to serve everyone in the Central City community as stated on the Chinese school website. This idea occurred to me at another teachers' meeting, when the same teacher informed the two principals that she had received a phone call from someone unknown: "S/he said s/he wanted to sign up his/her child(ren) for Chinese school, and asked me for the phone number for *the Principals' Office*" (fieldnote //2009, emphasis original).

Everyone at the meeting smiled or laughed a bit, because these formal organizational terms "the Principal's office" sound funny in the context of the school's informal structure. The principal smiled and said, "He can contact anyone of us." The teacher continued, "Right, so I told her/him about our website and said that s/he can email you folks, but s/he seemed unfamiliar with the concept of email." Both principals nodded, "Oh." The vice principal asked, "Where did s/he know you from?" The teacher smiled amusedly (as if to say "funny thing"), shaking her head, "I don't know where either, or where s/he got my number from." Both principals nodded again, and didn't say anything. The conversation seemed to stop there. So I asked, "Could it be one of the Chinese restaurant folks and s/he learned about your class from his/her friend since you have a restaurant [family's children in your class] ..." She immediately nodded with a

warm smile, “Most probably; s/he does have a Fujianese accent.” And then she continued, speaking toward the principals, “So I asked him/her to leave his/her phone number, and told him that I can ask you folks to contact him.” Both principals said, “Right, right, that’s good.” Nobody, however, asked the teacher if the person did leave her/his number, or if she had her/his number now with her. The meeting simply moved on to discuss further details for the graduation ceremony next month. I certainly wish I had probed the issue with the teacher and the principals more.

Although the informal non-hierarchical structure of the school serves the tech-savvy and mobile Chinese professional migrants well, it is an invisible barrier for the other major group of local Chinese migrants. In the “Contacts” page on their website, one finds only the address and map of the Chinese school (actually the church facility), as well as a list of the board members’ titles and names, with no phone numbers or emails at all. The only way members in the Central City community would know about the school is through word-of-mouth or a web search. To get in touch, a community member would typically either get a phone number of a board member, or email to the listserv which needs to be subscribed to in the first place (following instructions in a word-document to be opened from the homepage of the school website), or drive to the school in person on one Sunday. All these may not be easy options for the person (probably a local Chinese restaurant owner/worker given his/her fujianese accent and unfamiliarity with the concept of email) who contacted the teacher. The first option seems the most viable one for him/her, except that for privacy concerns the teacher could not simply give out a board members’ phone number.

While privacy sounds like a legitimate concern in this case, I have frequently witnessed Chinese professionals who just moved into the area getting cellphone numbers of board members in casual hallway conversations or at the school's summer picnics or other events, often from other Chinese professionals who just got to know the new-comer on the spot. Trust and collegiality is taken for granted among Chinese professionals, while a Chinese person speaking with a Fujianese accent on the phone has a much harder time establishing his/her trust-worthiness of a board member's private phone number.

The lack of an establishment of a "Principals' Office" or other structures could also be attributable to Chinese academic migrants' lack of their own space, as the Chinese school community borrows the place from the church. Lack of funding from public or private sources is certainly the root of the problem. This group, as doing-well and well-behaving, seems to the mainstream society perfectly able to take care of themselves, in no need of external support.

Constraints of time and resource seem to prohibit the school from reaching out to the local Chinese restaurant group, for example by opening classes for their children during a time convenient for this group. However, last semester for example, when several children of the professional group were practicing for their musical competitions on Sundays (hence a time conflict with their Chinese lessons offered at the Chinese school), the school was able to accommodate the parents' concerns and requests by adding one class specifically for these children during Tuesday evenings. So scheduling on the organizational level is flexible enough to accommodate different groups, if there is a perceived need to be addressed. There was barely any Chinese restaurant owners hanging around at the Chinese school (per the numerous conversations I had heard at the

school, in meetings or at school events) or socializing with these academic migrants elsewhere (per my personal knowledge), for this group to raise the issue of scheduling with the school administrators.

The lack of representation of the Chinese restaurant group at the school thus probably better explains their lack of access to the services provided by the school. This suburban Chinese school, in the end, is not just organized “by parents and for parents,” as Min Zhou (2009) has suggested regarding Chinese schools in the U.S. in general. Instead, this Chinese school is organized by suburban Chinese professional parents mostly for suburban (Chinese and white adoptive) professional parents.

There might be some exceptional incidences though, depends on how we interpret them. Once at a teachers’ meeting, one teacher told how with “the Fuzhou boy” in her class, his mother has recently “put a lot of effort into helping him with his Chinese homework, and I can tell he improved a lot. He is more willing to speak up too. So parental support makes a big difference” (fieldnote, //2009). And after a lengthy discussion about school money issue and story-telling in her class, the principal summed up this discussion with a warm reminder to the teacher, “the Fujian MaMa, who helped with her son’s Chinese, we should remember to thank her specifically, right? Let her know that her son is doing much better because of her help.” I had not remembered to check with the principal how he understands the issue here, but one could interpret his comment in two ways. Was he being inclusive and sensitive to the Fujian population’s specificities in life here (normally no time or energy to help out with their children’s Chinese-learning)? Or was he being exclusive and arrogant in assuming that “our” Chinese school is about children learning Chinese and the Fujian mother is finally

contributing rather than hindering that mission of “ours”? I wish I had been able to probe more what the principal meant about the FuJian mother.

In either case, the use of names such as “the Fuzhou boy” or “the Fujian Mama” signals for the group of teachers how this “other” group stands out as not the norm in the Chinese school setting. Too few in number, or too weak in power, to have their real names (or voices) represented here. Another conversation in the teachers’ meetings also signals the unintentional ignoring of differences within community. Principal En was talking about how we should just have our children recite DiZiGui (a Chinese classic moral text he was advocating at the school for teaching to children) as they are intellectually able to memorize even though they may not be able to comprehend the texts yet, “the children we have here are all very clever. Their parents are good at study, and they are too. ... (fieldnote 2, p. 7).” He was speaking of the majority of the parents there who were indeed academic or professional migrants, but he spoke as if that was the whole of the group, totally excluding the “Fujian MaMa” (who may or may not have been good in her schooling, but the majority of restaurant owners and workers in the U.S. were not college-educated).

The very informal structure of the school is related to the issue of not having a space of their own. So confined were their weekly operation in borrowed Church spaces that I eventually realized the functionality of a utility room, which I barely noticed in my first months of hanging out there. This room was always a bit messy, with all kinds of teaching-related things stored in a small room (about 6ft by 8ft). I remember going in there the first time with Jiang Jiang the ex-principal. He was looking for something for us teachers, and as soon as I followed him to the door, I felt besieged by the stuff stored in

there. Along the small wall there were lined up a cabinet with open shelves and tons of books, a table with many things on it, and a file shelf. In the middle of the room stood a big mobile cart with a TV on top of it, a DVD or VCD on its lower shelf, and a vacuum cleaner leaning by it. For the little space that was left open in this room, I noticed all kinds of gadgets lying around. So much so that I could barely walk through to the book cabinet in the back of the room without treading on something. To make it all the more bewildering, someone seemed to be waiting outside to get a folded-up Ping Pong table stocked there too. I had no idea how that huge thing could fit in this already over-crowded space here. Anyway, it was an overwhelming scene.

This have-to-store-everything-in-one-room operation, did not register in my mind at first. But at one teachers' meeting with the principal, one discussion finally connected the dots for me. The teachers asked about the possibility of leaving kids' drawings and crafts hanging on the wall so that "[t] children and parents will like this place better" (teachers' meeting notes, 4/26/2009). The principal smiled, "I think so too, but, (to Xia as if for confirmation) we asked before, they (the church) wouldn't let us." Xia nodded, "right, they'd like to keep this place clean of postings like that." The teacher smiled regrettably, "If only we could have our own place" (fieldnote, //2009) This conversation started to connect things for me, and I thought, oh, that's why they have to store everything up every time after class on Sundays, because this church space is not theirs but only rented for hours every week, so they have to restore things to leave no trace of their using the rooms for classes. So the place will go back to "(white) Church youth facility" look. The principal then reasoned that "we only use it for Sundays, so it would be a waste of space, if we have one totally our own." So it sounds like an objective

condition for the operation of the weekend Chinese school, and they could do nothing about it.

The informal structure of the school surviving and thriving on borrowing spaces, while signaling the strength and resilience of the migrant group, at the same time conveys the marginal status of the group in the host society. Everywhere these children go in the U.S. society, it is very seldom that they can find a space celebrating their specificities and differences. In the words of the Principal's own child complaining about the "irrationality" of his dad's insistence on him learning Chinese here, "We don't even speak Chinese here in the U.S.. (When I go to China, I will speak Chinese.)" The many generations of Chinese labor, academic, business and artistic (im)migrant who have spoken Chinese in the U.S. do not seem to even be considered part of the "we" American mosaic, in the mindset of these Chinese-American children, who have internalized and painfully sided with racism in the U.S.. Even at the Chinese school, the celebration and performances are contained temporally, so that they cannot even envision the possibility that the Church might consider allowing them to leave their children's drawings and crafts hanging on the wall.

So the informal structure of the Chinese school, upon deeper analysis, masks two invisible processes and experiences of identity formation: social class and race. I will now move on to talk about the conversation topics at the Chinese school hallway and events, which shows a profoundly depoliticized nature, so that the Chinese school space are shaped and experienced as more like an extension of private space rather than a public arena as it is.

2. Enforcing Suburban Parenthood: Conversation Topics at the Chinese School Hallway and Events

It seems that many of my participants, when I asked each specifically what do they talk about at the Chinese school, would tell me something like “we talk about everything.” So the common sense understanding remains for these people that the Chinese school is supposedly an open space welcoming any topic. However, when I asked each to give me some examples, the topics they would list for me are far from all-encompassing. This speaks to the frustration of the parent quoted above, who was unable to strike the right cord in his months of conversations at the school. He finally realized, correctly, that only middle-class private concerns such as house repair are welcome there.

For example, Zhen, a female volunteer teacher, told me about the range and nature of their conversation topics at the Chinese school,

[The topics are] [r]elatively multiple (*za*). That is, if we have a good relationship, maybe [we will] talk about everything. That is, relating to children, family, every aspect, clothing, cosmetics, maybe all [topics will be] talked about. (interview 7/7/2010)

Notice that even though she said that they talked about everything, what she listed are in fact all traditionally gendered topics, often heard among mothers sharing with each other in the Chinese school atmosphere. Children and family come at the top of her list. But Zhen is actually someone with very broad interest, stating her hobbies (wishful due to how busy she was with her husband commuting to a city an hour away) as gym workout, swimming, walking, going to parks, mountain-hiking.

My own observation agrees with her list of topics at the Chinese school between mothers or female teachers. Here is one typical example on a typical day there:

Yueru and Jiemin are talking about the second child they each had. We 3 stood on the staircase and just talked. They both included me immediately and told me that somehow the second child always seem to have an “I don’t care” mentality about most things in life. (Fieldnote 6/6/2010)

Interestingly enough, although the hallway conversations at the Chinese school such as the one above seemed very open to the public joining in, the topics usually revolve around private concerns, about children and family in particular. And the most popular topic at the Chinese school is mothers exchanging information about enrichment programs for children. It always made me wonder, is the Chinese school a public or (an extension of) a private space?

Even with myself, I notice in my fieldnote that with teachers I tended to bring up certain topics while hanging out at the Chinese school and then other topics would only come up when we were socializing elsewhere. For example with Kuang, a young non-parent teacher I had become friendly with due to carpooling, once I complimented her on *her new haircut* while we were saying goodbye at the Chinese school. Sometimes while waiting for our carpool members to get ready we two would watch children play there and comment on *how much fun kids were*. But one time when we two took the bus together to go to the Chinese school, we talked extensively about her study at a local college, in particular, her struggles and her hopes there. So certain topics seem more acceptable or convenient at the Chinese school.

Another volunteer parent's response to my questions shows this point as well. When I asked Yanke if he had time to have talks (*liao tian*) with teachers and other parents at the Chinese school, he said immediately, "Sure, [we] talk. I love to talk very much (laughing)." When I followed up and asked, "What do you normally talk about?" He replied, in slow, broken sentences, as if thinking hard what to say, "Uh, talk – everybody talks about different things, I think. As for me, coming here, I'd often talk about – something here like, that is, how to say it – [it is] different for everybody ..."
(Interview 9/27/2009)

Seeing him struggling to sum up the topics for me, I offered what I had often heard from other participants by then, "Any topic is possible?"

He immediately nodded, "Any topic is possible. Like say, you, lately, starting with, like starting with the weather – 'It is getting cold' (imitating a chatting tone). [Or] what is fun out there. Sometimes [we] talk about, what did [you do] this weekend, what activities, or what's happening in the supermarket. Chinese school of course also has some activities, for example, summer the organized Barbeques; winter the Spring Festival; these are all topics, [we] all can talk about. ..." He then said, "And also [we] talk often about things in China, like when someone went back and saw what. Then [we] talk about [our] experience there.

As we can see, the topics that most often came up were what these middle class Chinese professionals' families do for fun and/or involve exchanges of practical information (weekend and supermarket activities, Chinese school barbeques and spring

festivals, and international visits to grandparents in China...). The fact that this male participant who usually sounds an eloquent and thoughtful person regarding many topics in life (for an example refer to his earlier quotes regarding why they send their children to Chinese school) highlights his struggles in telling me what they often talk about at Chinese school. I wonder whether he struggled here because he felt that what they mostly talk about were their everyday “mundane” happenings (middle class family activities rather than serious issues in their migrant life) so that he found it difficult to summarize for me.

Jiemin, a female volunteer teacher, confirmed for me straightforwardly that her primary topic with other female volunteer teachers at the school was “schooling – basically talking about kids, not much else ... Sometimes grocery shopping, or where to [go for fun], sometimes.” (Interview 5/23/2010)

Besides issues about children or family, health is another legitimate topic at the Chinese school. I once heard Jiemin, for example, talking with another woman whom I did not know, standing in the corridor between the classrooms downstairs. I went over and found out that they were talking about the extremely cold air conditioning in offices here in the U.S. during summer months. The women I did not know told Jiemin and me that one of her friends had actually got painful shoulders from exposure to the cold air every day, and that she eventually had had to suffer a surgery as treatment (fieldnote 6/6/2010).

The all-time favorite topic with the Chinese school community still seems to be suburban housing. This point is well illustrated by a conversation I heard during the

annual summer barbeque and briefly cited earlier. When I got to know one couple who just moved here, after my spouse and I talked with them about where they moved from, we talked more about how they were settling down here. Chong, the wife, started talking about house structure. She said she and her spouse wondered if, for the house they just bought here, they could add a balcony, as most of the houses there did not seem to have one, but they had seen a couple with balconies, which seemed to be added ones. Two women sitting at the bench by the food table heard our conversation and took up Chong's concern by advising her, "Yes indeed you could add one later." "Many families do that with their house." The two women looked exhausted and un-energetic, and they were not smiling when they offered their advice. But they still stayed long to engage her questions. No wonder that later on when the husband Kuan wondered aloud how he had failed to strike a right chord at the Chinese school despite trying various topics, he realized that he could instead ask people about his house's issues.

To sum up, the hallway topics at the Chinese school are often private-concerns which support suburban parenthood. With the few topics that have a collective bearing on the group's welfare in general, they are often discussed with the neoliberal mindset of seeking individualized solutions to issues of social justice. In Chapter 6 I will elaborate on how those topics typically came up in conversations and how they were usually addressed. For now I will move on to discuss the intricate gendered dynamics of the hallway interactions and school activities and events.

3. Gendering of Spaces and Activities at the Chinese School and at Events

The dancers (all females) were not practicing their dance. Instead, they were gathered as a group in the corner of the auditorium, near the bench, and were just talking heatedly about something (fieldnote 6/7/2009).

Even when I was a volunteer teacher at the Chinese school before I turned on my ethnographic researcher “antenna,” I had already sensed that the interactions and activities at the school has gendered patterns and consequences. As I started observations at the school, and as I began coding my data, I was often amazed at how gender matters⁸⁸ in how different members shape and experience the Chinese school space and annual social events.

On a more obvious note, the teaching staff and administrative staff had a very gendered composition. Most teachers were female, and most administrators were male, as I mentioned early on. For the Chinese language classes, all the teachers but one were female. (Sports teachers were all male.) And the only male language teacher was not a parent in the community, but a graduate student at a local university. That is, not even one father volunteered to teach at the school. Several did volunteer to serve in the school board as administrators. All teachers were mothers except for a few graduate students. Also, when Xuan had to take a surprise leave for one Sunday, I saw the principal ask

⁸⁸ Gendered fieldnotes! Copied from my fieldnote 2, p7. I now notice that I actually use more He instead of She in my note-taking in Chinese. When I translate, I habitually correct myself and write s/he instead, but in Chinese, my mentality, when I hear the participants say Ta (can mean s/he/her/him), my first impression seems often a boy image! I never thought of myself as valuing boys more than girls, but now I realize implicit socialization might have still made its inroad so that boys always stand out easily and girls have to win their presence, even in my understanding of participants’ talk and hence in my note-taking!

several mothers if they could substitute, but I never saw him asking even one father about this.

The one male teacher never volunteered to speak up during teachers' meeting. He seemed very quiet and reserved. When he did speak, he spoke minimally, or simply nodding when he must reply to questions or suggestions. While the principal was male, he seemed comfortable in his administrator position, and spoke eloquently at these meetings. However, while most female teachers and mothers there could comfortably engage me in conversations or social time, the male principal instead, is better in his eloquent speeches about values, commitments and strategies, but sometimes not so comfortable with plain social time (fieldnote 2, p. 20).

What struck me as even more interesting though, is the gendered spaces and activities at unremarkable places in the school, like the reception desk and the pool table in the hallway. So in this section, I will go through the major hallway activities to highlight the gendered dynamics and experiences at the school and its events.

Female-only ethnic dancing team

Early on in my fieldwork at the Chinese school, one of the male administrators at the Chinese school suggested to me that I should really interview the ethnic dancing team

there as well⁸⁹, commenting on the role of the team within the host society as well as in group members' lives:

They represent our school often in the [larger] community, they are invited to perform, so, cultural exchanges. ... [And their activities are]

⁸⁹ Somehow I was not able to conduct a group interview with the dancing group. After more than a year of my regular presence and observation at the Chinese school, I had one contact – a key member of the dancing group – who helped me set up a group interview for 4:40pm one Sunday afternoon, after their practice in the auditorium, that is. We agreed that it would be informal, and whoever from the group wanted to stay could stay for our interview. However, while I was hanging out in the bar area waiting for the group to finish their practice and at the same time observing and joining hallway conversations, all of a sudden I noticed that the auditorium was empty of dancers! I had to look around upstairs and downstairs before I was finally able to find my contact in the children's dancing classroom. She did come to me immediately, telling me apologetically that everyone somehow had to leave early in her dancing group. She said we could do it next time. Then we two talked briefly in the hallway outside the classrooms. I told her more about my research and my upcoming moving plans. She told me about how the dancing group feels to her – like a social group really. Despite the rapport we had built up between us along the years, and despite her key membership in the group she was not able to get a group interview for me the next week though. The next week when I went into the auditorium at our agreed time, the group members were getting ready to leave. I was confused, greeted my contact, and started asking individual members to maybe stay for a group interview if they were interested. My contact joined me in inviting them (apparently having mentioned to some of them about my intention for a group interview earlier), but no one else stayed. Even though a couple of them looked somewhat interested in my research, they still looked uncomfortable about the idea of a group interview. So my contact and I was left alone there, and we ended up doing a one-on-one interview. Thinking back, I now realize that it might have been better for me to go for a more formal channel by seeking out and asking the dance teacher instead about the possibility of a group interview. Even though my contact was a key member of the group in that she participated in the practice almost every week and was often the lead dancer in annual performances, I never knew about the group dynamics, in particular, how much rapport she actually had in the group. Somehow I never had a chance to talk with the dance teacher, who was new that year. She did not hang out much at the Chinese school except in their auditorium. And in terms of personality we two did not seem to go easily together – I am the low-key type, and she just seemed more out there kind of. But even with the previous dance teacher for the group, who was at the moment teaching children's class only, I had a hard time setting up an individual interview with her. I never got a chance to talk with her at the Chinese school either. She was a long-time key volunteer of the school, and always seemed busy, either talking with some acquaintances or ready to go somewhere (teaching or home). She seemed uninterested in my research, said no to my first request sent in email, and only said yes unenthusiastically to my second request (in person and several months after I sent my email request). But she did kindly offer to come an hour early for the next Sunday so I could interview her before her two classes. And she also gladly accommodated my later request to switch to meet instead at a local restaurant during a weekday lunch time, more convenient for us both. She was as nice and amiable in our interview too, at the end of which she insisted on paying for her own lunch.

There was some friction at the Chinese school about switching teachers for the adult dance group, and I wonder if that could be part of the reason that I had trouble getting to talk with the dance group.

not just for the community, but for themselves too – (starting to smile)

They come to be able to *gossip* among themselves too, and they really enjoy it!” He smiled and leaned his head a bit jokingly, as if to say, “these women!” (fieldnote 5/3/2009)

My observation agrees with much of his comment – the dancing team members often stay for long after their performances, talking to each other in smaller groups.

From the male administrator’s introduction, we can see that ethnic dancing, made delectable by de-politicized multiculturalism in contemporary American culture, serves to reinforce the larger society’s imagination and consumption of this group as another kind of model minority⁹⁰. Many female members at the school actively participate and take pleasure and pride in this representation of their group to the community⁹¹. Also, the ethnic dancing activities have somehow remained a female-only group practice. It has served as a gendered space for these women to collectively discuss their everyday lives and share their folk knowledges among themselves (or *gossip* as defined in the male administrators’ gendered expression).

⁹⁰ This strategy may also relate to their professional identity – How is a typical professional invested in public space? – not to rock the boat obviously (Sari Biklen, personal communication).

Plus, despite their minority status, they, like others, tend to think of being professional as an international identity, easily transferrable to any campus around the world. As one of my participants put it, “I don’t feel much difference here in the U.S. as in Europe or elsewhere. It’s doing research, anywhere is the same.”

Sofya Aptekar. 2009. Organizational life and political incorporation of two Asian immigrant groups: A case study. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Volume 32, Issue 9 November 2009, pages 1511 - 1533.

⁹¹ We could understand this group’s performing delectable Chinese culture as either buying into mainstream multiculturalism or as strategic essentialism, in Gayatri Spivak’s words, “strategic use of a positive essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest (Spivak, 1998. *Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Histography*. In *In Other Words*. New York: Routledge, p. 205)”

An incident I witnessed at the school indicates the closeness established in the dancing group. Once a child started crying because she thought there would be a gathering that night after Chinese school classes but her mom said no there was not. The miscommunication came out of a joke, as the grandma explained to me: when the all-female dancers were getting ready to leave for home, one woman joked with Yueru, “So whose house are we going to today?” and Yueru joked back, “yours” (fieldnote, //2009). This joke signifies how often the people in the dancing group get together in each other’s homes. Of course the child who heard her mom in this joking conversation mistakenly thought they were indeed going to someone’s houses again that day, as had often been the case after Chinese school day.

Gendered spaces tend to encourage private-minded topics among these women, given that most mothers are socialized to be family-oriented. Also, since migrating here many of these women had sacrificed somewhat in their professional pursuits to accommodate their husbands’ career needs instead, which could explain why many mothers among this group put extra effort into their mothering role (as I discuss more in Chapter 6 about women’s de-skilling). These dancers therefore often talk at the Chinese school about parenting. For example, one topic Yueru talked to me quickly about after the small incident that day, is the different care-taking style between parents and grandparents and the struggle this difference creates. So she and I was comfortable in exchanging comments on this family-concerned topic at the Chinese school, given that parenting was happening right there and then. But even without children around, topics at the Chinese school are still mostly of private or family concerns.

Chinese school also reaches out into the community when in need of dancer performers for their spring festival, again only for female participation. Qin, while in the Central City community for a while, only got to know the Chinese school because they were looking for dance performers for their spring festival event. After she started teaching there too, she was encouraged and even required to dance for later spring festival events, “They have specially a dancing team, then we were the extra. That is, teachers must perform. Teachers, after teaching, would all stay to rehearse.” Jun another volunteer teacher who was a graduate student at the time confirmed her similar experience. The fact is that most language and arts teachers there are females while sports teachers are males. Only the female teachers have been asked to perform. Year after year, the Spring Festival cultural performance they put up featured only women in adult dancing, even though the school also always arranged social dancing for men and women to enjoy dancing together afterwards informally. The one time that I heard of a man practicing dancing was from a male administrator who told about his experience only in an apologetic tone in our private interview, something like, “Yes I did dance with the group that day because they needed some men to join them” (Dan, interview, 11/22/2009).

(Usually) Male-only pool table game

In sharp contrast, the pool table game in the hallway was mostly played and watched by males only. This group space does encourage some limited sharing among men, as I had observed there.

It seems that, more often than not, the pool game only facilitates sharing among men who were already familiar with each other, with several being good friends in the (all-male) fishing club. Members who joined only infrequently – such as the bellman for that day and my spouse – did not often start conversations or get integrated into the group talk easily. My spouse only went with me a couple of times to the Chinese school. The bellman was the volunteer I described in my previous chapter, with whom I had a hard time initiating a conversation, even though he looked very amiable and obliging.

This man, even though he did stay with the pool game with the bigger group after my spouse left, barely struck any conversation. And for me too, as a regular face by then at the Chinese school, I could not join the conversation the new pool game group was engaged in, sensing that they were so familiar with each other that they did not bother to include us non-regular members. And this was a recurring occurrence as I had observed there, week after week.

And the few topics I was able to hear among these men playing the pool game are: looking for housing/houses, fishing activities, topics about which I barely had opportunities to join their talk anyway, even if they had indicated a welcome to game-outsiders like me. (At a few times, however, I was able to build some rapport when there were only two players instead of a group atmosphere. Both times I “joined” the game by watching and then commenting complimentarily on their stroke or empathizing with a difficult angle one player had to make his stroke from. Somehow I felt their appreciation of my understanding and enjoying their game, and I was able to later on set up interviews with two of the players through this connection.)

We could also see the pool table's lack of galvanizing power on one important day at the Chinese school – the graduation day. June 2009, a pleasant early summer day,

I made sure I get there earlier than 1pm, to observe the happenings before the event. I walked in and the hallway was full of people, mostly women, many familiar faces. My spouse went straight for the pool table. Nobody was there.

(fieldnote 6/14/2009)

It is obvious that many women had formed strong connections along the year at the Chinese school, so they could easily occupy the hallway with lively conversations. But as for men, most had not even come (yet), or were playing PingPong downstairs, or (the administrators and volunteers) were busy getting ready the stage and logistics for the performances. The pool table did not even attract one man until my spouse went there.

(Usually) Male-only Ping Pong games

With the Ping Pong tables downstairs too, it engaged only a couple of male enthusiasts who regularly go to the school either to coach there or to drop off and pick up their children. Plus, Ping Pong classes (for children) and games (adult and children) were held in the basement classrooms. I have limited observation of this activity at the school. As with the pool game, somehow this too signaled to me as a male space (before and after children's classes). Most probably because of my approach to enrolling participants (hanging around in the hallway on the ground level, besides snowballing), I have somehow not got a chance to talk with the Ping Pong volunteer teachers. After teaching the children's class, they usually stay to play Ping Pong among themselves while the

children hang around there, or help to put away the Ping Pong tables when all set for the day. I did however observe one semester-end Ping Pong game in the adult group.

Compared to the pool table or women's dancing activity, the space around the Ping Pong table provides much less time for playing or socializing among these Ping Pong players because most of the time it is used for Ping Pong classes for the children. So these few men could only squeeze in some minutes of playing either before or after class time. And then the tables would be folded again and put away in the storage room to restore the room for church use during the week.

Without a regular practice (such as ethnic dancing for women) to hold these men together and form bonding, men seem to typically socialize among familiar circles instead of forming new connections at the school.

The reception desk

The reception desk (with the school journal and the Chinese newspaper and magazines), actually had a gendered function, and was an important meaning-imbued and meaning-giving place at the Chinese school. I had often seen a man picking up a newspaper and sitting at what I call the "coffee bar area" to read it, all by himself. Seldom had I seen a woman do so. If I did once or twice see a woman reading the paper, she was only casually reading it while standing by the reception desk, ready to drop reading any time to start another conversation if someone came along. Of course some men behave this way too. The point is that the newspaper file serves an important function for the male participants at the school who struggle to find social space, while its place in the women's lives (and for those men who are more social or comfortable at the

school) is much less significant. Part of the reason could be that there are fewer men around the Chinese school to socialize with.

Therefore the reception desk is a symbol place where people can gather and talk, more often for males or mixed gender groups. Women instead typically just stood (in groups of two or in circles) at any spot in the hall and talk among themselves. Often in the quiet hallway during class time I would notice one person (often a man, but sometimes a woman) leaning or sitting by the reception desk, browsing the newspapers or files there half-heartedly, looking around once a while. Gradually I had come to realize that people who hang out by the reception desk by themselves were usually open to – or in fact waiting for – conversations when someone came along, while those who sit by the “bar area” may or may not be.

Unlike the pool table and the Ping Pong tables downstairs (which expect skills), the reception desk is a place that I witnessed most men feeling comfortable hanging around, by themselves or in small groups. For example, once after I finished a conversation with Teacher Kuang near the reception desk and we waved goodbye, I looked around and saw the big guy who just came last year sitting behind the reception desk, reading something by himself. He immediately raised his head and smiled warmly toward me. However at the time I could not remember who he was or how I got to know him. So I smiled back and then left him alone. But if I had felt comfortable initiating a talk with him, I was certain that he would be ready to engage me in conversation (fieldnote 6/6/2010). Even though he appeared to have been reading, he had been attentively heeding to the happenings around him in fact. So as soon as I finished

conversation with Kuang and surveyed the hallway, he raised his head from his reading and greeted me. He might even only be reading so as not to look engaged in nothing.

Reflections on the split and dynamics between the gendered activities

So the organization of space and activities in the Chinese school is very gendered, encouraging gendered interactions. Dancing is unanimously a female activity, so are most hallway conversations, and the pool table is almost always occupied by males. Xia is one woman who might drop by the pool table once a while to watch. It does not seem to be the case that men discourage women from watching or playing. The first evening when I observed at the Chinese school, when Rong was playing the pool table by himself, I watched and commented, and he engaged me for long in talking about techniques (as if I knew about them!) while he played more. Nevertheless, somehow, there have only been a few times that I observed Xia watching or playing the “male” game.

In the hallway at the Chinese school, the pool table looks not much different from the foosball table and air hockey table. How come that most players at those two tables are children (of mixed age groups) and women sometimes? As I sat at the “bar area” and wrote my fieldnotes or just observed, I pondered many times about the interesting gendered pattern I had noticed with these table sports there. I wondered if it was because many of these men had learned the pool game back in China, so they felt comfortable about playing it here instead of trying something new such as foosball or the air hockey table.

Comfort and skill seemed to be something that these Chinese academic men are always concerned about. Although the Chinese academic women also showed concerns

about comfort and skill in terms of joining the dancing group or not (as my discussion below will demonstrate), they seemed better able to overcome these concerns. So I also wondered if this gendered difference has something to do with the heavy blow to self-esteem that some of the men suffer here as racialized Chinese migrant men in the U.S. (as one of my female participant pointed out – details in my next chapter).

Whatever the reasons are, there is certainly a bigger space for socialization in the Chinese school for women instead of for men. When we think of the fact that there are about 70 families in the Chinese school congregation, there are regularly about a dozen women practicing dancing there (the percentage is quite high, more than 10 out of about 70 mothers), but only about 1 to 5 men around the pool table. Being a two-person game, the pool table typically engages only a couple of men, with a few on-lookers cheering the game mostly, and only having a few conversations on the side irregularly. But still, except for the Ping Pong game downstairs, it is almost the only space men can hang out at the Chinese school, so much so that after going to the school a couple of times with me my spouse had learned to head off straight toward the pool table every time he went to the school with me.

Part of the reason could be that men are socialized to talk about politics (and sports here), but the men hanging out at all at the Chinese school, they might think that politics here is not within their circle of influence, so why bother socializing and talking about it? As we will later learn in next chapter, when Dan's son, a middle-schooler, considered becoming a politician as his potential career choice, Dan found it so funny that he laughed many times about it, explaining the various reasons he viewed the choice as next to be impossible.

One wonders whether chicken came first or egg first. Was it because so few men hang out at the Chinese school, therefore few activities were developed for them? Or was it the other way round? It is possible that school business is considered more “mom’s realm,” so men do not even come to the school often? Like Jiemin said, “oh my husband doesn’t come to the Chinese school. He doesn’t like it here (for what reason? Wish I had probed more).” The female dancing group, instead, has regular break time during their practices, so they always have time to social and talk about things or issues in their lives during these breaks, that is, “gossip” in the term used by a male administrator.

Also of note about the dynamics between the two gendered activities of dancing and pool table game is that the women’s dancing group is often dismissed by men in other ways too, besides being labeled as a channel for gossiping, while I had never heard any negative comments about men’s pool table game. For example, one day after the dancing group left, when Kai a woman went back into the auditorium for more practicing, her husband⁹² said dismissively, “what’s to practice anyway?” Though he did turn on the lights in the auditorium for her. As the man walked past me toward the pool table, I smiled at him and commented to him that the dancing looked nice, even better when in team. He smiled back but only said, “yeh?” and he just went ahead playing on the pool table. I thought he was just not in the mood for casual talk, but then contrast his indifference to her dancing practice with what he did next, while playing the pool by himself: noticing that I was writing, he volunteered, “too dark there? do you need more light?” While it is true that sometimes people are nicer to strangers than to spouses (a

⁹² Obviously I have often been using the word wife/husband instead of spouse, not because I am unaware of the heterosexual norms in society, but because it is easier to write about gendered experience this way.

pity), in this case I do think that if I were practicing dancing there with his wife, he would have been almost as dismissive with me.

It is also interesting that the woman was herself not comfortable about talking about their dancing practices either. When she came out of her practice, I smiled at her, “It’s nice you folks dance together.” She looked a little uncomfortable, and said in a low voice, “yes and it’s good as a work-out too.” So she tried to emphasize the functionality of dancing as work out instead of acknowledging the pleasure of dancing and group support. Only when I nodded emphatically and saying “right!” did she become more comfortable and even invited me to join them.

So while every man can comfortably walk over for pool table activity if they want to, some women have to do it with discomfort about what others might think of them dancing. They have to quickly give a justification even when in the face of a compliment. And I can reasonably surmise that many women may have never taken up dancing there exactly because of this internalized discomfort.

Relatedly, a scene I witnessed seemed to show how little autonomy the dancing group has at the school. The vice principal, also a dancer herself, went for the signature of the (male) principal on a consent form that would mean agreement from the school to perform at a local community college. Because the representative from that college was already at the school waiting, the vice principal went in and interrupted the teachers meeting for the principal’s signature, with a tacit knowledge that they have agreed to it,

“Sorry but can I just have your signature on this? For the performance on Apr.

30th?” ... The principal said, “oh, that one! No, I haven’t agreed to that yet. They

only *initiated* (said in English), but I haven't said yes." The vice principal turned to walk out, "oh really? So they cannot have your signature now? Well s/he's waiting upstairs. Should I let her/him leave for now? Or you'll talk to her later?" The principal said, "This (the meeting) won't be long, 3:30 we'll be done." She said, already at the door, "Ok, so you cannot sign now." ... (Teachers' meeting, //2009)

But women do find their sense of self at the Chinese school, as dancers (Kai for example said, "I never knew I could do this before"), and, as I analyze further in next chapter, they find dancing at the school such a relief from their everyday stress that they would come to the practices every Sunday, no matter what. Yueru, one key member for example, (as I heard them talking in between their dancing in the hallway where a small group of dancers temporarily set up another practice area) when another dancer commented to her, "your complexion (*qi se*) looks good today," she smiled, "No, actually all night I didn't get sleep!" and yet she still came for dancing with all her enthusiasm.

When women are together about their dancing efforts, even when they are doing something physically straining, men close by do not offer their help, and women do not seek their help, as I often witnessed during my many visits there. So this group effort may also provide women a sense of independence despite or because of men's unsupportive stance toward their dancing practice. For example when one day the auditorium was occupied and a group of three women worked on folding a Pin Pong table set upstairs in the hallway and putting it away by the wall (to clear up some space for their dancing), it got my attention (even though I was jotting down notes like crazy at the bar area, about my carpooling with 4 teachers earlier that day). Downstairs with the Pin Pong class, the

3 teachers are all male, and after every Sunday's class, it was always the male teachers or administrators who fold the table and put them away in the storage room. That particular day, I had heard the 3 women talking between themselves while working on folding the table, so it was hard for anyone in the hallway not to notice their effort in that small hallway area. But, when I finally looked up from notes, I realized that all the while the 3 women were working on and talking about it, neither man who was right by them offered to help out. One man, in his 40s, was the bellman for the week and was then playing the pool all by himself. Another man was in his 30s and was reading the Chinese newspaper by himself sitting on the sofa. So neither of them seemed too engaged with something to help out. And none of the three women bothered to ask for their help (or mine) either. I figured that, if the man had signed up to volunteer for cleaning up and bell ringing, he may be reasonably obliging. So he could have had no problem offering help, or the women could have felt comfortable asking for help if they had wanted to.

While the fact that no one asked to or for help seemed weird to me as an "outsider" researcher, it may have signaled the dancer groups' sense of independence once they are together as women. I wish I had probed with the dancers more, but their habitual acts of independence seemed to have become common sense for others at the Chinese school, like the two men who did not bother to offer help. Of course this could also have happened due to men unwilling to give (or show) support for women's dancing efforts (as I witnessed in my first fieldwork note with Rong and his wife). So at the same time that the dancing practices at the Chinese school seem to reify gendered division of hobbies and social circles, they also paradoxically empower this group of women and strengthen their sense of independence from men.

Gendered hobby of cooking classes and child-rearing seminars

Another two activities that happened at the Chinese school were the gendered hobby of cooking and the child-rearing seminars. Just like (ethnic) dancing, (ethnic) cooking is encouraged in the women's migrant life by the host community and their own professional migrant community at the Chinese school too. I learned about this from an interview with a female participant, who also for a while hosted several seminars among Chinese academic migrant parents about child-rearing challenges. Chunteng told me that she once taught a cooking class at a local high school, and it was after she started teaching cooking weekly at the Chinese school.

Also Chunteng was once invited by a local middle school to teach their children some Chinese ethnic dancing there, and then the children performed it at the Chinese school's Spring Festival. She taught so well there, that the children at the Chinese school, who performed something else at the Spring Festival, said they would have liked to dance that dance, 'Why haven't we been taught that one?' All this I learned from a female volunteer teacher while we two watched the Chinese school's graduation party together. (Fieldnote 6/14/2009) So the Chinese school and their participants do help connect the Chinese community with the other local communities, through the performing and consumption of delectable "ethnic" differences such as ethnic dancing and ethnic cooking.

Ethnic dancing, ethnic cooking classes, or child-rearing seminars were taught or facilitated by female volunteer teachers, while with ethnic sports such as Taichi classes as well as Ping Pong classes and games, 4 male volunteers were in charge. When I myself

saw Xia and another mother playing Ping Pong there, I actually felt a bit surprised at the moment. Such a rare scene there.

Male-only fishing club

Chinese school also operates informally a fishing club, where all members are male. I will analyze in detail in Chapter 6 how Chinese academic migrant men are often drawn to the hobby of fishing, for now, I acknowledge that I was not able to gather many fieldnotes on the fishing club. I only noticed that at the Chinese school summer barbeque, there were also a group of men talking about fishing. They were seated or standing in a circle near the food table, most of them listening to (and nodding or offering a sentence or two to) Che talking. Che is experienced in fishing, and seemed the livelier guy among the group anyway. (Later on I learned that Che is the organizer of Chinese school's fishing club.) I recognized Rong standing among the group too, but knew no one else. I did not feel comfortable going closer or joining the group, since they were all men there, positioned in a relatively enclosed circle.

Mixed-gender Taichi practice

The mixed-gender Taichi team at the Chinese school certainly does not seem to provide a gendered space for sharing. I typically saw around 6 to 7 members there in the smaller auditorium, and about half of them were male (including the teacher), half female. Their break time as I had observed from the hallway seemed to consist of far less heated discussions as with the dancing group's break time. When I asked a female participant who joined only the Taichi practice what they talked about in between their group time,

she told me that typically they asked questions about certain Taichi moves or practiced more individually.

And a conversation I had with the volunteer teacher for the Taichi class also confirmed this point for me. When he told me about how his wife always shared with other women in her dancing group about children's education, I asked him, "with your Taichi, would you often, when taking a break in the middle, what would you often communicate about?" He looked hesitant, as compared to his usual eloquence. So to fill the gap I offered, "Or would folks talk about understandings about Taichi, or, um, ...?" He immediately said, "Yes. That, um, like with John, last time he wanted to learn about what are the features of Chinese Taichi martial arts. ... [Basically,] asking about [more] knowledge in this aspect" (fieldnote, //2009).

So the gendering of spaces at the Chinese school seems to encourage gendered bondings. So much so that in the mixed-gender Taichi class, there were seldom the heated discussions and exchanges about children's education as in the all-women dancing group's break time or in these women's gatherings beyond the Chinese school. Neither did I witness or hear about in the Taichi room the kind of bonding talk between men during their all-men pool table games.

Gendered cultural work: Spring Festivals and graduation ceremonies

These special large gatherings are held annually by the Chinese school. Spectacular events are particularly hard for ethnographers to grapple with and grasp the multiple layers of happenings and meanings therein (xxx 2008). However, I was able to notice the gendered cultural work this group of Chinese academic migrants performs year

after year. With the spring festivals, the Chinese school administrators put in much effort to organize performances and activities for the evening of celebration. Both male and female administrators had told me how exhausted they typically would be by this event every year.

Again not having a place of their own, the Chinese school usually hosts their spring festival celebration in the middle school right close by. The performance is staged in the big school auditorium, the dinner or refreshments⁹³ are served in the school cafeteria, and some social dancing is held in a couple of the classrooms. Before 2010 they had also set up activities on tables in the hallway of the school too, such as riddles, raffles and other child-friendly games.

The school's administrators and volunteers did take effort to put up an air of "authentic Chinese culture" in the middle school's building they borrow for this annual occasion. They decorated the front and inside of the middle school's entrance (and also the auditorium) with red paper lanterns as well as big Chinese characters (black on red paper), "*XinNian KuaiLe*." Also, as soon as my spouse and I walked in, we heard warm greetings, "*XinNianHao!*" (Literally meaning "Good New Year", something like "Happy New Year" but sounding more "Chinese" than it, because "Happy" – *KuaiLe* – was not an everyday word in China before the 1980s.)

⁹³ 2010 was the year the school finally gave up their tradition of serving mostly home-made dishes prepared by administrators' and volunteers' families. This year, they decided to serve only ordered refreshments instead, such as Chinese dumplings, pancakes or kabobs. They made the change primarily because, as the chair of the board told me, since the previous principal had left for another city **due to job relocation**, the administrators had been too overwhelmed with everyday duties to keep this tradition for the spring festival. The harsh reality or possibility of frequent job relocation looms large for most members of the community, and when it actually happens for a key administrator of the school, the whole community was left to struggle with his vacancy and even a change of school culture afterwards.

Interesting gender dynamic happens at this celebration too. While the 3 people stationed at the entrance to greet guests were all male administrators/volunteers, most of the people working for the stage performance were women and children. The decorations at the school were most likely hung up by mostly male administrators and volunteers too, as I witnessed a couple of them taking down some lanterns as we left the festival later on. When my spouse and I walked into the big auditorium, we saw some activity right down the stage, with a few women and children busy walking around, probably doing last-minute preparing or rehearsals. All performers and hosts were women and children, except for one man in a cross-talk show who was not Chinese himself but a Chinese learner. The audience included men and women and children. Most Chinese men were either just sitting there or talking with some other men. Women were often sitting, speaking or walking around with or watching their children. The auditorium was quiet in general, with adults and most children sitting there patiently waiting.

The other interesting scene that stood out was the seating and clothing of American families with adopted Asian children:

I noticed that the section to our right seemed to be mostly seated by white families with adopted children from China or Asia in general. Most parents sitting there looked white and middle-aged. Their children looked Asian, and often dressed Asian too with little *QiPao* (for girls) and *MaGua* (for boys). A couple of parents there dressed Asian too. Compared to them, most Chinese(-American)-family's adults and children were dressed casually festival, seldom in traditional Chinese clothes. I was able to notice little interaction between this

group of families and the general Chinese academic migrant families, before and during the performance. (Fieldnote 2/14/2010)

The seating patterns indicated that, despite some casual and supportive talk that happens between Chinese academic migrant parents and American adoptive parents at the Chinese school, the two groups remained largely unconnected in their everyday lives. The contrasting clothing patterns between the two groups seemed to suggest that, the Chinese families do not try to look or feel authentic Chinese for the spring festival.

The Chinese school, however, does try to convey that “authentic” feeling with the greetings, decorations, refreshments and performances. Even the program flier (printed in Chinese and English) featured in the center of its cover page a cute picture of a little tiger holding up a Chinese character “*Yin*” meaning tiger year. The program included mostly children’s performances (hosting in Chinese, ethnic dancing, and playing musical instruments), but also some ethnic dancing by adult women. Having the children play musical instruments was a practice tailored to the subculture of Chinese academic migrant families here, many of whom care deeply about their children’s enrichment programs, particularly their music education. Other programs seemed more targeted toward re-creating the authentic “Chinese culture,” to be consumed by Chinese academic migrants (for belongings) and American adoptive parents (for longings and heritage maintenance).

For the annual graduation ceremony in summer too, with its major purpose being “a reporting performance (*Hui Bao Yan Chu*),” the administrators hope to let “the parents see how their children have learned,” “Chinese culture” being a primary part of the

school's mission to impart to the children (Teachers' meeting, 5/23/2010) So the performances included a “teriyaki” of Chinese songs, a performing and reciting of the 12-*Sheng Xiao* poem, and a performing of a Chinese novel classic *The Journey to the West* (*Xi You Ji*) – its first episode actually, *the birth of the money king*.

But in this way, Chinese culture is presented in a static and unchanging manner, instead of fluid and constantly in the forming through interactions with individuals, groups and institutions. If the school had tried to convey how the migrant parents and their children experience “being Chinese” here in the U.S., the classes and performances would have been made more meaningful to both. For example, a presentation of the issue that one family had struggled with – the American school teacher's understanding of the Great Wall as a project – might have had invoked profound reflections from the families. I will discuss this incident further in my next chapter, but here is how one male volunteer recounted it to me:

In the U.S., many teachings about China are to a certain degree negative teachings. Before I left [with my family for China], [I said to] my daughter, I told her, 'I'm taking you to Beijing to the Great Wall.' [You know] what my daughter said? 'The Great Wall? I don't want to go.' So I said, 'Why?' She said, 'the teacher said, the Great Wall, Great Wall, Great Graveyard (said in English indicating it was the teacher's original words which the child told the father).' ... This, this, [is] very negative. Any big project gets people die, you know. The JinMen Great Bridge, ... were all built by the sweat and blood of all. (Interview with Yanke, 9/27/2009, emphasis added)

Chinese academic migrant families run into troubling issues like this in their everyday lives, but these seldom get discussed or represented in the Chinese school hallways, classrooms, or ceremonies. It is not surprising, therefore, that many children (and even some parents) do not relate to the mission of the Chinese school, “the teaching of Chinese language and Chinese culture.” Teachings at the Chinese school, probably like most other Chinese schools in the U.S. (as reflected in their most-used textbook), suffer an artificial separation of “Chinese ways” and the real everyday Chinese cultures here whereby for example these Chinese academic migrants deal with the stress and pain of the overwhelmingly negative teachings about China which their children are often exposed to in American classrooms (and media).

The gendering of spaces and activities at the Chinese school hallway and events is so pervasive, they support the Chinese school’s implicit organizing principal of tailoring to and shaping a particular kind of suburban parenthood. It is disheartening that, after growing up during decades of socialist instillation of ideals of gender and class equality, this group had come to the U.S. only to experience and shape their migrant families’ social life profoundly on the intersecting axis of gender and social class. In the next chapter I will detail how such dynamics at the Chinese school shape how the group understand themselves as and perform the “model minority.”

Conclusion

With the informal organization of the school, limited range and nature of conversation topics, and the gendering of different spaces and activities, Chinese academic migrants experience the suburban Chinese school and its communal space at

the complex intersection of multiple identities. Overall the social dynamics allow participants to emphasize a gendered class identity (based on suburban housing, consumption, recreation, and privileged schooling and education) and a national or ethnic identity (based on shared language and carefully performed cultural authenticity) over a racial identity. Race is “the elephant in the room” at the Chinese school, as my next chapter will show in more detail, in this group’s tactfully performing the neoliberal ideal immigrant, “turning to and away from power” (Cho, 2007).

CHAPTER VI

DOING WELL, STRUGGLING HARD: THE MAKING OF THE IDEAL IMMIGRANT

Identities are always constructed and lived out on a historical terrain between necessity and choice.

- Angelika Bammer, *Displacements*, 1994
cited in Wannu W. Anderson, 2005, p. 194

From the previous chapter we have seen that “innocent” hallway conversations and activities at the school, as well as its organizational structure, all turn out to be part of the process of place-making and subject-making in *the cultural production of their suburban diaspora*. Chinese school is a contested site of inclusion and exclusion. Instead of a public space as the participants claim it to be, the weekend Chinese school is a disciplined and disciplining space instead.

So I started asking, What kind of subjects are produced in this disciplining? What kind of power are they subjected to, in pain and in pleasure? What boundaries do they cross, build, negotiate? Building on Michel Foucault’s (1982) understanding of “subject” as effects and vehicle of power, my study reveals the making of a specific neoliberal subject – the ideal (im)migrant (or the so-called “model minority”) – at the Chinese

school and beyond. In particular, my analyses in this chapter are informed by the concept of “cultural citizenship” (Ong, 1996).

The anthropologist Aihwa Ong, based on Foucault’s notion of subjectification, developed the concept of “*cultural citizenship*” to refer to “the cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms which establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory. Cultural citizenship is a dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society” (1996, p. 738).

She highlights the “racialization of [social] class” (i.e., the conflation of race and class), happening early on for immigrant Irish Americans (“whose whiteness was in dispute” when they came as lower-class immigrants) until all the way to contemporary Asian immigrants (ibid. p. 739). For example, the training of Cambodian refugees at the refugee processing center defined them as “as potential low-wage workers” and socialized them to “expect limited occupational options and taught [them] subservient behavior” (ibid. p. 742). Even before these refugees arrived in the U.S., therefore, they were already positioned as “black Asians” along the white-black polarized social hierarchy in the U.S., as compared to “the model minority [hence whitened] image of” Chinese and Vietnamese (ibid. p. 742). Once they came to the U.S., welfare institutions (who in general favor women of color as care-givers for their children therefore) significantly disempowered Cambodian men. When Cambodian women take up these advantages and contest or discipline their husband, the newly-developed tensions in couple relations is often conveniently blamed on Cambodian men being too patriarchal. With these and other institutional processes in their migration, Cambodian refugees’

coping strategies here often leave them further stigmatized as welfare maneuvers and prone to divorce (ibid.). Siu (2001) went a step further and came up with the notion of “*diasporic cultural citizenship*,” in order “to move cultural citizenship out of its restricted focus on the internal workings of a singular nation-state,” treating it as “a localized process... in which the formation of a diasporic consciousness and community is linked to [global] geopolitics” (p.8).

This chapter depicts how the Chinese academic migrants perform their “diasporic cultural citizenship,” in their everyday struggles and how they deal with them: instead of contesting the institutional webs of power and injustice in their life, as resourceful academic migrants my participants repeatedly turn to (and encourage each other toward) technical explanations and individualized solutions, building on the support by the Chinese school community. Importantly therefore, Chinese academic migrants do not live out their privileges and disadvantages separately. Instead, these two inflect each other, with gendered consequences sorely standing out.

Again and again I notice such cultural production of (the making of) the ideal (im)migrant subject. In many cases, we will see that members at the Chinese school keenly understand what is valued and devalued in the U.S. (and the global society), and they work daily and creatively around much systemic injustice to perform “the ideal (im)migrant” or “model minority” in the U.S.. So it is not the culture of Asian values (obedience to authority, for example) they are honoring, but instead, this group of Chinese academic migrant is carefully performing the (inter)national cultural value of “democracy” understood and practiced often in depoliticized ways of engaging with mainstream politics and life in general – “infantile citizenship” in Lauren Berlant’s words

(Berlant, 2000, cited in Pratt, 2004). To copy Ladson-Billings' (2006) language⁹⁴, it's not so much the essentialized (Asian) culture of values, it's the values of (American and transnational) culture, that is highlighted in this cultural production lens, through which my dissertation understands this group's lived experiences.

Building on or (once in a while) contesting against discourses of difference, this group strives to perform the ideal immigrants. They work hard, they dress (and act) inconspicuously, and they seldom make collective demands. In fact, they dress so inconspicuously that early on in my fieldwork I realized that I had trouble noticing or remembering what most of my participants were wearing. And they always try to do the "right" thing, or explaining their problems as they individually have not done the right thing, hence needing individual adjustment, instead of noting and contesting unequal power relations. So it is either "accept it and get used to it" or "manage it better."

In this chapter, therefore, I will unravel how they perform the ideal immigrant in various aspects of their life. Specifically, I witness these academic migrants performing *the self-sufficient citizen/family, the ever-adjusting wife, and the proper parent*.

1. The Making of the Ideal (Im)migrants as Self-sufficient Immigrants/Family

⁹⁴ Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). "It's not the Culture of Poverty, it's the Poverty of Culture: The Problem with Teacher Education" in *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, v37 n2 p104-109.

Chinese school in particular, and suburban diaspora in general, facilitates the social formation of the neoliberal⁹⁵ subject characterized by “individual responsibility” and “family values.” This is in relation to both family and work, with the Chinese professional migrants negotiating the harsh demands of “flexible production”⁹⁶ (Harrison, 1994, (rev.) 1997; Soja, 2000; Banerjee, 2006, p. 425) including everyday overwork and frequent relocation with shrinking social services (Devault, 2008, in particular Acker’s article in the edited collection). The communal services – both material and social-psychological – available at suburban weekend Chinese schools around the country serves to fill the gap to release some of the stress of legal/visa status issues, overwork, relocation, childcare, taking care of grandparents, and identity issues. It is a site of “self-help”⁹⁷ for this group simultaneously privileged and disadvantaged.

As discussed in the earlier chapter, members keenly understand that only topics and issues related to “family values” are welcomed and addressed in the Chinese school space. Examples are children’s schooling, house, and family-oriented entertainment. This

⁹⁵ Lipman, Pauline. (2011). *The New Political Economy of Urban Education: Neoliberalism, Race, and the Right to the City*. New York: Routledge.

Peter Demerath, Jill Lynch and Mario Davidson. (2008). “Dimensions of Psychological Capital in a U.S. Suburb and High School: Identities for Neoliberal Times,” in *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, Volume 39, Issue 3, P270–292.

Erika Mein, (2009). “Literacy, Knowledge Production, and Grassroots Civil Society: Constructing Critical Responses to Neoliberal Dominance,” in *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, Volume 40, Issue 4, P350–368.

⁹⁶ According to Edward Soja (2000, p. 174), Manpower, Inc. (a staffing company which provides services including permanent, temporary and contract recruitment) was then the largest corporate employer in the U.S., larger than GE and other big companies!

⁹⁷ While the discourse of “self-help” and “boot-strapping” in discussing social problems is usually centered on what marginalized and underserved groups are supposed to do, here I observe that the disadvantaged yet also privileged Chinese academic migrants rely profoundly on the strategy of “boot-strapping,” individually and communally.

site thus serves as an affirmation and extension of the “traditional family values” as claimed to be the roots of Asian success in the U.S. through the “model minority myth.”

Historically, the discourses about “Asian culture” or “Asian values” has served to mask the rocky road Asian-Americans have travelled in transforming themselves in the American mainstream imagination from the “permanent aliens” to the somewhat assimilable “model minority.” International political economy is lived out in the vicissitudes of this group of people in the U.S.. Colonial and neo-liberal processes (globalization as is commonly understood), changes in U.S. economy and immigration laws (1882, 1924, 1960s, 1990s), and changes in Asian society all comes into play of how Asian-Americans are perceived and received in the American mainstream.

Furthermore, such a “model minority” claim, as Osajima (1988), Kim (1999) and Palumbo-Liu (1994) among others have documented, is an important puzzle in the conservative discourse of racial triangulation between whites, blacks and Asians since the mid-1960s:

The [Asian] model minority myth has always worked in tandem with explicit constructions of Blacks as culturally deficient. ...By emphasizing [the two groups'] internal sources of success or failure, both myths decisively shift attention away from structural determinants of group outcomes, including institutionalized White dominance. Racial inequalities have nothing to do with politics or power, we are told, but only with differences in group values. Asian Americans are thus wise to ignore politics in their pursuit of prosperity, and Blacks would do well to follow their example. (Kim, 1999, p. 121)

As Kim then powerfully documents, such a strategy features in the writing of a conservative author Thomas Sowell, an example of his writing she gave below:

[T]hose minorities that have pinned their greatest hopes on political action have made... slower economic advances. This is in sharp contrast to the Japanese American, whose political powerlessness may have been a blessing in disguise, by preventing the expenditure of much energy in that direction (ibid).

So Sowell was essentially saying that the Black population, who persistently demanded social justice, has suffered least upward mobility, in contrast to the “model minority” who (supposedly) accepted their political powerlessness and avoided wasting their energy in that aspect but instead spent it productively toward upward mobility.

Furthermore, Kim notes that, through such a strategy of racial triangulation, “[w]hen Whites then side with Asian Americans in an effort to push back Black political demands, they can come across as antiracist champions of the underdog rather than as acutely self-interested actors” (Kim, 1999, p. 122). Similarly, Wingard (2013) cites Hong (2012) in noting how the neoliberal notion of “family” as “a category of normalization for the citizen-as-capitalist” also works as “a category of exploitation for the non-citizen immigrants and the racialized citizen poor.” In particular, through the discourses of mainstream and model minority “family values,” the citizen poor are racialized as not only surplus labor but also as morally lacking, therefore “excluded from a privileged liberal subjecthood: [they become also] existentially surplus [in the U.S.]” (Hong, 2012, p.94, cited in Wingard, 2013, p. 30).

With the mechanism of racial triangulation, white privileges conveniently fade into the background when politicians, media and scholars advise minorities on proper (read: apolitical) strategies for ethnic advancement. As Chinese schools around the U.S. aides this group of Chinese academic migrants in their everyday struggles, these schools also serve to sidestep this group’s needs to become political in making demands to

improve their work and life conditions. Just like many conservative members among the South Asian Indian professional immigrants who chose to act the “model minority” (Gupta, 2006), this Chinese group also often performs the myth diligently.

One wonders, therefore, whether this weekend Chinese school is a “public space” for the community in general, or rather another neoliberal space in the larger American society organized around ideas of individualism and social mobility, as well as social myths about race, gender, class and so on. And does this in some aspects resonates with (and in other aspects differs from) the discourses of “Asian values” around Chinese transnational businessmen’s global lives that the anthropologist Aihwa Ong documents in her (1999) study?

1.1 H1B Work Visa Program: Producing Vulnerable thus Docile Racialized Labor

The stress of overwork with underpay and frequent relocation for this group of immigrants are often justified and even glorified through the discourse of Asian “Confucius ethics” of diligence. The American media often portrays Asian immigrants as keeping their cultural heritage of valuing hard work. However, among my participants I have constantly heard a different story. Many shared with me that, in order to stay employed here, we have to work double harder, because we are not Americans (read: white Americans). When I asked a man at a Chinese school group buffet gathering whether he was busy lately, he said, “of course busy – if not, it’s time for you to be let go,” smiling (fieldnote, 06/06, 2010).

Even after they have obtained Green Card (permanent residency) or citizenship, many among this group still recognize their disadvantages here, knowing that they would usually be the first ones to be laid off if their companies experience difficulties. Several administrators and parents at the Chinese school have told me how “lucky” they were to be able to remain in Central City for more than 10 years, when others had constantly moved around because of job loss or job relocation. When I asked Jun, a female teacher at the Chinese school who recently obtained her PhD degree in biomedical field and decided to follow her spouse and go back to China to start her career there, “What conditions do you feel are needed for those of your [Chinese] schoolmates who is staying here to succeed?” She replied succinctly, “The issue of visa status” (interview, 12/1/2010).

Besides gaining citizenship through marriage with an American (which are still very rare cases among Chinese academic migrants), the other viable and more typical route for them to gain citizenship (or at least Permanent Residency) in the U.S. is through employer-sponsorship. Chinese academic migrants, upon graduation, usually land on work through Optional Practical Training (typically 1 year) and then through H-1B work visa program (for up to 6 years) both of which allow US employers to hire skilled foreign workers on a temporary basis. Afterwards his/her H1-B work visa is only extendable if her/his employer has started Green Card application for him/her. Until s/he finally gets approval for a Green Card, the Chinese academic migrant is indefinitely in a limbo and vulnerable status. If s/he is laid off or changes job within the (often excruciating) years of waiting for Green Card, s/he needs to start all over again with a new Green Card application process tied to a new employer (if s/he is lucky enough to find one who is

willing to be bothered with the complicated H1B visa and Green Card sponsorship process). So s/he almost cannot afford to lose her/his job once s/he starts a Green Card process.

The employer-sponsored Green Card process has typically taken 5 to 10 years for a Chinese academic migrant after they finish their graduate study here (unless they found a faculty position which could make them eligible for faster process). Some who had suffered layoffs have taken up to 20 years. Furthermore, spouses of H1-B workers are legally not allowed to work in the U.S.⁹⁸, adding to the (financial and deskilling) stress of those Chinese academic migrants (often wives) who fall on the H4 visa as spouses. This policy thus further strains their spouses and families' sense of financial security and options of nationalization sponsorship, during their long waiting years for the Green Card. Before that, during years' of graduate study too, spouses of students on F1 visa are not allowed to work either. So it could be a decade or more of deskilling (and all the related family stress and strategizing), for someone who chose to accompany her/his loved one in moving to the U.S. for graduate study and then starting a career here.

As Banerjee (2006) documents, the current legal system of H1B visa program allows skilled immigrants to come to fulfill American businesses' (and sometimes universities') desire for cheaper intellectual labor, but these workers' legal status here is contingent on their continued employment. This system over-empowers the employer, the American companies, and makes the workers a very docile group as they sweat their way

⁹⁸ Policy is changing only this year with a small leeway opening up, primarily because of advocacy by Indian (im)migrants, who as a group is more proficient in English language (given that India had been colonized by Britain) and have had more voices and representation among social critics in higher education and in policy areas despite their shorter history in the U.S. as skilled migrants.

toward American citizenship. In Banerjee’s words about Indian IT workers who are similarly vulnerable on H1B status in the U.S.,

[T]he interplay between visa policies and flexible hiring in IT marginalizes this workforce, [a]s a result of their fragile immigration status under H-1B visa terms. As an employment-based visa, the H-1B makes these workers dependent on their visa-sponsoring employers . . . to remain employed and legal, which drives H-1B employees to accept severely exploitative work conditions, including wage cuts, . . . lack of benefits, and frequent relocations (Banerjee, 2000, p.).

Chinese academic migrants’ delicate work and legal situation in the U.S. reminded me of an interesting sign I once noticed at a gas station. The sign says:



<https://tveigga.wordpress.com/2015/04/24/smile-youre-being-watched-tips-on-how-to-survive-being-observed/>

As I was then immersed in my dissertation-writing, the sign immediately resonated with me as to how Chinese academic migrants are expected to behave as docile workers (hence model minority) under the watchful eye of visa policies. For students too, they recognize how hard and underpaid PhD research work is, and say that “all these [struggles], isn’t it because you don’t have a [legal] status (meaning citizenship or permanent residency)?! Once you have a [legal] status, maybe a *Master’s* is useful enough [for you to find a well-paid job here] (Dianyan, Interview 3/29/2009).” Speaking of one usual corporate policy (i.e., the sponsorship of Green Card is only available after one has worked with a company for a year), Dianyan had a sharp critique, “Indecent

[policy]. Because, think about the waiting line [for Green Card] [backdated at the U.S. Immigration Services], so much waiting! You can't run away [from your job/company] anyway, so what's not good about getting into the line a year earlier?" She understands that most Chinese academic migrants, once employed, become legally bound to their employer for years while waiting for the Green Card approval, thus suffer a sense of entrapment as in her phrase "you can't run away."

Such harsh work-legal conditions also result in constant relocation or fear of relocation, with gendered consequences. With their legal status tied to their keeping a skilled job, if they get laid off, they do not have the option of working a less skilled job locally while they look for another skilled job. If the one who will lose job is a male, usually he will try to get a new skilled job instead of applying for a "Dependent" legal status tied to his wife's H1B work visa. He will then have to take whatever skilled-job offer he can get at the moment. More often than not, this new job is in another state, so usually he will have to move. With this relocation, the wife often sacrifices her job and the children suffer leaving their familiar school and friends. Or if the man is lucky, and the job is within weekly commuting distance, then the family might choose not to move, but they would still live with the daily harshness of not having the dad around for the week (and extra rent burden). When it is the wife who is losing her job, often her family needs override her own career need, and she may not even choose to accept a job offer in another state, therefore often she takes on the "Dependent" legal status. Many Chinese academic women thus became full-time home-makers, letting go of their career dreams and personal/financial independence.

These dynamics of harshness in their work and relocation however seems perfectly in line with the media's championing "Asian values" of diligence, "family values," and "respect for authority," the alleged roots of "model minority" success⁹⁹. What I have observed, instead, is that this group often relies on the resources of the Chinese school to offset their daily struggles as privileged migrants living in disadvantage. Chinese school becomes their communal "boot-strapping" strategy. After a week of depleting work at their jobs and within their households, they look forward to coming to the Chinese school to get recharged, so they can be ready for another week of harshness.

1.2 Suburban Isolation and Enrichment Programs Frenzy: Producing Overworked and Stressed Family Life Driving to Places After-school and On weekends

While work-legal conditions are stressful enough for these families, family life is often not the oasis one would hope for. Other than the couple of hours of de-stressing at the Chinese school, Chinese academic migrant parents (often mothers) spend most of their weekends and sometimes even after-school weekdays working for their families: grocery shopping and chauffeuring their children to myriads of enrichment classes. Therefore, several of my participants told me that "Our weekends are even busier than weekdays," and many admitted that they work as drivers for their children's many enrichment programs after-school and on weekends.

⁹⁹In *Fresh Fruits Broken Bodies*, Seth Holmes (2013) documents another discourse - the Mexicans are short, so they are perfect for picking berries on the ground. With the Asian migrants, the idea of "culture" is proffered as the justification for domination, while the idea of "biology" serves conveniently in the case of Mexican migrant workers.

In the last section of this chapter I will discuss in detail why many Chinese academic migrants often feel the strong urge to sign up their children for so many enrichment programs. For now, I want to highlight that the fact that these families live in the U.S. suburbs keeps them dependent on cars due to social-historical reasons (Hayden, 2003; Duany, Plater-Zyberk & Speck, 2000; Putnam, 2000; Gallagher, 2013). These residential areas were required by policy to be separated from work and commercial zones, a policy which resulted from heavy-pollution days, even though heavy-pollution manufacturing is barely a part of American industry now.

American suburbs have become so isolated that (except for playdates with neighborhood children) parents and children have to get into cars or school buses to get anywhere for fun, learning, childcare or basic needs such as grocery and clothing. No wonder Kuang, one of the volunteer teachers at the Chinese school, exclaims, “It’s so difficult to go around here without a car!” (fieldnote 5/10/2009). Teacher Kuang and I also had a good laugh over our discovery that “(when you get lost here) you cannot ask for directions – nobody (walking or hanging around) out there!”

The 2011 Grammy winner, *The suburbs*, historicizes suburban families’ dependency on cars:

***First they built the road, then they built the town
that’s why we’re still driving round and round
and all we see
are kids in buses longing to be free.***

- Arcade fire, 2011 “Wasted Hours,” *The Suburbs* (cited in Gallagher, 2013, p. 79)

As Hayden (2003) explains it, it is not so much that suburban families chose to buy houses there (and live isolated and busy lives there), but rather, they have been living socio-historical conditions which have made other alternatives seem less desirable or possible:

Excessive private consumption [of suburban housing and living] was not inevitable [back in the 20th century]. It was [instead] the result of sustained pressure from real estate interests and their allies in government (and in industry too, like GE, car and oil interests¹⁰⁰) to marginalize the alternatives to unlimited private suburban growth (p. 18).

Therefore, Chinese academic migrants' busy weekends driving around are only part of the politics of the urban/suburban divide, which exacerbated their stress and overwork, with little time to relax. Most private developers since the 1930s, like Levitt and others, have profited immensely from building acres and acres of single-family houses (backed by Federal Housing Authority's insurance) while building minimum infrastructure (parks and commons) for these neighborhoods (ibid; Duany, Plater-Zyberk & Jeff Speck, 2000). There is therefore less and less street life, so families have to seek leisure and community, or to fulfill even basic living needs such as grocery shopping, elsewhere.

In conversations with my participants at the weekend Chinese school, however, most of them seem to take for granted the contemporary American suburban life (and the American dream based on it). For example, in response to my last interview question, "do you have one or two words in general you want to use to describe your life here?" they would laugh, trying to come up with words, and one participant said matter-of-factly,

¹⁰⁰ Americans pay only half of the real price of driving a car.

“Life is good here in the U.S.. Our house is big. And good environment” (Chunteng, interview, 6/12/2009). Never once did I hear any discussions (with me or among themselves) of their awareness of how the American suburbs came about social-historically.

So under such double stress in their H1B work-legal conditions and in their suburban family life, how do Chinese academic migrants still manage to perform the ideal self-sufficient citizens and families? Below I describe first their individual strategies of boot-strapping and self-policing. Then I move on to discuss how the suburban weekend Chinese school conveniently becomes a site of communal boot-strapping and self-policing.

1.3 Boot-strapping through Individualized Explanations and Distancing Strategies: Becoming OK with Institutionalized Racialized Job Stress, Family Life Stress and Social Loneliness

I want to enter my discussion of how Chinese academic migrant individually practice self-policing and become ok with their experience of racial inequality and/or social isolation from the experience of Chinese academic migrant men. Chinese academic migrant men do not have it easy here, as a wife keenly describes, “*(Chinese) guys they (ta men nan de) are very lonely here* (Xuan, Fieldnote //2009).” Even while several female participants made similar comments about men’s stressful life here with limited outlets, the topic of their loneliness and stress (often visa and work-related) does not come up easily in hallway conversations at the Chinese school or during my interview with most participants. The first time I heard about the mentioning of loneliness was when a male

administrator discussed with me how social life in big cities can feel very differently from that in smaller cities like Central City, where he mentioned that

If you go to big cities, on the surface it seems very prosperous (*fan rong*) and very lively/bustling (*re nao*), but in reality you are very lonely. ... *you*¹⁰¹ are very lonely, in reality. (Interview with Anyun 11/1/2009)

Yanke a male volunteer also told me about how in another city, when his family had gone shopping in a local Chinese grocery store, they had met another Chinese family who then “literally dragged us to have dinner with them at their house!” He concluded by saying that (as Chinese migrants) living in the U.S., “*you* are very lonely.”

For people who are more involved at the Chinese school, such as Yanke, Anyun and others who volunteer or hang out there, they can find some release for their otherwise lonely life. For example, when I asked Dan, the male volunteer teacher for the Taichi class, where or how he has made friends living here in the U.S., he replied that their family makes friends through “[*m*]ainly still the Chinese school. All folks travel together. Having fun together” (interview 11/22/2009, emphasis added.)” Dan highlighted that, for Chinese academic migrants, it is “not so easy” to make friends in the U.S. (particularly when one has started work and family, as Dianyan noted elsewhere). This difficulty seems to result from the little social interaction they have at work and also few associations they join for their social life (Dan, Chunteng, Jun, Anyun, ...). When later on I asked Dan if he also socializes with his (mostly American) colleagues too, he said

¹⁰¹ Distancing strategy – will be discussed further later.

“only sometimes,” and he mainly socializes through “still the Chinese school,”

“Company’s off-work social, yes there are some, but relatively much less.”

I found it strange that he had not much social activities with his colleagues, because earlier in our interview he had shared extensively with me about how Chinese academic migrants could learn to communicate better with their boss or with Americans in general. Our conversations for this part came out 7 pages in total! I asked him how come, given that his language ability was very good and his interaction at work was quite many, he still mainly have friends among the Chinese circle. His response resonates with many of my other participants’: “Mainly because, this [same] culture [we share], thus more convenient to communicate. Including language and culture, in this aspect.”

Therefore, most Chinese academic migrants like him have accepted their social isolation in the host society and attributed it to only “objective” conditions such as “language and culture.” They either do not recognize or shy away from discussions of institutional or personal racism. It might help to look at their experience of language struggles through the theoretical lens of intersectionality, i.e., their experience living at the intersection of race, class, gender, nation-state, language. These Chinese migrants’ academic and social life is very much structured by multiple power relations. Although language is the most noted cause for their feeling restrained, how they experience their language struggles however are inseparable from how they experience their positioning in relations of race, class, gender, nation-state, etc.. (See Edwards et al. (2007) in British context.) While most studies define “the problem of language” for Chinese students here in terms such as “their limited English” as if it is an objective issue, I suggest that the deficiency model is only blaming the victim. The problem is not so much inherent in

these students' language capacities as it is in the social relations they have found themselves in, where more often than not they do not feel comfortable striking conversations and deeper connections.

Back to Dan's case, his explanation of limited social life with his colleagues relied on differences of "language and culture," and did not cite racism as a possible factor at all. So I asked him how his experience had been, when we often say that in the U.S. everyone is equal, and all have opportunities. He replied in a serious tone, but with a big smile, "*Absolute equality does not exist.*" (Smile.) (Interview 11/22/2009, emphasis added.) This sentence (or "Equality is a relative thing") I heard repeatedly among my participants (Zhen, Anyun, ...), in reply to my above question. Zhen a female volunteer teacher in her 30s concisely said, "*Yes, all lives are equal, but all living is not equal*" (interview 7/7/2010, emphasis added).

Similarly, acknowledging the liberal ideal of equality but noting the harsh reality in contrast, Dan continued,

Everyone is equal, but absolute equality does not exist. Like for Obama to have become the president is really not easy. ...He has some extraordinary, that is, very high talents. [Only with that] [c]ould he have done this. (Emphasis added.)

He then commented specifically (framing in terms of "ethnicity", but seeming to mean "race" instead when he compared "minority ethnics" to "whites in the U.S."), "As a minority ethnic, if you want to strive for the same equality, as the whites in the U.S., that is not possible. There is some distinction still."

Later on I went on to relate to him how I reacted when I was walking to campus and a school bus drove by me and the kids on it stuck their heads out and shouted at me, I would first think, ‘because I am an Asian walking on the street, that’s why the kids would shout like that.’ Here Dan chimed in and commented, “*Asians’ character maybe is strong in sensitivity.* Indeed when I first came, I also felt the same. If others shouted, I would think, is it a friendly shout, (laughing a bit,) or a malicious shout?”

So our reaction tends to be similar. Du Bois was able to concisely theorize this kind of reaction as “double consciousness,” a burden which minorities have to carry on, living their life in constant doubts and worries. But Dan explained away my double consciousness as an essentialized cultural sensitivity of Asians.

He then went on to tell me how he had since been able to reason away his misgivings, first *by talking himself into believing that it is just a “bad luck,”* understanding institutionally-shaped racialized experiences as his individual incidents. Adding to that reasoning, *he also reflected on how in China or among Chinese some discrimination may be even harsher than what we encounter in the U.S.,* “For example, early on, Shanghai-nese discriminated against outsiders. For example, Chinese – now many Chinese discriminate against blacks.” With that note he concluded that, “*So, ... if you speak of absolute equality, without discrimination, it is impossible.*”

We then went on discussing this issue further. Dan emphasized that even though the current dark economic situation might lead *some Americans* to resent Asians and think that they had taken their jobs, “*the open-minded people* would think that it is a

matter of your competence. Because this U.S. it is a competition society.” In this liberal discourse of “individual responsibilities,” he is attributing racism to some individual Americans, while attributing open-mindedness (belief in meritocracy and hence supposedly immunity to racism) to other Americans.

Besides citing meritocracy, Dan also went back to his point of *not over-thinking*, “Without thinking so much, then your mood will be brighter.” This comment of his reminded me of what Xuan shared with me, about what she thinks that we as migrants need to nurture in ourselves, “the spirit of A Q,” a figure of pitiful contentedness in Xun Lu’s famous novel. Again, an individualized solution is envisioned and encouraged.

So no wonder race became the “elephant in the room” at Chinese school community¹⁰². Similarly, they barely ever talk about their (racialized experience of) visa stress or job stress which may explain their lack of energy or even time to socialize even with their Chinese peers here. For Rong and Dan, both of whom working in the corporate world, both only started speaking of stress when the topic of fishing (club) came up and they explained in depth about how fishing is unique in relieving their stress in life. For Anyun, a tenured faculty member at a local university, only when he talked about how the Chinese school administrators managed a division of labor did he bring up the topic of the stress of job insecurity for those working in corporate jobs, “...*With us [in] the*

¹⁰² A younger female volunteer teacher, during our interview, did speak briefly about discrimination relating to a very minor car scratching accident on a parking lot after which the other party speaking “very very ugly words,” like “get the hell back to your China” and also about her previous landlord “discriminating against these foreigners” (Interview with Jun, 12/1/2009).

Xuan, during our private conversations in my fieldwork, also spoke of “wherever we go, we get trodden down (ShouQIFu). Not to mention other things, at least your face, right? Tells that you are different. ... Actually, I grew up feeling like this – you know I grew up with my grandparents in ... [the metropolitan city], while my parents worked in the northwest. So the [city]-ese, they would look down upon me, they called kids like us ‘tag-on kids (DaiDai HaiZi),’ as if we were inferior. Now, us being here is the same thing.”

university, it's a bit ok, but in companies, if the work is held up, it's big trouble. ... So we will all share the [volunteer] work [at the Chinese school]. This way, the volunteering would not overburden anyone" (interview 11/1/2009, emphasis added).

So he seemed to suggest that a faculty position gave him some leverage in terms of negotiating work pressure, but a corporate job could be even more stressful.

Gournelos (2009) and others have noted the issue of "economic emasculation" for many men who seem to live a successful suburban life,

[The movie character, a husband in a suburban home,] works for an advertising agency in a cubicle, is close to being downsized, and is constantly aware of both his expendability and his lack of upward mobility (in other words, the betrayed promise of suburban identity) (Gournelos, 2009, p.).

For Chinese academic migrant men who have found a professional job here after graduation, their sense of loss is no less vivid. With the flexible work visa system in the U.S. (Banerjee, 2006), which makes them dependent on the support of their employers to gain and retain work permit and then sponsor their permanent residency, these men are in racialized positions particularly vulnerable to job loss and lack of upward mobility.

In Anyun's words, "here in the U.S. layoff is very cruel. Not much to talk about. [If they] [t]ell you to leave, [then] you leave (emphasis added)." He sounded so forceful and serious about this issue, so I probed into the current situation with the Chinese migrants here in Central City. Although Anyun was straightforward in bringing up the issue of the fear of job loss, he became very hesitant about addressing the harsh reality of layoffs and relocations which the members of the Chinese school community had experienced in Central City.

All in all, many of these Chinese academic migrants seemed to have learned to live with their job stress and the social isolation that they have found themselves in. To address their profound sense of loneliness, as compared to what some said they had had back in China, many have resorted to the Chinese school, the Chinese church, or their private hobbies such as going fishing, watching sports, playing foosball or Ping Pong at home.

I want to finish this section with discussions on 3 distancing strategies Chinese academic migrants typically use to offer individualized solutions or understandings of their lived experiences within institutional webs of power relations: switching to use you instead of we/I when speaking of personal painful experiences; joking through dark humor (hence dis-identifying with the pain); and individualizing (often objectifying) problems, diagnosis and solutions.

DISTANCING STRATEGY #1: “We... You ...” – Cross-border lives, cross-boundary articulations

The suburban Chinese school is a site of complex articulations (Hall, 1990) of Chinese academic migrants’ *transnational* struggles with socio-historical and geographical contingencies and specificities. An interesting phenomenon I have noticed in my participants’ talk is the constant switching of the use of pronouns between “you”/“your” and “we”/“our”, when the participants are explaining their understandings of their life here as migrants. A pattern seems to emerge that, particularly among male participants, whenever they had to talk about their struggles, they tended to switch to the use of “you,” or simply omit the subject of the sentence, as is a common practice in Chinese language. Whenever they were speaking of positive aspects of their lives,

however, they would more often use “we” or “I”. It seems that there is a disengaging (i.e., distancing-from) strategy they use when it comes to negative things in their lives, and an embracing (i.e., identifying-with) stance when it comes to positive things.

Recall the same paragraph when one participant explained to me about why he thinks it important for his children to come and learn Chinese at the school,

...**We** hope for our own children to keep **our** own tradition, family’s *legacy*, country’s tradition. ...So, so, particularly when living abroad, if without this kind of things, in some circumstances, **you** might think whether this is the place *I* should reside in. If in this situation, what could **you** do? If so, must [in the] *back of your mind*, **you** need to know where **your background** is¹⁰³. This I think, if without this, [**you**] will feel relatively lost and frustrated (ShiLuo). (Italicized words without bold are those he spoke in English, Italicized words with bold is added emphasis).

In this case, for example, when the male participant were speaking of the first aspect (that he thinks explains the need for his children to come to Chinese school), i.e., to keep family’s legacy and country’s tradition, he proudly repeated several times “our,” identifying strongly with what he was talking about. After he started to bring up the second aspect, i.e., to negotiate feelings of displacement and struggles around alienation as migrants (“whether this is the place I should reside in”), he switched to use “you”

¹⁰³ Michaels, Walter Benn. 2006. *The trouble with diversity: How we learned to love identity and ignore inequality*. Metropolitan Books.

instead as the subject, as if this were not something that concerns himself or his family as well. He also adds the word “relatively” before the word “lost and frustrated,” to make the feelings of alienation sound not so painful or acute.

This same phenomenon happens repeatedly with many other participants’ talk as well. It made me wonder whether this relates to their professional identity, the need to feel that “we are doing ok.” Therefore they might struggle to even talk about their feelings of alienation at all, unless framed as a distanced problem “you” might experience.

Here is another example with a female volunteer teacher. When I asked her in our interview, “Living and working here, which aspects do you feel not so convenient or relatively frustrating?” She responded,

I think it’s still language. ... Like for *us* in the lab, *it is ok*, in everyday work we don’t have that much communication ... just *you* do things by *yourself*. But it’s still not like in *your* own language, not as free. Because *you* cannot easily tell a joke or kid someone. And the humors others laugh with, *you* cannot understand (ti hui) it. ... *But, having gotten used, it’s ok.*

(Interview with Chunteng, 6/12/2009, emphases added)

Besides the distancing strategy, what is most interesting is that, in the end of her painful narration, she concluded that, “*But, having gotten used, it’s ok.*” So once again, she shoves her pain aside and instead reasons to herself or to me that “it’s ok.” Instead of allowing further discussion of our collective situation here as migrants on the margin, she closed off the conversation with a statement of “we are ok” or “we can deal with it.”

A similar example came up in my interview with Anyun, the male administrator at the school. When I asked him, “in your study, work and life, what have been relative struggles for you...?” He replied in a very low voice,

For Chinese, actually teaching is quite laborious, ... particularly if *you* teach undergrads, *you* also have to *motivate* them, *you* also have to give them *entertainment*. This is a *challenge*. ...[The] kind of upgrading, if it were *my* own culture, for example, if *I* were to teach in Chinese, then for *me* would be very *easy*. ... (Interview with Anyun, 11/1/2009, emphases added)

He ended by highlighting his competence in teaching, “students do quite like the way *I* teach. *I* teach vividly, getting at depth yet with easy language or providing easy access,” and even repeating the last sentence to stress his point. Just like the female volunteer teacher at the school, he also tried to downplay his struggle by conveying a sense of “I’m ok, I can handle it.”

DISTANCING STRATEGY #2 - Joking: “Just getting older (laughing). ... It’s actually, I didn’t *manage* (Italic word said in English) well.”

Often my participants rely on another distancing strategy – a joking tone – to offset the painful feeling or experience discussed, if the discussion ever came up at all, and then often they would move on to the ever-so-useful individualizing strategy.

Recall earlier one of participants was cited as saying jokingly that of course “(my) work is busy, if not, *you’d* be let go.” The next rational (individual) strategy seems

naturally to work even harder at your job so you will not become unemployed (which for Chinese migrants on H1B visa is a *legal* nightmare besides threatening their livelihood).

Similarly, when Yueru (an IT worker) told me how she felt sick last weekend and her spouse had to take her to the hospital, I got concerned and asked what had happened with her. She shrugged her shoulder, “*just getting older!*” laughing a bit. When I said to her, “You are working too hard, maybe.” Yueru shook her head, smiling, walking toward the auditorium to join her dancing group but finished our conversation with this response, “Not really, it’s actually, I didn’t *manage* well (Italicized word her own, said in English, fieldnote, //2009).”

Instead of questioning their collective day-to-day struggles, my participants tend to individualize their situation, either joking about it, saying for example “I’m getting older,” or suggesting that they could do better, “I didn’t manage well.” This professional language, “I can manage” (better), is a language prevalent among them, which fits well with neoliberal discourses of self-responsibility and boot-strapping.

DISTANCING STRATEGY #3 - Language of self-help: individualizing problems, diagnosis and solutions

This language of self-help does not come from nowhere. “During the late twentieth century, minorities in the United States have been told to stop complaining about oppression and to start drawing upon inner strengths” (Liu, 1994/2005, p. 322). So the advance made by the civil rights movement has been gradually pushed back through such a discourse of “model minority” (vis-à-vis the “un-deserving” minorities). Chinese academic migrants, with their privileged background, seem particularly good at being

“hardworking, bootstrapping, successful” (Ono, 2005, p. 11) as per the “model minority” myth.

As an another example, while we both hang out at the hallway watching the dancing group practice, Meizhuo wondered with me about her status issue, whether she needed to get a new visa to visit Hongkong, now that she is in EAD status in her green card application process. Immigration status has been made so complicated a system, it discourages collective effort but instead encourages individual differentiation and meritocratic thinking among these Chinese academic migrants.

In Meizhuo’s case, she first gave me a long explanation of her confusion about her visa and Green Card issue, given that she is from Hong Kong, not from mainland. I then suggested to her only individualized solutions, like writing to the first lady for her green card issue. And when I finally understood that there was this difference of visa length between visa for mainlanders and visa for Hongkongese, I took the difference for granted, and just made a comparison, without any questioning of the complicating visa system. I also offered assurance, “But EAD is almost as certain, so no worry then,” as group members typically do, when we hear about each other’s struggles, instead of taking the issue apart and analyze it collectively. But what is most interesting and the key point I am trying to show here, is that she finished off her explanation to me this way, *“It’s this complication, but I can certainly do it. I just have to know which way is ok”* (fieldnote, //2009, emphasis added).

So once again, the “I can manage it” professional mentality for these migrants: “complicated yes, but I can handle it, just need information.” This group thus is

disadvantaged yet privileged. Our/Their privileges actually offset and exacerbate our/their disadvantages at the same time – because our/their discussion allowed no collective complaining leading to political solutions. Instead, we discussed the struggles as only individual ones, and hence individualized solutions. There is no opening for a discussion of how unfairly complicated the system is made into for this group of Chinese academic migrants.

The discussion around another case of visa struggle went similarly:

Once I learned that Zhen, the female teacher I quote at the beginning of this section, would visit China soon and so she went to Canada to apply for U.S. visa so that she would not have to bother applying for it during her short trip in China (fieldnote 3/29/2009). This is a common practice among Chinese academic migrants here and the risk is usually small. However, in her case somehow she got denied a visa, so she could not come back to the U.S. from Canada to prepare for her China trip, but instead had to leave for China from there.

Another teacher Meizhuo was also there when the school's principal shared with me the disappointing news. We all share the understanding that status is a big deal in our lives. (For Zhen now, her life and her plan were all of a sudden disrupted by this status issue, her family distressed, as the principal said, "So she cannot come back now. It's so unexpected.") So both Meizhuo and I asked, "So what can Zhen do now?" When the principal said, "She has to go back to china now, and apply for her visa there," Meizhuo asked further, "Is she legal in Canada? What status is she in? L?" (fieldnote, //2009)

Despite our shared understanding that status is a big deal in the lives of every one of us as Chinese academic migrants, we talked about the issue in a way as if it were Zhen's individual issue. None of us three "complained" about it (to take it up as a collective issue). Instead, we were only concerned about Zhen's individual situation and solution in this issue. The next weekend, when I asked the principal how Zhen's situation is now, he simply said he had not heard about how she is now. We then went on to talk about his own visa issue, that he needed to get Chinese visa now that he is an "American". This shows a lack of communal attention to community members' heart-wrenching struggles around these legal status issues.

The complicated visa and green card system also presents itself as individualized, processual, and merit-based, so that it discourages collective deliberation or action. Instead, it encourages a individualized Compare and Competition mentality. Also, the immigration status is such a complicated system, it is very hard to know other people's status for sure, as Meizhuo asked in this case, "Is she legal in Canada? What status is she in? L?" Everybody is in a different situation. Also, as time changes, visa rule keeps changing too, makes it even harder for this group of migrants to relate to each other's different experience of the visa issue.

When discussing their cultural shock upon coming to the U.S. too (a sharing that rarely happens at the Chinese school though, except the few time I carpooled with the younger teachers), members tend to individualize the problems and solutions. For example, while I was driving, Teacher Kuang and I had a good laugh over our discovery that "(when you get lost here) you cannot ask for directions – nobody (walking or hanging around) out there!" We two then enjoyed talking about our need for fresh air vis-

à-vis living in (what we found to be over-) air-conditioned indoor environment in the U.S.. Kuang said, “Well I’m assimilated (TongHuaLe) now, but I used to care about fresh air too, when I first came here to the States! I don’t know why Americans don’t like to open their windows. When I first came here, I always felt like living in the cellar! (Laughing.) The campus buildings never have any fresh air inside” (fieldnote, //2009). I commiserated with her laughingly .

Neither of us went any deeper about the fact that America is so suburbanized and subsidized into “a country on wheels” (Hayden, 2003) (and “a country on air-conditioning” as her comment indicated). Nor did we discuss the environmental impact and the international imbalance of consumption of oil or other sources of energy¹⁰⁴ have both raised alarming accounts from critics both in the country and worldwide. Instead we just let us conversation stay on the joking level of “What a shock it was for me,” and “I’m assimilated now.”

Similarly, during many teacher’s meeting and parents’ hallway discussions on how to get the children interested in learning Chinese (one major struggle of Chinese academic migrants here in the U.S.), the discourses are usually individualizing. Often I heard teachers or principals saying, “*how well the children speak Chinese really depends on their vocabulary*” (fieldnote, //2009). Another conversation at the teachers’ meeting illustrated more interesting dynamic, but in similar gist, ranging from suggesting that

¹⁰⁴ While Central City is a medium-sized city with quite a sizeable population of students and refugees without cars, the city public transportation remained notoriously inconvenient. When I once tried to get to the suburban Chinese school on buses from my residence close to a local university and close to another suburb, I needed to transfer twice, meandering to city center before heading out into the suburb again, walking substantial distance at the end of bus transportation. In total it took me one hour and a half, for a 20 minute car ride. For many refugees conditioned to work low-pay exhausting jobs, this is a daily reality for them.

have parents engage children by “*watch[ing] some Chinese TV series at home*” to even “*rent[ing] grandparents* (from other families who are lucky to have grandparents here with them)!” After a room of laughter, the vice principal said more seriously, “Those children with grandpa and grandma here are best in Chinese, and those whose parents care are second best” (fieldnote 4/26/2010).

When the problem (and hence solution) is seen as with individual families, then it becomes hard for the group to envision collective actions to address the deep-rooted problem (that these children are not interested in learning Chinese). So the group could only either offer kidding solutions (rent grandparents), or practical solutions (increase children’s vocabulary, watch Chinese TV). Seldom was the marginalization of their language discussed. Most of them are uncomfortable about the topic of inequality or discrimination. As the principal once said, “My son actually told me, ‘Why do you keep pushing me here? We don’t even speak Chinese here. Once in China, I’ll speak Chinese!’” (fieldnote, //2009). The many generations of Chinese labor, academic, business and artistic (im)migrant who have lived and spoken Chinese in the U.S. do not seem to even be considered part of the “we” American mosaic, in the mindset of these Chinese-American children, who have internalized and painfully sided with racism in the U.S.. How could parents and teachers expect children in such mindset and social environment to want to learn Chinese then¹⁰⁵?

1.4 Chinese School: a Site of Communal Boot-strapping and Self-policing

¹⁰⁵ Therefore my suggestion or feedback to the group, as requested by the principal’s consent letter, ...

As vulnerable as Chinese academic migrants often are, strained by their H1B disciplined work-legal conditions and by their over-driven (literally and figuratively) suburban family life, this group has resorted to great lengths of individual boot-strapping to perform the ideal self-sufficient citizens and families. The suburban weekend Chinese school, on the other hand, provides a site of communal boot-strapping, in addressing their stresses of frequent job relocation, overdriven family life, childcare and even care for grandparents. With all the social support they get from the Chinese school community, a migrant life often so disciplined and stressful becomes live-able for many of them. Therefore they were able to maintain a façade of “doing well” and thus continue to “behave well” – performing the “model minority.” The communal boot-strapping through de-stressing and resource-sharing therefore might discourage a need for political actions for social change. And the language and topics at the Chinese school are so oriented toward private life concerns, the communal life itself constitutes an implicit self-policing for the group.

The Chinese school community thus provides a precious opportunity during their busy weekends where families can get some de-stressing while also getting their practical needs met (having their children learn Chinese here). For example, when I asked members at the school why they bothered to come to help out or hang out at the school when they were all so busy with life, several participants offered this reply, “For me, coming to Chinese school on weekends is actually very relaxing for the week,” hinting at the stressful work they do every day at home and at work. While I observed one dancing practice out in the hallway, I even heard one member (an IT worker) telling another that she “had had no sleep at all the previous night,” and yet she still came for the practice

with all enthusiasm (Fieldnote //2009). When I asked a father, “So you come to the school often?” he smiled, “Yes, I have my kids studying here. And it’s nice to see all the people here.” (Yanke, fieldnote 5/3/2009) This participant enjoys coming to the school on Sundays, even though – as I heard earlier in a hallway conversation – he told En that work is always busy, and he also told me jokingly in our interview later that, for him, weekends only mean “more [lab] labor.” (Fieldnote 5/3/2009, Interview 9/27/2009)

One major stress the Chinese school helps to relieve is the pressures of frequent relocation. Newcomers have often told me how appreciative they are of the existence of a Chinese school here with all kinds of resources and advices available to smooth out their move-in. As one new-comer explained to me how he came to know Kun the previous principal and the Chinese school, “When I first came to Central City, Yueran told me, ‘you have to know this person if you are coming to Central City.’ Kun, of course!” (Yanke, fieldnote 5/3/2009). He and I both laughed.

Recognizing their vulnerability to constant job loss and/or job relocation, Chinese academic migrants have collectively turned Chinese schools around the U.S. into communal resource centers to address those struggles. As the vice Principal explains, “Yes, when you come here as students, you look for the Chinese Student Association on campus. But for families¹⁰⁶, whenever they move to some place, they look for the Chinese school first.” (Interview with Yun and Zinuo, 7/13/2009) Many administrators and parents also used the language that new-comers would feel “at home” once they found the Chinese school. Typically, new-comers would get extensive advice on which

¹⁰⁶ And once again, she is talking about (and taking for granted) the group of Chinese academic and/or professional migrants, not about the other significant group of Chinese restaurant owners and workers.

suburb to buy their house in, with due consideration of “good school districts” for their children to go to, and with many Chinese families living nearby for their family to socialize with.

For people who are in the middle of looking for a job too, the Chinese school serves as a resource center, where people get encouragement and information. The discussions I heard were usually very individualistic. The advice given was that *one* just had to try harder. There was no collective discussion about how come the job market had been so down, or how difficult it was for a Chinese without Green Card (legal status of permanent residency) to find a job here. Among this group of migrants, these harsh realities (economic and social injustices and instabilities on a global scale and with local manifestations) seemed to be tacitly taken for granted and accepted as is.

Importantly therefore, Chinese academic migrants do not live out their privileges and disadvantages separately. Instead, these two inflect each other. For example, the discourse of suburban parenthood, while reinforcing their class privileges, also enforces practices of privacy and neoliberal values. This means that discussions about their disadvantages or other aspects of their everyday lives are effectively excluded except when framed in de-politicized questions and answers about where to send their children to school/programs or how to fix a house (as in the case of the new-comer parent who struggled to strike a chord in hallway conversations at the school). Suburban weekend Chinese schools around the U.S. therefore serve as important sites of *the cultural production of the suburban diaspora* by these Chinese academic migrants.

These practices further signify, for both Chinese academic migrants and for the larger society, the “ideal” (im)migrants who can take care of “their own problems.” The social costs of neoliberal restructuring thus are borne communally by this professional group, rather than discussed and resolved in political terms on a local or national scale (as is often the strategy of marginalized and underserved groups, featured by events such as A Day without Immigrants or by community centers such as the one represented in Geraldine Pratt’s (2004) study of Philipina live-in care-workers’ activism in Canada).

Not only does the Chinese school help to release the stress of overwork (at job and at home) and frequent relocation, the Chinese school actually becomes an effortless communal child-care space because there are always some parents hanging out the hallway. Before and after class (and during a sibling’s class), I have often noticed in the hallway children hanging out there with each other, with or without direct parental supervision. These children would play the piano, air hockey, pool table, hide and seek, or just running around, or improvising games, all by themselves. It was also not a rare happening to see a parent searching through the Chinese school with a puzzled but not worried look, wondering where she had lost her child. Once one parent, when I noticed her searching and asked her “where is ... (her child’s name)?” She just smiled and said, “I don’t know,” and then made a flying gesture with both her arms, smiling toward me. So I laughed, “Flew away?” She shook her head smiling, and walked back downstairs to search again but still free of worries (fieldnote, //2009). And even for the class time too, teachers have suggested that some parents send their children there for child-care instead of for Chinese-learning. Parents can then get the precious freedom of 2 hours during which they can get things done without worrying about their children.

Of course they also get child-care help from friends they have made at the Chinese school. Yun in fact, told me that she would prefer to leave her children with her dancing team friends (interview 5/15/2010). The temporary help with child-care they could depend on their Chinese school friends for might seem insignificant, but I was able to appreciate its importance when Dianyan explained the difficulty of finding help among friends for child-care:

Here, if you go to classmates [for help], all are striving hard (*fen dou*) [so it would be imposing extra burden for us to ask for their help with child-care]. Here, that is to say, all [our friends] are those who have come abroad. (Interview 3/29/2009)

Dianyan's words not only signifies the difficult early years Chinese academic migrants experience when starting to have children while in their early career, but also hints at how isolated Chinese academic migrants are from social life outside their peers (who were similarly in their early struggling years), so they do not have anyone else to request child-care help from. Unlike in traditional Chinese ways where childcare help from grandparents is often taken for granted, Dianyan explained to me in our interview how limited she felt her living in the U.S. was,

Limits are many. Not just the issue of status. ... To put it simply, you in china would have someone to take care of your child for you, right? ... Here no. And (for grandparents) to come (help out), it still depends on

whether [visa officers] are willing or not to give you [meaning grandparents] a visa¹⁰⁷. (Interview 3/29/2009)

So for Hong who had forged strong friendship among her dancing team, she felt very fortunate to be able to rely on their help with child-care once a while. But more often, Chinese academic migrants resort to the effortless child-care space (that I have recognized at the Chinese school) without having to ask for favor or extra care from anyone.

Some of these Chinese academic migrants say they are very fortunate to have had grandparents to come help out here (while the grandparents often lived with the pain of separation from their other relatives and friends in China, sometime even from their spouses because the other one has not retired from his/her job yet¹⁰⁸). Others (Yueru for example) have sent their pre-school-age children to be cared for by grandparents for years in China (while they themselves strived hard here to establish themselves either in a burgeoning professional career or in their PhD study, living with the pain of separation from their children). Those who had not been able resort to either channel talked to me extensively about their years of hardship when the children were young, often with mothers sacrificing their own career or academic advancement. Wenzhuo for example worked full time in a computer career after migrating here, but eventually gave up her

¹⁰⁷ So the visa issue does not burden Chinese academic migrants only with concerns about their own visa status, but also about whether grandparents can get visa to come help too.

¹⁰⁸ Wheelock, J. and Jones, K., in their (2002) "Grandparents Are the Next Best Thing": Informal Childcare for Working Parents in Urban Britain, also discusses the childcare help working parents get from grandparents. In Chinese academic (im)migrant families in the U.S., most often both parents work outside the home, so childcare is always a struggle for them, with typical school days in the U.S. ending around 3pm while their work days ending around 6pm or later if commuting is needed. Many of my participants compare school day length in the U.S. with that in China (typically ending around 5pm), and wonder why the U.S. has such short school days.

professional job due to parenting stress when grandparents' help was not available to her family, "The job I had was good, in terms of money, but it was surely not good for parenting. I was so busy" (interview 4/14/2010). For those who have grandparents here, taking grandparents to Chinese school to socialize also help these participants to deal with their guilt in having grandparents live here to help out with their own stressful lives with young children.

Chinese academic migrants struggle so much to maintain a façade of "doing well," to the point that "*you can't afford to get sick,*" as Dianyuan one of my participants put it (interview 3/29/2009). Knowing how hard she has to work in an environment where she finds little social support, she realizes that she cannot even get sick without life becoming extremely difficult for her family particularly in terms of having barely anyone else to rely on for child care responsibilities. Notice also here the use of the "distancing strategy," whereby she said "**you** could not get sick," instead of "**I** could not get sick." Often many of my participants would switch to using the pronoun "you" instead of "I" when they start speaking of their personal (AND often collective) painful experiences, thus creating a distanced stance to their pain. Later I will talk more about these typical strategies Chinese academic migrants use to become ok with their everyday struggles.

Just like many Indian immigrants who, through communal resource-sharing, practiced self-policing and became "allowable Indians," Chinese academic migrants seem to also join in the effort of performing the (in)convenient neoliberal multiculturalism (Hale, 2002), as my next section will show. It is an easy approach in the sense that, by playing it safe, they do not need to rock the boat. And it may seem more convenient for the American mainstream society to live with these "model minorities" instead of co-

imagining and co-working for social change. But it is also inconvenient for all social groups, as it facilitates the perpetuation of institutional racism and dehumanizes everyone involved.

1.5 Fading into Background or Sharp in Relief? The more Resourceful and “Integrated” Participants

As I witness in my years of observations and interviews how this group of Chinese academic migrants live under and work with constant stress of instability and insecurity alleviated through their involvement at the Chinese school, I cannot help but noticing how two of my participants exuberates a different feel. They do not seem to share the sense of visa-related perpetual stress, and they do not find social life at the Chinese school meaningful for them, so they barely get involved there at all. If anything, for Yinzhi and Yongze, their Chinese school experience seems to affirm for them how integrated they are into the American mainstream society. Because for both of them, application for Green Card and then citizenship was based on their marriage with an American, neither experienced visa-related job stress after their graduate study here, and both found jobs in their professional field and thrived in their careers. Also, due to each's marital association with a white American, they have found social life among white colleagues and friends.

Most of my participants, however, find the Chinese school to be a major “self-help” resourceful center (for friendship and for stress-relief) for themselves and for their families, even though it encourages a distanced or joking or individualized “managerial”

approach to shared problems in their lives here as privileged migrants in disadvantage. I was surprised to find a similarity of their approach to what has been described as neoliberal governance of public housing in Scotland:

The construction of identities for subjects as *self-regulating* agents characterises processes of governance in advanced liberal democracies. Such identities implicate subjects within moral bonds of *responsibility and agency* to prescribed ethics of *normalised consumption and duties to community*. Within this 'ethopolitics' of social housing in the UK, the conduct of tenants and practitioners is framed within *a conceptual triangle of consumerism, communitarianism and managerialism*¹⁰⁹. (Flint, 2015, p. 151)

By resorting to and affirming their class privileges through community-sanctioned normalized consumerism, Chinese academic migrants could collectively yet temporarily find alleviation to the pain they experience daily as racialized vulnerable intellectual laborers in the U.S.. Believing (and assuring each other) that they can “manage it,” members among this group resemble clearly the self-regulating agents the welfare institution (in the U.K. and possibly in the U.S. too) also tries to promote.

Diligently performing the ideal immigrant, Chinese academic migrants managed to appear to be self-sufficient individuals and families, despite turmoil underneath the happy façade. Much of this façade is achieved through the invisible labor of women among this group. In the next section I will detail how these women perform the ever-adjusting wife supporting their family through many gendered emotional work and career sacrifices.

¹⁰⁹ Flint, J. (2015), Reconfiguring Agency and Responsibility in the Governance of Social Housing in Scotland, in *Urban Studies*, January 2004 vol. 41 no. 1 151-172.

2. The Making of the Ideal (Im)migrant Wives as the Ever-adjusting Women

Most literature on Chinese (or Asian) migrant women in the U.S.¹¹⁰ looks at the obviously disadvantaged group of lower-class workers or refugees, for example in garment industry and mostly in NYC or LA metropolitan areas (Foner, 2000; Pyke, 1996). Also, they tend to unanimously portray a picture of how migration experiences have changed family relations for these women, in particular, how they become empowered by migration to the U.S.. Here Ong's (1996) study on Cambodian refugees stands out, as she adds another layer to this dominant analysis, showing how cultural politics (local institutional practices and discourses in the U.S.) actually serve to discipline and produce these "empowered" subjects.

Following Ong (1996), but with a very different group of women which shows a different dynamic, I look at how discourses of privileges and disadvantages serve to produce ideal immigrant wifhood among the Chinese academic migrants. As the examples in my previous analysis show, the "self-help" discourse - the intertwining of this group's privileges and disadvantages in the discourse of suburban diaspora – also has gendered consequences¹¹¹. Because the prevalent perception of women continue to be

¹¹⁰ Thanks to Li-Fang Liang for highlighting these points for me. Also significant is the fact that most of these studies are "research-downs" with lower-class groups, enjoying easier access to their participants. My study, instead, is a "research-across" with a middle-class migrant group, who can be more guarded about their time and privacy issues. This certainly bears on my access to their lived experiences, as well as on our interview settings and dynamics. Many studies (xxx....xxx...) have also noted the difficulty of doing research with middle-class participants such as doctors and lawyers. Li-Fang says, she'll find out more with her upcoming co-research on the impact of neoliberal trends on university professors.

¹¹¹ Devault, Majorie. 1999. Comfort and Struggle: Emotion Work in Family Life. *Annals of the American Academy for Political and Social Sciences* 561: 52-63.
Acker, Joan 2004. Gender, Capitalism and Globalization. *Critical Sociology* 30, 1: 17-41.

that they are more vulnerable and hence more suitable to talk about everyday struggles, many of the issues Chinese migrant group face collectively are disproportionately addressed by the women instead of by the men.

Performing “the competent professional women who can do it all” (Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2002) or the supportive contented wife of a professional, most women in this “model minority” group, day in and day out, take on tremendous amount of emotional and physical labor¹¹², to maintain the façade of a happy middle-class suburban home. As one male participant stated,

Chong (his spouse) is very good at making friends. When she was less busy, we used to have friends’ gatherings. She knows how to talk to people better than I do. ... But after moving here, life is a lot more miserable for us! (uncomfortable laughing) (Interview with Kuan, 9/29/2009).

Kuan sounded painful in talking about the socializing problem their family now faces, and he acknowledged that their problem happened due to his wife’s current busy schedule and hence her lack of time to take care of the socializing work for the family as

England, Paula. 2005. “Emerging Theories of Care Work.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 31: 381-399.
 Jagger, Alison M. 1995. “Caring as a feminist practice of moral reason.” In *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics*, edited by Virginia Held. Boulder: Westview Press.
 Tronto, Joan. 1987. “Beyond Gender Difference to a Theory of Care.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12(4): 644-663.

¹¹² Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American women and men: labor, laws, and love* Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.; 2nd edition (October 29, 2007). In her section on “**gender relations for salaried professionals**” she argues that these migrant professional men do share more housework, even though the women still do the lion’s share. And plus, they live in the suburb, so fewer resources than is usually available in ethnic communities. p. 78-79.

she used to. One can thus reasonably surmise that the “gossiping” that is a significant part of the ethnic dancing group’s weekly activities is also an important space of this group of women’s collective problem-solving too.

The ideal (im)migrant family therefore rely on tremendous efforts from Chinese(-American) women in this group to smooth out their family’s struggles working within the family through “diasporic intimacy (Cho, 2007, p. 471) or through Chinese school community (and church community too) in the U.S. suburb. “Gossiping” is the women’s way of performing the emotional labor (DeVault, 1999) – and do actually problem-solving too – for the family.

This strenuous and often-invisible project is unraveled by the notion of “cultural citizenship” (Rosaldo, 1994; Rofel; Ong, 1996), “the dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society” (Louie, p. 24 cited in Cho, 2007, p. 473). In supporting their spouses and children while building support for each other in the Chinese school community, Chinese academic migrant women routinely and caringly clear up and meticulously decorate with roses Chinese academic migrants’ thorny paths toward becoming “the proper citizen” (Manalansan, 2003, p. 14). As Cho’s review of Manalansan’s and others’ work shows, diasporic “citizenship [is] a profoundly performative act in which membership is not so much bestowed by the state once and for all, but repeatedly scripted and enacted” by cultural subjects for their own meaning-making and for others’ in “the pageantry of everyday life” (Cho, 2007, pp. 470, 472).

2.1 Unpaid Work of Stress Management and Artful Mothering

Women typically work unpaid as the stress-manager and stress-reliever for the house, without much recognition from their spouse. Sometimes this is due to women being sensitive to their spouse's need for "face," so they would monitor stress factors without making their effort obvious to their spouses at all. For example, when Xuan and her spouse hesitated about whether to buy a nicer house or not, she explained to me her struggle, "*as a wife, I cannot tell him directly*, but if (to earn more money to support a nicer house) his pressure gets big (at work), he would still bring it home, and it wouldn't be fair to us, wouldn't be fair to the children either. So I would really want to just get a decent house instead" (fieldnote 5/31/2009, emphasis added).

This monitoring of spouse's stress is what Chinese academic women do day-to-day, so habitually, that they/we do not even think of it as (extra) work they/we do. While Xuan understood her spouse's hope for a nicer "finally-feels-settled" home, she was keenly aware of how much more stress it might bring to her spouse and then he might dump the stress onto everyone else in the family (which possibly has happened before with other issues in their life so that she has now learned to predict stressors). So she carefully monitors family stress level and indirectly addresses it with her spouse in issues they struggle with. Walking such a fine line and working so strenuously, she barely leaves any footprints or fingerprints at all, so she gets little credit from her spouse for her multifaceted work as a home-maker.

So in their pursuit of the American dream, the Chinese academic migrants often struggle between a need for home and a concern about stress (with the wife typically working as the stress-manager for the household, unrecognizedly). The disagreement between the husband and the wife thus represents a routine work in “*diasporic intimacy*” (Cho, 2007, p. 471) and its complexities in negotiating struggles around race, gender, class, sexuality, nationality, ... hence specificities in their emotional labor¹¹³. In contrast, traditional notions such as “marital conflict” or “generational conflict” tend to “privatize social conflicts and contradictions” (Lowe, 2006, p. 147)¹¹⁴.

Chinese academic migrant women’s work in parenting tends to go unnoticed and unrecognized for similar reasons. I will talk about more details regarding what neoliberal “proper parenting” means for these Chinese academic migrant mothers and fathers. But here I would like to highlight how these women do it artfully. Xuan for example, told me about this incidence in how she and her spouse educated their son:

When our son misbehaves, [my husband] would tell our son, ‘*Do you know you are not in your own country? You have to always watch out and behave*¹¹⁵. *You are being hosted in this country, how can you act like you are the host?*’

... I didn’t want to immediately say something different in front of the child. ...But later on, ... when [my son] was relaxed and, I

¹¹³ See also Maj Devault on lower class mothers’ advocacy for their children.

¹¹⁴ Lowe, Lisa. “Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian-American Differences.” In *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, edited by Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, 132-155. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006.

¹¹⁵ The father apparently feels the impact of the watchful eye of the surveillance camera (i.e., the immigrant visa system) on how he and his family is supposed to live their daily life.

seemingly casually brought up the topic with him, and discussed with him. I asked him how he felt, and explained to him why he needs to be more careful and responsible in his behavior, just so that he understands.

...it is a tricky thing, not easy to get it just right. *You want to put in effort, but then you don't want to leave a trace.* You don't want the children to feel that you are putting much into it. Otherwise they get irritated, or they get nervous. ... (fieldnote 5/3/2009, emphases added)

While Xuan's inconspicuous parenting strategy works to the family's advantage, it disadvantages her in that her strenuous emotional and intellectual labor goes unrecognized. Once when I again commented on how reflective and artful she is about parenting, she told me, "my hubby doesn't think so. He thinks, '*Mothering right? Just cooking for them and playing with them – what else is in there? What's the big deal?!*'" (Interview with Xuan, 6//2010) She herself knows very well, instead, that "it's not easy."

Much of the social talk that goes on among mothers in the hallway (and also among the dancing group members specifically), I have reasons to believe, is women's way of helping each other to address significant issues in their homes. Child-rearing certainly is a major topic there. Women routinely talk about their "trouble kid(s)" who either would not come study Chinese or would not listen to parents in general. And other parents upon hearing it would typically feel comfortable to share commiseration, advice and tips. Also shared often is information about educational programs or resources.

Earlier in my first data chapter, I quoted Dan who told me that “children’s education” was “what is communicated among Chinese parents.” And then he told me it was his wife who did most of the communication with other Chinese parents at the Chinese school about their son’s education, usually with dancing group friends at the Chinese school.

However, in many Chinese academic men’s eyes, these sharing are often seen as plain women’s “gossip.” As an administrator I quoted early on said, “They come to gossip too, and they really enjoy it!” while tipping his head a bit. Many of these men certainly do not view these women’s talk as productive work (for family stress-management or for the reproduction of their class status), not even productive talk at all.

In my fieldwork, I have also often noticed bits and pieces of women taking care of their husbands in seemingly mundane ways. For example, when I gave a ride to two female volunteer teachers, one of them called Xueren got a call from her spouse. Every time he said something, she gently repeated, very understandingly, “Oh the bus didn’t come?” “Oh now you are walking to go there?” We the other two there were already intrigued by her super-soothing tone, but her last sentence amused us most, “Ok, you walk slowly ok?” (fieldwork //2009) As I got to Xueren more in my fieldwork, I began to understand that she was so nice with him because she knew how stressed out he was in his lab work, one of the typical jobs that many Chinese academic migrants hold here in the U.S.. For example, another time when she was being very considerate about what to leave for her husband to have for meals when she planned on her day trip with friends, I commented on how nice she was with him, and she told me that because he was very busy in his lab work, even during weekends, he is too busy to cook.

It is not rare to hear similar stories of Chinese academic women performing this kind of emotional labor, because they witness daily and understand keenly their spouses' migration-related stress. So no matter how much they whine and tramp, we still have their best interests in mind, because we know that they probably would not have it so hard on us, if they did not have these migration-related stress to deal with day to day. This is a common theme I hear among my Chinese academic migrant women friends, even though they/we sometimes acknowledge that they/we have similar stress to deal with too.

2.2 Migration-related De-skilling: Becoming “Full-time Mothers”

These women struggle to be their best as mothers, but as Chinese academic migrants in the U.S., they often feel strained in their performance of motherhood, particularly when they give up their professional career for a stay-at-home role. As Xuan, a volunteer teacher at the Chinese school, shared with me in pain,

It would've been nice, if I had a job. When the children sometime do not behave, you would not be too despaired then. But I do not have a choice – I cannot find a job here. Anywhere you are, you are a foreigner! (fieldnote 5/31/2009, emphasis added)

Therefore not being able to find a job not only hurts her sense of professional identity, but also hurts her performance of motherhood too. When her identity and personhood was made to primarily hinge on her motherhood, that is, on how well she

raise the children, the pressure becomes double for both her and her children. (The truth is, although Xuan called herself a “full-time mom”, she had in fact seldom stopped working outside home after migration, even though always on a part-time status.)

For diverse reasons, after migration some of these Chinese women with high academic credentials have “chosen” to center their life around their family. (Some others like Kong and Wenzhuo did study and even work full time, but eventually gave up their professional jobs due to parenting and other migration-related stress.) For Xuan, she had known that she “might not find a job after immigration” (probably due to her humanities academic background as compared to her spouse’ engineering background). To come abroad she had sacrificed her successful career in China based on her humanities background.

Jiemin, another volunteer teacher at the Chinese school, sounded less troubled by the impact of her migration on her ability to find a job here. She told me matter-of-factly,

Every time I wanted to start doing something, my family – my husband and my older daughter – would discourage me from trying. This time, a position teaching Chinese at a college, they told me not to try. This position, it’s over an hour’s drive away. My husband asked, “Can you, really? Over one hour drive there, and over one hour drive back home?” So I thought about it, it’s through [a busy interstate highway], so I thought, “Maybe I really can’t do it.” It’s probably better that I don’t even bother. (Interview 5/23/2010)

So Jiemin made the decision to not even try applying to this job because of her limited driving experience after migrating here with her family. More importantly, when she needed to make these important decisions, her family stressed her limits instead of her strength for her. Only later on did I learn from bits and pieces in our conversation that she had very strong academic preparation. Since coming abroad, Jiemin in fact had also taught Chinese as an adjunct professor and at her home, but in the earlier part of our interview she portrayed her career life as not so significant, and she attributed her lack of career development to her gendered exhausting role as a mother. Instead of supporting her application to re-gain her professional identity, her family discouraged her from any endeavor to “start doing something.” She has internalized their lack of confidence in her ability to adjust here, to the point that she decided that “Maybe I really can’t do it,” and that “It’s probably better that I don’t even bother.”

So just like with Xuan’s life, “full-time mothering” has in fact never been her life for Jiemin either, before or after migration! Nevertheless, the sense of lack from having to adjust to the role of a stay-at-home-mom has had major impact on important parenting judgments such as her expectations for her daughters’ future (“for her not to do too many things, too exhausting”).

2.3 De-skilling: Meandering into Professional Jobs Outside their Academic Training

Migration scholars and general literature do pay some attention to the above-discussed experience of de-skilling, particularly about professional women who ended up in a low-pay job after migrating from so-called developing countries to developed

countries (Man, 2004). Not enough is said, however, about those who are able to find a professional job but only after a significant amount of de-skilling and/or changing of major, in order to stay wherever their spouses have found a job. In my study I was often alerted to this phenomenon when female participants told me, “I just followed him coming here,” or similarly when male participants told me matter-of-factly, “she just followed me coming here.” Jiemin in fact, said it laughingly at first, although in pain, “He came abroad, I didn’t have a choice (laughing), can’t divorce him right?” (Interview 5/23/2010, emphasis added)

Similarly, one male participant told me, “[My wife] is now teaching Chinese. She is relatively flexible, following where I [found a job],” (Interview with Anyun, 11/1/2009). This sounded like an easy and happy-go-lucky account, but he immediately went on to say that, “So her major kept changing back and forth. This thing, I feel, if both are [working] in academia [like we both are], and both in a narrow field, then it is very troublesome.” Although I failed to clarify with him the exact route of “her major . . . changing back and forth,” from the conversation he seemed to imply that his wife majored in Chinese back in China, and for her graduate study she changed to something in a narrow technical field like his, but in following him along after he found a university job in Central city, she could only find a job by falling back to applying her expertise in Chinese mostly acquired during her undergraduate study. So many Chinese academic women, after migration, pursued academics at first, then dropped their graduate training and went for whatever came up handy to accommodate their husband’s professional career path. More importantly, these women’s sacrifice is often taken for granted in their family’s narratives about how they came along, as for example Anyun

replied earlier to my question, “when you came to Syracuse, was it convenient for your family to follow along?” “That was very convenient, ... no problem.”

Another male participant Dan also spoke of his wife’s adjustment in order to follow him along, in a more appreciative tone. When I asked him, “She works too, right? Which field is she in?” he said in a somewhat low and slow tone (as compared to his usual composed tone), “She is in – before she was in, should be *informatics*.” He continued low and slow, as if this is a discouraging topic, “Right. Before she did EE (Electrical Engineering). Then, in [Europe] she got a *PhD*, in *medical informatics*... But once here, because here there were no suitable jobs in this aspect, so now she is in *linguistic informatics*, in the department of *applied linguistics* ...” Then he said, “That was no choice (na mei ban fa), she followed me here (starting to laugh), with no relevant – this, that is, back then she did not find a relevant suitable job” (interview with Dan, 11/22/2009). His brief uncomfortable laughing seemed to indicate to me that he did feel sorry for her having to follow him along.

Yet another male participant, a very respectful, obliging and easy-going man in general, spoke of his wife’s adjustment in a somewhat dismissive tone, “I don’t know if she – she only knew to ... anyway follow me coming abroad here, but she was maybe not so clear what she wanted to do.” This participant does seem to harbor some masculine notions of how women are like. For example, elsewhere when I asked him “what activities does she like?” he answered in a dragging tone, as if hesitating, not sure, “She, what she normally likes is,” then he said more affirmatively, “– [you know] women, right? Just *shopping la* (*la* is a Chinese tone word indicating ‘of course’). Not much else – her biggest hobby is *shopping*” (interview with Rong, 12/6/2009).

As Duany et al. suggests in their (2010) book, *Suburban Nation*, the suburbs were constructed not only for the interests of real estates, car industry, highway construction, but also as “a site where families could become models of consumption”¹¹⁶ (Wingard, 2013, p. 29) so capitalist production in the U.S. (and promoted worldwide post-WWII) could continue to thrive and stay legitimate. It is little wonder that many Chinese academic migrant women, once here, found themselves joining many other suburbanites in becoming the bearer of such nation-building priorities, engaged primarily in shopping as their “biggest hobby.”

Compared to male participants’ account, female participants’ account were more direct about the painful adjustment they made after coming abroad. Dianyan for example clearly stated the intersecting struggles that she suffered since coming here, including academic and career sacrifice, language difficulties, reproductive labor, and lack of time to go visit her extended family in China. Therefore, my female participants are usually painfully aware of and expressive about the adjustments and sacrifices they had made in accompanying their spouses here. The emotional labor in their “diasporic intimacy” often went unnoticed and unrecognized by their spouses.

In conclusion, the image of “the self-sufficient family” relies on tremendous amount of invisible labor and sacrifice from the ever-adjusting Chinese academic women. Not only do they routinely perform stress management and artful mothering at home, they also suffer deskilling in becoming “full-time mothers” or taking up lesser professional jobs than their trainings qualify.

¹¹⁶ Jennifer Wingard, 2013. *Branded Bodies, Rhetoric, and the Neoliberal Nation-state*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Both Chinese academic men and women also learned to perform the ideal (Im)migrant parents as the proper care-givers. Not only do these women care much about their parenting duties, many men among this group were so socially isolated here in the U.S. that they also took to child caring. The wives often tell me that, had they and their spouses remained in China, the men (and probably they themselves too) would have had many more social activities in evenings and on weekends. But here in the U.S., socially limited in their suburban diaspora, they took upon parenting as a valued channel for reproduction of their social class but also for their own identity re-formation as the ideal immigrant who focuses on proper parenting.

3. The Ideal (Im)migrant Parent – the Proper Care-givers

These Chinese academic migrants work to provide “proper parenting” for their children. Their life seems to be organized “mechanically around work and family (Yongze, interview 9/13/2009),” not much else. As cited early on in Chapter 4, Dan, a male administrator puts it, “Yes [we are very busy].... Also, family-wise, we are often “both-spouse working.” ... So after work, most time is for family, and for children.” (Interview 11/22/2009) Because Chinese school’s official function is for the children’s learning, the school is a legitimate social outlet for the busy parents who hang out at the school. These migrants’ top priority is often their children’s schooling success, which would result in a reproduction of their middle-class status, and with it hopefully (a particular version of) “a happy life.” Chinese school learning also contributes to these goals, in these parents’ eyes, as I discussed in the first data chapter. Many of my participants (male and female) acknowledge that much of these parenting efforts come

from mothers, even though again their unpaid work in this area might not seem so obvious or necessary to their spouses.

I learned about their understandings and practices of “the proper parenting” mostly through their responses to my questions as to their hopes and concerns about their children growing up here in the U.S.. Although some parents gave broader yet abstract answers such as being respectful for others, socially responsible, etc., most parents center concretely on three common themes: *a college education, a happy life, and integration into the U.S. society.*

We can see one mother’s endeavor around all these three themes epitomized in her disciplinary practices about her children watching TV, as she once related to me in our hallway conversation:

In our home, I forbid them to watch much TV. For the older (child), after we came here [to the U.S.], I let him watch news. He needs to cultivate the habit of watching news, now that he is older and can understand.

Plus, good for him to pick up English here. (Xuan, fieldnote 5/3/2009)

This mother mentioned that letting her son watch TV news would help him *pick up English faster (so it helps with his schooling and his integration)*. Elsewhere she also told me that she thought it important for people to keep up with what is happening in society, to “*be able to feel and capture the society’s pulse*” which she finds as *fundamental to our happiness*. And in our conversation, another shared assumption is that watching too much TV is not good for children and would take time away from more productive things such as schoolwork, so she allows him to watch the news only. In her parenting practice about her children’s TV-watching habit alone, she is already working

on all three common concerns that many Chinese academic migrant parents share: schooling success, a happy life, and integration into the mainstream society.

3.1 Privileged Hopes for their Children's Future: a College Education and a Happy Life

The Chinese school provides the social arena for Chinese academic migrant parents to address these hopes and concerns they harbor for their children. For example Xuan also told me about how parents at the Chinese school share and address their “concerns about the children’s growth here, somewhat related to TV habits but more connecting to children’s peer groups. She explained for me,

Well, like, *when [our children] play with white children, we are worried, right?* But it’s good to hear from other (Chinese) parents, they told me, “Don’t worry, as soon as they get into high school, they’ll start hanging out with Asian kids instead. ... It always happened, with other kids of ours....” (Xuan, fieldnote 5/3/2009, emphasis added)

When I wondered why Chinese parents would worry in the first place about their children playing with white children, she smiled,

Well, you know, *Americans, they are lenient with kids, in terms of watching TV, going online, you know. ...* So yes, I do keep an eye on that, and don’t want [my children] to pick up TV or internet habit from their white classmates.

This participant therefore enacts proper parenting¹¹⁷ by “keep[ing] an eye” on her children so they would not pick up racialized habits from his (white) peers TV or internet habits.

Chinese academic migrant parents in this suburban diaspora thus routinely enact neoliberal discourses of “individual responsibility,” and work vigilantly to enforce their children’s schooling and career success by distancing themselves and their children from the other supposedly “less responsible” groups. Little considered is the fact that many middle-class families do embrace limits on TV, while often it is the lower-class families where parents (sometimes single-parents particularly among African Americans due to the under-employment and over-incarceration of males) are overwhelmed with low-pay long-hours menial jobs, and TV and sometimes illegal street activities fill in the gap of less parental involvement for their children. Even less considered is the fact that TV has been promoted as a symbol and vehicle of materialism in the U.S. (Hayden, 2003), American people among every social class are not immune to its decades of negative impact on and eroding of family time. Instead of envisioning collective alternatives (for example, forging a vibrant community or positive street life), Chinese academic migrants seem keen to pick up and get on board with political assaults on so called “deficient families.”

¹¹⁷ Another female participant also shared with me, although inadvertently, about her parenting practice regarding another leisure activity in her home. When I asked her what magazines she reads, she said that she used to subscribe to Times and Newsweek, which were *actually for his son “to learn English* (Interview with Chunteng 2010? all emphases added).” (So once again, not only childcare, but also children’s education, fall primarily on these Chinese academic migrant *women’s* shoulders.)

These parents often also take as a given their hopes for the reproduction of their social class through their children's schooling success, which they believe will build the pedestal to the children's future happy life. Interestingly, as mentioned in Chapter 4 already, many of these parents insist that they do not have high hopes for their children's future, despite their taking for granted their privileges in leading their children into a college education or even further. Here is another intriguing example,

[My] Expectation [for my children is] very easy. (I think that)... *in the U.S., in general, education, college is not a problem. Most children can go somewhere and all the way to a PhD.* Then, in the future what specifically [they] do, *I think it's up to them.* (Interview with Yanke 9/27/2009. The italic words the interviewee said in English, emphasis added.)

So once again, their social class privileges are taken for granted, so much so that this interviewee states that in the U.S. obtaining a college education in general is “not a problem” at all, even if we grant that he might be speaking of only Chinese(-American) children here.

Also in relation to class reproduction and a happy future life, I enjoyed a fascinating discussion with Dan, another male volunteer teacher, about his hopes and worries about his child's future, this time around the issue of career choices. Acknowledging his son's great interest in history,

Also we helped him analyze, as to his *future*. You have to think through about what you will do. What is a historian's *future* gonna be like? What

is a *scientist's future* gonna be like? What is a *lawyer's future* gonna be like?¹¹⁸ (Dan, interview 11/22/2009)

Then he elaborated on what he meant by career projections for these career tracks:

[F]or example, for you to become a historian, ... your future *salary* will be like what. For you yourself and your family, what *style of life* do you want? ... Then, you becoming – you study science, you will have in the future what kind of life *life*, work *life*. What kind of *income*. (Interview with Dan, 11/22/2009, emphasis added)

So for Dan, proper parenting means ensuring the class reproduction and his son's future happy life by addressing his worries about (but not discouraging) his son's interest in the humanities. He indicates that he wants his son to not choose history as career for concerns of "salary" and "style of life." Later on Dan says that he would like to see that he chooses (natural) sciences instead, so that his son can have the "kind of income" he now enjoys and tries to model for his son.

It is notable here that, the Chinese school functions not just as a social arena for parents and students to ensure and share the pressure of the children's academic success, but also as a concrete resource center for that purpose. Dan told me that it is because "at the Chinese school, teachers and students communicate about [Kumo program]," that he

¹¹⁸ Here I can hear myself, in my stuttering of the following words, my researcher antenna having highlighted the previous information as an interesting point, and my mind racing trying to figure out a way to get him to talk about how he talk to his son about these careers without letting him realize that I am after what Chinese academic migrants think of different careers.

and his spouse learned about the rigorous private program, as well as some academic summer camps, such as the national program “Center for Talented Youth” (interview, 11/22/2009).

Similar to Dan’s clarifying his hopes for his son’s career future, Rong, a male administrator at the Chinese school, explained to me how he does not worry so much about his children’s future in the U.S.. For him, “the good thing in the U.S. society” is that “as long as you have a little (*shao wei*) schooling, you can find a *decent job*. Not – unlike china where it is so *competitive*.” He went on to clarify that for “a *decent job*” he did not mean it is ok for his children to enter any career though, giving a concrete example of what to avoid,

Of course I mean [for them] to study a somewhat *popular* major, not studying very un-*popular* major. [F]or example *art*, ... normally only when you are a *genius* can you make a *decent living*. Normally, normally *artists* are living on the edges (*qiong kun liao dao*). (interview, 12/6/2009)

And then he finally specified what exactly he would like for his children to achieve in life, this time citing his own career as a model, “But I’m just saying that, for example, be an *engineer*. Like me, being an *engineer*. ... [You] can *make enough money*, can *support a family* (emphasis added).

As we can see, both Dan and Rong were very explicit about their hopes for their children’s future career choices. In Rong’s words, he expects them to “make enough money,” “can support a family,” and in Dan’s words, he and his spouse ask his son to consider, “to become a historian, your future salary will be like what. For you yourself

and your family, what style of life do you want?” Both Rong and Dan, therefore, rely heavily on the neoliberal discourses of “individual responsibilities” and “family values” to discipline their kids into understanding parental preference for certain career choices, where the next generation can become the most productive “human capital” in a society where humanities are devalued, social services are increasingly cut, and families are expected to fight for themselves for survival.

3.2 Mediated Worries for their Children’s Future: “Integration into” the Mainstream Society

Besides their coupled hopes for schooling success and a happy life [meaning self-sufficient with middle-class income] for their children, these Chinese academic migrants also had to indirectly struggle with (and occasionally talk about) their concerns about their children’s “integration” into the predominantly white society. For these Chinese academic migrants, “proper parenting,” when it comes to the issue of integration for their children, means once again dealing with it individually, without rocking the boat with political discussions or actions. There seems to be four indirect approaches they take to this issue.

1, they might try to circumvent dealing with their or other’s racism¹¹⁹;

¹¹⁹ *Bluechip Black* also illustrates this strategy among middle-class black parents – their class privileges help somewhat circumvent racism, as they can shelter themselves and their children in suburbs. And they make sure their children do not buy into hip-hop culture, a strategy they believe to facilitate their children’s success in life, hence class reproduction for their family.

2, they would try to reason their worries away by saying to themselves “the U.S. is a liberal place, so it’ll be ok;”

3, they would take their children’s marginal status as a disadvantage they need to take as is;

4, they would explain it with nature or culture.

I will now illustrate these “proper parenting” approaches in the following three examples.

Earlier when Xuan shared with me what other Chinese parents has assured her about, (that eventually Asian children will start hanging out only with other Asian children,) I laughed and asked, “really? How so?” Interesting enough, at first she offered me an explanation combining *culture (aesthetics) and nature*,

...maybe, you know, they watch movies, they see Cheng Long (Jackie Cheng), and they watch Korean TV series, and they like that. And they’ll hang out with children like them. It is really an aesthetic issue. They will somehow find Asian people more to their taste to play with. *I think it’s aesthetic taste, it’s in our blood.* (fieldnote 5/3/2009, emphasis added)

But then she immediately backed up, and even ended up *citing racism as a possible reason*, based on her distinct experiences here versus in Canada,

Of course it is also different here from back in Canada. In Canada, people are more open to others. ... But here in the U.S., everywhere you go, it's still mostly white people, right? And racism sure is still here.

So her unique life experiences, her having been to two predominantly white societies in North America, allow her an opportunity to make comparisons and recognize racism more keenly at work in the U.S..¹²⁰ As many scholars have noted, in Canada the needs of the nation-building have (with some success) relied on state-championed multiculturalism to embrace capital's need for differentiated labor (Liang¹²¹, 2010).

But then she was quick to move on to reflect on how not only do Americans harbor (overt) discrimination toward Chinese, but also Chinese toward blacks (a comment Dan also made), and [immigrant] Indians toward [immigrant] Chinese here,

“Also, Americans, they are [cautious]. They wouldn't say anything. Even though they might really hate you, on the surface they'd act like they are fine with you.... And it's not just they do it, right? Even for us, with Blacks So if we have it [(covert) racism] too, do Americans not have it with us? Do Indians¹²² not have it with us?”

In noting how (individual) Americans are cautious about saying out loud how uneasy they may really feel about the presence of minority members in the U.S. society,

¹²⁰ Some male participants in my study, who migrated here from their study in Europe, in their comparison actually found the U.S. to be more open and welcoming to immigrants than some European countries such as Germany and France.

¹²¹ Li-Fang Liang, 2010, Dissertation: Constructing Migrant Care Labor: A Study of Institutional Process and the Discourse of Migration and Work, Syracuse University.

¹²² Many Chinese possibly think of Indians as of a race different from Chinese, given the different phenotypic features.

she does not acknowledge how often many Americans live in between the rock and a hard place. After being socialized through centuries-old institutionalized and legalized racism, many Americans now feel obliged to embrace a superficial multiculturalism (now that the U.S. is more diverse, due to capital's needs for globalized differentiated labor) with few opportunities for richer interactions and deeper understandings between individuals from different races or countries. In other words, Xuan failed to acknowledge the struggles of many Americans these days who decide consciously (and sometimes conscientiously) to not show racist thought (or even to struggle to contest their learned contempt for other races), even if just to be politically correct, a term familiar since the strides the Civil Rights movement has made in minority advocacy.

Also, by conflating racism with the hostility some (Asian) Indian migrants here show toward Chinese migrants, she downplays or naturalizes institutional racism. So even though she was able to pinpoint racism at work in terms of why Chinese children here would end up hanging out only with other Asian children once in high school, she eventually seemed to *take (and even justify) racism as is* among different groups and seemed to suggest that we could do nothing about it.

Also significant is Chinese academic migrants' constant negotiation of "American culture." I ask my participants what they worry most about parenting in the U.S.. On the one hand, they often voice their concern over the influence of (white middle-class) "liberal parenting" on their own child-rearing. They have repeatedly wondered with me, "I am not so sure about the freedom American parents give their children, you know, the long TV time, internet, drugs, all those things (Xuan, fieldnote 5/3/2009)." On the other hand, they are also vocal about their disapproval of the parenting style of "the Other

America,” speaking of “when you enter *those areas* (raising eyebrow with a grin), you know, when kids are just running around aimlessly (*XiaPao*) on the streets (Kuan, Interview 9/29/2009).”¹²³

So in pondering these concerns in their own parenting, they also consciously *draw the line of their diasporic parenting* as an oasis from the “evil” influence of what they perceive to be part of the American culture, as Francis, Archer, and Mau (2010)¹²⁴ also observe in their study of British Chinese schools. Therefore, a shared sense of “responsible” suburban parenthood (imagined as opposite to “typical” white and black parenting) (instead of their “tiger mom/dad” Asian values as is often discussed or implied in literature and immigration policy language) seems to be what they highlight about their way of defining and performing the “model minority” parenting.

The other parent whom I quoted earlier about how most children can go on to college or even PhD was also able to talk about his worries about the children’s integration, a topic seldom heard either during the Chinese school hallway conversations (or in my interviews with these participants). Interestingly, the participant also immediately reasoned away his worries, through self-talking (self-help), instead of seeking political improvement, ***But I feel that in the U.S. the society is quite open. ... in general I feel that [the U. S.] is a relatively liberal place.*** (Interview with Yanke 9/27/2009. The italic words the interviewee said in English, Italics in bold are added emphasis.)

¹²³ But they would voice it with some reservation, asking me for example, “it’s ok to say that, right? You know, they have this ‘political correct’ thing, so, I don’t know (Kuan, Interview //2009).”

¹²⁴ Francis, Becky, Archer, Louise and Mau, Ada (2010) 'Parents' and teachers' constructions of the purposes of Chinese complementary schooling: 'culture', identity and power', *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 13: 1, 101-117

My discussion with Dan the other male participant about his son's interest in history also led to him talking about the (uncomfortable) topic of integration. He mentioned how he discouraged his son from considering channeling his interest in history into a political career, based on his concerns about his son's integration at school:

Sometimes [My son] tells you, ... if I don't become a *scientist*, I will become a *politician*. (smiling as if saying "how impossible is that?!") I said, (if) you want to become a politician, ... (laughing a bit), you need to consider whether you have the qualities for a *politician* (laughing a bit again as if amused by the impossible statement). Politician needs to have leadership (interview, 11/22/2009)

So this male participant finds his son's hope to channel his interest into a political career only little less than a wishful thinking. He then gave "nature" or biology explanation first, after which he did offer another possible reason, with a quick and light discussion of "the society situation" of "minority ethnics." Watch the interesting flow of our conversation below:

Maybe it also has to do with this child's character. ... [My son] is of blood type A. *His character is relatively sensitive*¹²⁵ [Instead, a] *politician*, s/he can [usually] more easily make friends. ... [T]he other point is, because, Chinese ethnic children at school actually belongs to the *mi – um – minority*, ethnic minority. *You* as an ethnic minority, that is, maybe,

¹²⁵ Notice Dan also suggested earlier, about the school bus yelling incidents, that "Asians are over-sensitive."

very seldom can become a very strong *leadership* in the (social) circles at school. ...*So maybe indeed to a certain extent has a limitedness.*

(Interview with Dan, 11/22/2009. The italic words the interviewee said in English, Italics in bold are added emphasis.)

So even if this parent would like to honor his son's interest in history and allow him to keep his career choices open for "becoming a politician," his deep concerns about his son's "integration" prevents him from even considering it as a plausible choice. But when I asked him what worries him most about his son growing up in the U.S., he never did bring up the issue of integration or discrimination. Instead, he only talked about his concerns about his son's math education.

Even here, when he did bring up the painful issue of how many choices his son really has, he could only finally come up with the defining word, "ethnic minority," instead of "racial minority." The word "ethnic minority" is safe to use, hinting that we are in a multicultural society. The word "racial minority" instead, could easily hint at or remind oneself of racism.

Some Chinese academic migrants do note their children's exposure to Americans' biased accounts of things in China. This is a rare occurrence in my interview or casual talks with the participants at the Chinese school. As I mentioned earlier too, when Yanke told his children that they would visit the Great Wall during their trip to China, expecting excitement from his children, they replied instead with disinterest, saying that their teacher had told them that the Great Wall was a cruel project built upon numerous human bodies. He was very upset about this account when he related the story to me, "this, this,

[is] very *negative*. *Any big project gets people die, you know*. The JinMen Great Bridge, ...’ So he thinks that “in the U.S., many teachings about China are to a certain degree negative teachings” (interview, 9/27/2009).

Most Chinese academic migrant parents, however, do not actively talk about the issue of discrimination, as we have already witnessed in the Chinese school hallway conversations. Proper parenting in this aspect means for them to work around (instead of work with) the issue with their children. On the other hand, they also do not recognize how privileged their hopes for their children are, in taking college education and a happy life (self-sufficiency) for granted.

Conclusion

Many of my participants thus seemed to take their job and visa stress, language, culture or child-rearing struggles as their own problem and figured that they just had to live it, therefore their distancing strategies as well as reconciliation mentality, that is, constantly saying “It’s ok here” (Anyun, Chunteng, Xuan, Zhen, ...). On the other hand, many also routinely speak of “regret” about their migration decision (Zhen, Xuan, Dianshan). Interesting enough, both the language of “regret” or “it’s ok” (which my participant typically voice either one or both) are the two sides of the same coin. In individualizing their internal struggles understanding their migration, Chinese academic migrants seem to take for granted their marginal status in the U.S., barely considering the possibility of collectively contesting it. Instead, they diligently perform the ideal immigrants, by being self-sufficient citizens (with communal self-help), ever-adjusting wives, and proper parents.

As we have seen in this chapter as well as in earlier chapters, Chinese school collectivity does not address (but worsens instead) the fundamental issue in their life, i.e., mostly private pursuits and lacking collective efforts. Sadly, as Buddhism/*Chan* suggests, if you pursue only your own happiness, it often eludes you. For example, when I ask Chunteng, “which aspects do you think can be improved regarding Chinese living here, if there are aspects to improve?” she replied, “Because here it is basically very *individual*. It’s family by family. So it might be different depending on each family’s situation. Every family has different focuses. Those with children going to school, try to let them get into college. Those with children already in college, just work out, *enjoying*, entertaining” (interview, 6/14/2009). It is after this observation of hers that she said, “Entertainment is relatively very little.” My participant thus keenly notes how the individualizing neoliberal discourses work to keep the families separate and each fighting for its own uplifting.

It is little wonder, therefore, much of the talk that goes on at the Chinese school and among my participants are very individualized or communal “self-help” talk. This is in line with neoliberal expectations for individuals to boot-strap themselves from disadvantages and power structures, except that in the case of Chinese migrant parents, often they get the extra boot-strapping strategies at and/or through the suburban ethnic Chinese school community. This is one of the major ways this Chinese school serves in the making of these “ideal immigrants.”

In the beginning section of the chapter, I noted the politics of differentiated labor, a process enabled by the U.S. H1B visa program (besides by the cultural logics of migration desire on the national and international level, documented in Chapter 4) and the

tremendous amount of stress Chinese academic migrants and families suffer under such policies. As my detailed analysis above shows, day in and day out, Chinese academic migrants implement individual boot-strapping and self-policing, while the Chinese school community and the women in particular help to support communal boot-strapping. Therefore, not only were neoliberal capitalist operations able to extract the most of job productivity out of these racialized male and female bodies (most of them contributing heavily in STEM fields), but also they were able to extract the most of emotional labor out of the gendered (and ethnicized) bodies of Chinese academic migrant women in the familial space of individual households and in communal spaces such as the suburban Chinese school (and suburban Chinese churches). Through the politics of differentiated and racialized labor, it seems that the neoliberal capitalist system has successfully externalized the cost of the maintenance of productive labor into (gendered and ethnic) communal realms.

Both discourses of suburbia (Hayden, 2003) and discourses of diaspora (Ong & Nonini, 1997) are shaped by power relations (gender, race, class, and so on), and together they shape how Chinese academic migrants understand themselves and their everyday experiences. The “cultural politics” (Lowe & Loyd, 1997; Perreault, 2003) of *suburban diaspora* highlight how this group negotiates their complex struggles around identity, struggles that are at once material and symbolic. This group’s cultural identity therefore is not so much an “essence as a positioning;” it has “no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic” origin (Hall, 1996, p. 226) Just as “queer diasporic subjects must create and enact scripts of citizenship in their everyday lives” (Cho, 2007b, p. 471), these

Chinese academic migrants also must create and enact particular scripts of suburban diaspora in their everyday lives.

As Lisa Lowe urges in her (1998b) article, “Work, Gender, Immigration,” we need to acknowledge differences in lived experiences yet “situate different cultural forms in relation to shared social and historical processes, and to make active the dialectic that necessarily exists between those forms because of their common imbrication in those processes” (p. 33). My study of Chinese academic migrants’ everyday cultural practices of performing the ideal immigrant situates their unique lived experiences within a broader shared social history of racial triangulation in the U.S.. As Lowe also notes in her (1998a) article called “The International within the National,¹²⁶” “immigration has been historically a locus of racialization and a primary site for the policing of political, cultural and economic membership in the U.S. nation-state” (p. 43). She notes that nation-state tries to resolved capital imperative (cheap differentiated labor) and political imperative (“to constitute a homogeneous nation with a unified culture (p. 31)”) through the institution of Immigration/citizenship.

In his (2013) *Fresh Fruits, Broken Bodies*, the physician and anthropologist Seth Holmes documents how Mexican migrants are legally, medically and socially constructed as best suited (as affordable laborers, dispensable bodies, docile and segregated workers) for working in the back-breaking toxic fields of seasonal berry-picking. Such disciplinary power through legal and institutional discourses also has shaped Chinese academic migrants into vehicles and effects of power (Foucault, 1982). This chapter unravels how

¹²⁶ **The International within the National: American Studies and Asian American Critique**, Lisa Lowe. *Cultural Critique* No. 40, The Futures of American Studies (Autumn, 1998), pp. 29-47

Chinese academic migrants perform the “model minority” within the legal and social conditioning of their (cheaper stressful docile and often lonely) skilled work in the U.S.. While the layers of vulnerability are vastly different for these two different groups of migrants in the U.S., both groups keenly understand their vulnerable positions in the host society.

Yet many Chinese academic migrants, in their privileged positions, seems far less willing to see how their subordinate situation in the U.S. is part of the vicissitudes of a restructured global economy based on imbalance of global social economic power. As the Mexican migrants sees little economic viability in their home country/area (mainly because of NAFTA and the resulting dispossession of indigenous Mexican farmers), they perceive their life-risking migration as not a choice, but a necessity. But Chinese academic migrants, at the same time explaining their migration decision in the larger cultural logics desire saying that of course they were to come to the U.S. (see Chapter 4), but also simultaneously repeatedly announce their regret of or reconciliation with their migration decision (“I made a mistake” or “I can live with it”) as if it were totally their individual choices. With this individualistic mentality indicating acceptance of the status quo, they resort to communal help, gendered women’s labor and parenting per “individual responsibilities” to shore up their performance of the ideal immigrant.

Silence often speaks loudly. What hurts is the lack of conversation topics on or collective approaches to their stressful lives here on F1, F2, H1B, H4 visa status (and then a Green Card and citizenship which do not resolve them) as gendered classed racialized bodies and workers and hence their decades of vulnerability and struggles. My

very difficulty at the beginning of this study to come up with a name for this group signifies how they are under-noticed, under-studied, and under-self-identified as a group.

Therefore, the name of “Chinese academic migrants” does not just describe their activities and movements, but also signifies them as political subjects. Each of these migrants personify the perpetual unease of the modern immigrant nation-states which constantly struggle with the jarring presence of “the international within the national” (Lowe, 1998a), and the troubling disjunction between abstract liberal equal subjects and concrete embodied and differentiated labor (Brown, 1990). It is my hope that, by bringing their “individual” and group struggles into sharp focus, my study can help break the silence around their paradoxical status as privileged migrants in disadvantage. And even though the disciplinary power they are subjected to can seem pervasive in their self-understanding, self-governing and self-policing, we also hear several of my participants voicing their concerns about racial and social boundaries and marginality.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: RECAPTURING AND RE-IMAGINING CULTURE

... diasporas ... emerge in relation to power, in the turn to
and away from power.

- Cho, 2007a, p. 11

Most scholarship in Asian American studies on Chinese in the U.S. investigates the historical impacts of Chinese Exclusion Act – a federal law passed in 1882 and repealed in 1943. The Sociological focus is on Chinese labor migrants’ and later generations’ identity and community struggles through Chinatowns (Takaki, 1989; Zhou, 2009). Literature is scarce on the diverse experiences of the hundreds of thousands of mainland Chinese students, who, since China and the U.S. resumed educational exchanges in 1978, have come primarily for graduate study. Most of them have settled here afterwards in dispersed university or corporate jobs and suburbs. Since the Immigration Act of 1990, many of them have become visible and often vocal experts in science and engineering. Yet their struggles as Chinese academic migrants simultaneously privileged by their educational backgrounds AND disadvantaged by their outsider status in the U.S. often remain invisible. Mainstream America, without addressing the “bamboo ceiling,” has seen them as doing-well and well-behaving.

My dissertation attempts to break the partial silence by documenting how a group of Chinese academic migrants engage with everyday struggles around their paradoxical statuses through participation in a weekend Chinese school as alternatives to the Chinatown habitat. How do they rely on their social class privileges and confront their disadvantages (ethnicity, nationality, race, gender, language) at and beyond suburban Chinese schools?

In between Mainstreaming and Ethnicizing/Othering

The suburban weekend Chinese school is an important site of *the transnational cultural production of the suburban diaspora* by the Chinese academic migrants in this medium-sized city in the U.S.. With my study, I hope to unravel how these privileged migrants in disadvantage seek to become American (feel at home) by becoming¹²⁷ Chinese (in specific ways) at and beyond the Chinese school through discourses of suburban diaspora. My ethnographic work shows how complex power relations (at the intersection of citizenship, race, ethnicity, class and gender) constitute the formation of this place and these embodied subjects.

In particular, I look at what cultural logics of desire brought them to the U.S. and then to the Chinese school, how they have shaped the Chinese school into a highly-disciplined space through (in)visible politics of exclusion and inclusion, and how (supported by communal boot-strapping at the Chinese school) they diligently perform

¹²⁷ Chen (2008) argues that many Taiwanese became American in the U.S. by becoming religious – joining Taiwanese religious communities in the U.S., which helps them to negotiate their difficult migration experiences.

the ideal (im)migrants - the self-sufficient citizen/family, the ever-adjusting wife, and the proper parent. The cultural production of this “model minority” can thus be witnessed at one of the primary sites of their social life – the Chinese school. Diaspora, therefore, is the *social formation* of subjects and sites, identities and places.

Specifically, my study first highlight how the cultural logics of migration had been formed among this group back when they were in China, encouraging their migration to the U.S.. Since WWII, the U.S. has imposed or induced market economy globally in the name of democracy and globalization (Rupert, 2000). China in the meantime switched ideologically resulting in the profound sense of disorientation among its college graduates, leading many to seek a perceived-superior western education. In the U.S., the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 during Reagan administration led to pro-business higher education funding growth as well as increased immigration of intellectual workers (and harsh education reforms such as NCLB exacerbating the devastation at many disadvantaged/urban schools). Many Chinese academic migrants had thus ridden the waves of these socio-historical-political changes and come to the U.S. with clear dreams and unclear visions.

I then document how, after migration, this group shaped the Chinese school to address their new sense of loss and disorientation in gendered, classed and ethnicized ways. As many among this group experienced a status drop (from the privileged elite in China to the racialized and isolated minority here in the U.S.) because of their (un)realized American dream, the Chinese school functions to help them reconnect to their (essentialized) “cultural roots” and (for many women) their professional selves as well as reproduce their social class status through cultivating an edge in their children.

Next I illustrate how this group has shaped the Chinese school through visible and invisible politics of exclusion and inclusion. Several conversations at the teachers' meeting first alerted me to the invisible divide between social classes, inadvertently implemented by the informal structure of the school organization. While the Chinese school is claimed to be a public place, it de facto excludes the local Chinese restaurant owners and workers. It also has normalized suburban parenthood, with the members themselves encouraging and sharing primarily conversation topics in the familial or consumeristic realms such parenting, housing, recreation and shopping. Finally, the physical spaces at the Chinese school turns out to have become highly-gendered, with more spaces for women to socialize among themselves and much less for men, and with very few mixed-gender spaces and interactions.

Finally I move on to elaborate the cultural production of the ideal immigrant. I start by noting how this group's migrant life, both at work and at home, is profoundly disciplined and over-stressed by the H1B work visa program¹²⁸ and by the social-historically formed suburban landscape. Despite such adversities in their daily life, this group was able to appear self-sufficient and perform "the model minority" by resorting to communal and individual boot-strapping, gendered de-skilling and emotional labor, as well as (troubled and troubling) parenting pursuits and struggles. And by encouraging the norm of communal bootstrapping "self-help," race becomes seemingly irrelevant to their discussion and addressing of their everyday struggles.

¹²⁸ For detailed analysis of U.S. immigration laws and how they represent a structure of neoliberal global labor migration, see Rhacel Parrenas' work and Bill Ong Hing's work.

Through this ethnographic study of a suburban weekend Chinese school, I have thus looked at the ways that Chinese academic migrants understand, enact, and negotiate suburban diaspora collectively in the culturally produced spaces of the school. The Chinese school is a project in fact, a contested site, relational, processual and contingent. My research participants (constituted at the intersection of their privileges and disadvantages) are constantly figuring out ways of being at home – building on or contesting against discourses of difference. They navigate displacement by re-rooting themselves through *performing being “Chinese,”* yet at the same time they strive to mainstream themselves (i.e., to *become American*) through performing the ideal (im)migrant with the Chinese school as a site of “self-help.”

Therefore, my study is a story of the cultural production of and by a group of “model minority.” All those seemingly innocent hallway conversations and activities, serve to make particular kind of places and subjects. That is, they weave together the project of place-making and subject-making situated in national immigration policies and local as well as national and transnational meaning-making.

The diasporic suburb therefore, with its ethnic institutions, is specific and dynamic. Even when physically integrated into the white suburb, many of these Chinese academic migrants are still socially excluded from white America. So they had carved out a space of their own through their weekend school, appearing ethnic, appearing fine – hence the “model minority” myth is once again seemingly substantiated. But this suburban diaspora paradoxically reinforces their disadvantages too, disciplining them into a particular kind of subject, “doing well and well-behaved.” My study thus looks at “the making of diaspora and the experience of diasporization (Parreñas and Siu, 2007, p. 12),”

specifically, a “Chinese professional suburban” diaspora in the U.S.. It reveals the making of a neoliberal multicultural subject – the ideal (im)migrant – at and beyond the Chinese school.

Are they quintessentially Other – with their “ethnic” institution, “oriental” dancing and “Asian values”? Obviously not. Are they mainstreamed – yellow outside and white inside? Obviously not either, as they know they can never really be considered American. In between the two expected possibilities – mainstreaming and ethnicizing, my participants are instead simply navigating their complicated migrant lives in fluid ways. At the intersection of citizenship, race, ethnicity, social class and gender, they have built their suburban diaspora “in relation to power, in the turn to and away from power” (Cho, 2007a, p. 11).

To sum up, the weekend Chinese school is more than an ethnicized space where Chinese academic migrants and white adoptive families as well as the local suburban community perform post-WWII ideals of “cultural democracy” advocated as early as in 1947 by teacher educators in the U.S.. This “tolerance” framework, although certainly a step forward from earlier assimilation approach, romanticizes cultural democracy as

“a state wherein the majority group *gives freedom to* a minority group to perpetuate its own cultural heritage, and in return, the minority group willingly shares elements of its own culture with the majority” (a teacher educator quoted in Burkholder, 2008, p. 453, emphasis added).

My dissertation, instead, shows how Chinese academic migrants meander through these practices of delectable “cultural democracy” at the Chinese school only to negotiate their everyday struggles around identity in the larger structural inequalities at the intersection of gender, race, class, nationality, language, place, and so on. Suburban diaspora, therefore, is not a natural landscape, but a social project. It is a process of transnational cultural production – continual negotiations through specific institutions and practices, as well as imaginations and aspirations. Discourses of “suburbia” and “diaspora” intertwine in how Chinese academic migrants live their everyday privileges and disadvantages. The identities of these individuals, as well as the group in general, and the space of the Chinese school are all produced and reproduced vis-à-vis “the seductive promises of” (Perreault, 2003, p. 585) suburban diaspora.

Contemporary Significance of my Study

In summer 2012, Yahoo news reported about “[The Rise of Asian-Americans](#),” a new study by the Pew Research Center. The article states that “Asians have surpassed Hispanics as the largest group of new immigrants to the United States,” and that Asian-Americans now “have the highest income” and “are the best-educated” (<http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/lookout/asian-immigrants-hispanic-us-pew-report-132434717.html>, 6/19/2012). Although this report is about Asian-Americans in general, Chinese Americans in particular can be most vulnerable to the stereotype of the invasive “Yellow Peril,” given Chinese government’s claimed ideological rule by Marxism in contrast to the West’s rule by liberalism and capitalism. Given the contemporary political

dislike among many in the U.S. of foreigners or immigration policy in general, it is urgent that more accounts help humanize different groups in the U.S..

Michael Burawoy, in his (2000) chapter *Grounding Globalization*, argues that Anthony Giddens' 1999 BBC Lectures "The Runaway World" make us "wonder how much of globalization talk signifies the privileged lifestyle of high-flying academics" (p. 337). Burawoy urges us to look beyond "the new cosmopolitan elite" and ask "[w]hat globalization look[s] like from the underside – for example, from Castell's 'black holes' of human marginality" (p. 337). My study notes that some of those new cosmopolitan elite, despite all their privileges, actually suffer marginality unknown to scholarship too.

This project thus counters the prevailing silence and explores the struggles of a migrant group often-extolled as "good and successful." Addressing their paradoxical experience, my study defies the partial silence and curates their distinct journey and their diverse voices. For this group as compared to other (often-studied) migrant groups, I reveal overlapping patterns (such as neoliberalist discourse of "boot-strapping") and distinguishing ones (the intertwining of privileges and disadvantages), highlighting the historical changes and continuities in the cultural politics of ever-globalizing capitalism (Lowe & Lloyd, 1997).

Attending to how Chinese academic migrants navigate academia, family, work, media, immigration law and other social institutions, this study complements both literature about Chinese graduate students here (which focuses on their *on-campus* adjustment) and studies on weekend Chinese language schools (which concentrate on *second generation children's* struggles there). My research also complicates the more

recent globalization and migration studies which (despite their turn to critical studies on identity formations) highlight only the experiences of either *refugees and service labor migrants* or *upper-class business and cultural migrants*. I certainly also hope this study will contribute significantly to (sub)urban studies which provide us valuable socio-historical insight yet have thus far ignored this suburban population. More importantly,

- my project's attention to concrete everyday lives and spaces on the *micro and local* level (while taking note of the global and national forces) complicates prevailing *macro* analyses of the controversial phenomena of skilled migration and international education;
- its insistence on how *advantages* and *disadvantages* intertwine, for example, how gender, skills and uprooting intersect, also complicates contemporary theories of migration and globalization.

Furthermore, Foucault (1980) urges for “ascending analysis” of power (p. 99), meaning studying for example state's and other intersecting powers' pervasive manifestation at local sites first, then trace up to state and other intersecting powers. Moore (2005) similarly notes the importance of studying “spatiality” – “the [social] production of space, its discursive and material practices, as well as its cultural understandings” (p. 3) within power relations. My study strives to do just that. It is an ethnography of governmentality – of “power relations that enlist subjects in the project of their own rule, ... encouraging self-discipline” (ibid. p3). In 2005, Moore lamented that

such “ethnographies of micropractices grounded in distinctive cultural politics and specific localities remained rare” (ibid. p. 325, note) (with the exception of Ong’s and other studies). There are certainly more such studies now, but still little is done with the group of Chinese academic migrants and their suburban Chinese schools.

Limitations of this Study

This study is approached through the primary theoretical lens of understanding “cultural production.” As a result, the focus on dynamics of culture may lead our attention away from how national and international political economy shape and is shaped by this intricate process of cultural production. While this study is limited in this respect, there are many places I tried to take note of how economics shape cultural production. For example, in Chapter IV, I briefly addressed how the international political economy (and the related im/migration policies in China and in the U.S.) played into the staging of the American dream among China among college students. In Chapter V, we can notice the economic divide between two major groups of Chinese immigrants, one group primarily working in Higher Education and related research careers, while the other group working in the service industry as restaurant owners and workers. This economic divide also speaks to the status quo of Central City, which has lost most of its manufacturing jobs in the past decades, with Higher Education and service industry now its main employers. The spread of globalization and deindustrialization has left lasting impacts on the nation as a whole, the surprising results of the recent election being just one manifestation of the ongoing hurt and pain experienced by many social groups. In Chapter VI, I also highlighted the racialized H1B work visa program. Structured mainly

to serve the interests of high-tech industries in the U.S. and to keep the competitive edge of the U.S. economy in the global arena, the H1B program has disciplined most Chinese academic migrants into highly productive and docile workers. It is my hope that future research would delve more into the national and international neoliberal economic dimensions which shape and is shaped by this group's everyday lived experiences.

Implications for this Particular Group

So how might my research facilitate this group (and potential allies in the U.S.) to reflect on our/their experience and be able to apply this newly gained insight to make our/their (and other's) life better in the U.S.? Without clearly discussing a "So what?" for my participants and readers, my research would only serve in the (poststructural) scholarly tea-time discussions for fun intellectual exchanges instead of for social change.

I am hoping that with my writing of their everyday experience of the Chinese school, they might be able to identify with what I am saying in general. Even though with my analysis they might still have some moments of "what on earth is she talking about," at least they might appreciate my respectful understanding and conveying of their experience, so that they would also give my side of the window a viewing and a pondering.

For example, I am hopeful that mothers and wives among Chinese academic migrants reading my study will be able to understand that the weekend Chinese school functions importantly in the formation of the "ideal immigrant wives or mother," the female figure of the "model minority." Working at the intersection of race, gender and

class, the Chinese school produces and reproduces a collective middle-class diaspora, a group of men and women “proudly” exhausted, or exhaustingly “proud.”

Women among this group in particular have done most of the physical, psychological and emotional nurturing and repair work. They teach and dance at the Chinese school to help the group reconnect to their “cultural roots,” they endure deskilling to serve their family needs stressed by the racialized H1B visa policy and the socio-historical suburban landscape, they mother artfully to keep a watchful eye and a full agenda for class reproduction, they “gossip” (share and connect) for boot-strapping at the Chinese school, although usually with private-minded concerns and topics. While many women among these Chinese academic migrants do the bulk of the teaching, organizing and representing work for the Chinese school, mostly it was men who occupied the administrative positions.

It is possible that many of my female readers will identify with these mixed feelings and messages, and collectively envision other possible ways of fulfilling their family’s needs without sacrificing their own. It is also possible that many might think of alternative ways of making the Chinese school into places of not only resource-pooling but also consciousness-raising, thereby bringing about different ways of subject-making in this communal space too. Maybe they could speak up among themselves about their family’s political limbo status haunted by the H1B visa policy. Or maybe they could recognize, for example, that the organization of the weekend school makes its activities and resources virtually inaccessible for the large body of local Chinese restaurant owners and workers, and choose to connect with them about our shared realities living in a neoliberal fragmented society.

Implications for the Larger American/Global Society

Finally, I hope my study of Chinese(-American) experience will serve as a mirror to the larger American society, and further, to globalization in its neoliberal decades.

While we tend to think of the Chinese academic migrants as more privileged, able to take care of themselves, therefore not constituting a social problem to cry out for research on, I find their lives to be just as constituted by the intersecting powers of class, race, gender, nationality, etc., as those differently situated in the U.S. (and elsewhere). Their hopes, joys, difficulties, and anxieties (before and after they came to the U.S. for study) serve as a mirror to what has been happening in the larger US society at this critical social-historical juncture of neoliberal globalization, the very conditions that structures, albeit differently, the lives of various other social groups.

Similarly, Karen Brodtkin (1999) documents *How Jews Became White Folks and What that Says about Race in America* and Noel Ignatiev (1996) traces *How the Irish Became White*. Both studies show how groups negotiated their marginalized places in the society by making (limited) choices in their everyday practices, thus living out the intricate workings and understandings of class, race, gender, nationality. In my study, I demonstrate that Chinese academic migrants and their spouses also constantly make choices based on how they perceive and experience their socio-historically situated lives. For example, some Chinese academic migrant women take up (gendered) ethnic dancing at the Chinese school for a sense of group belonging and for “gossiping” – collective problem-solving, and some Chinese academic men found comfort in fishing (a hobby of

the usual lone act) which helps to relieve their migration-related stress without needing to actually talk about it.

Borrowing from the American studies scholar Lowe (1996)¹²⁹, because these Chinese academic migrants' work (physical, intellectual and emotional labor) – are situated at the intersection of processes of immigration, racialization, labor exploitation, wider social class divide, and patriarchal gender relations, their work cannot be reduced to the abstract concept of “labor.” Similarly, their subjectivity cannot be reduced to an abstract political identity of “workers” (also see (1995) *States of Injury* by the political philosopher Wendy Brown). Hence Lowe (1996) takes issue with social movements around the line of social classes which often use singular narrative of emancipation implied by the abstract identity of “workers.” She suggests embodying these workers instead, by acknowledging differences in lived experiences yet “situate[ing] [these] different cultural forms in relation to shared social and historical processes, and to make active the dialectic that necessarily exists between those [diverse cultural] forms because of their common imbrication in those processes.” This study responds to her and other feminists' call to embody diverse groups of subjects, making their lived experiences intelligible and accessible, so we can move beyond a superficial “cultural democracy” to imagine other ways of living together and thinking together¹³⁰.

Implications for the Fields of Higher Education, Multicultural Education, and Heritage Education

¹²⁹ Immigration, gender, work.

¹³⁰ P. Evans, 2008. “Is an Alternative Globalization Possible?” *Politics and Society*, Vol. 36 No. 2, June 2008 271-305.

Years ago, inspired by my PhD advisor, I started my dissertation project planning to do a philosophical study on multicultural education which centers on “inclusion” and “representation.” I saw the limits of multiculturalism and wanted to help move the field of education toward social justice education instead, i.e., more dialogue on “privileges and disadvantages,” by challenging the status quo. As you can see, I have since allowed my sociological interest to take over my dissertation project, however, it turns out that my project still speaks loudly to my original philosophical interest.

The mainstream multicultural “representation” approach is obviously operating in this group’s migration experience and in their heritage education. Weekend Chinese schools are allowed to flourish in the U.S. and elsewhere, local newspaper reports on their annual spring festivals, local communities and schools invite dancing teams from weekend Chinese schools to perform for them. At weekend Chinese schools, “Chinese culture” and “Chinese language” are diligently represented for and cultivated in second generation immigrant children through texts and pictures in the curriculum and teaching, as well as at annual festivals and graduation ceremonies.

Representation without challenging the historical and contemporary marginality of Chinese in the Americas, however, is a very limited and limiting approach. During my interview, I was able to hear one male participant narrate how shocked he was about his daughter’s teacher’s negative portrayal of the Great Wall. Yet overall during my fieldwork, I have barely ever heard any discussions about how marginalized Chinese have lived their migration life here.

The visa and immigration system which profoundly structures their work and social life and family life in the U.S., is taken for granted as difficulties for each individual (family) to deal with or for Chinese school communities to help buffer the pains. In addressing their migration-related social isolation and familial stress, men have resorted to hobbies such as fishing and watching TV or ball games and browsing online, while women have taken up the lion's share of emotional work (besides often-gendered housework and reproductive work). Chinese school communities have become a key resource center to provide communal boot-strapping, to handle the difficulties of their frequent relocation and overwork and under-social. Race (and marginality) has become the elephant in the room at the Chinese school, whether in textbooks, classrooms or in hallway conversations and annual events.

In the field of higher education, as U.S. universities increasingly seek to recruit from China (and East Asia in general) “customers” – undergrad and Master's students – and “intellectual labors” – Ph.D. students and postdoctoral trainees, the support for Chinese academic migrants remains shockingly inadequate on or off campus. The few resources available (yet under-tailored for this group) are the office for international students and scholars, which provides one or two orientations annually and then day-to-day logistical help, the Chinese student association which again provides logistical help and some communal social events, the multicultural office which usually takes a multicultural “representation” approach, and the counseling center which often do not even have in their mindset Chinese academic migrants as among their clients.

I see an urgent need for academic departments on campus with a critical lens to walk the talk and ally with the multicultural offices and the Chinese students associations

to host discussion groups and book clubs or other activities which will build on and galvanize this group's migration experience. It is also important to make these activities and events accessible for the larger community on and off campus, so that (im)possible affinities might develop within and across diverse social groups.

In the recent heat of high-profile campus protests about structural racial injustice across the U.S., it is even more urgent that diverse Asian American migration experiences be studied and shared in-depth, so that the legacies of racial triangulation – naming Asian Americans as “model minority” to dismiss black activism as a lazy and unproductive approach to group advancement – can be further understood and hopefully dismantled. Only then, a real integrated and multicultural society is possible, based on profound inter-group social-historical understandings and affinities.

Implications for Interdisciplinary Study

It is certainly also my hope and passion that my project will inspire more students and faculty in the field of education to broaden our scope of interdisciplinary studies. It can be a risky endeavor (sometimes thrilling but often also strenuous, uncertain and lonely), but still one worth pursuing. Through the interdisciplinary lens of critical migration studies, my work highlights the interplay of power, place and subjectivity for the first-generation Chinese academic migrants. I have found freshening insight and gained sustaining strength from disciplines as diverse as sociology, philosophy, history, cultural geography, anthropology, cultural studies, Asian-American studies, as well as gender, migration and globalization studies.

As a result, my ethnographic dissertation seeks to shed light on engaging stories, images and discourses through critical analysis learned from various fields. Detailing the cultural politics of a suburban diaspora, this study stands at the exciting junction of racial/ethnic/gender formations, sociology of place, geographies of power, cultural logics of desire, and transnational flows. Besides contributing substantively as a case study of complex identity formations (Ignatiev, 1996; Lowe, 1996; Ong, 1997; Lowe, 1998a; Razack, 1998; Brodtkin, 1999; Gilroy, 2000; Roediger, 1999), methodologically this study is an endeavor at documenting governmentality and subject-making (Foucault, 1979; Butler, 1990) in their everyday workings (Ong, 1996).

My methodological and epistemological use of Symbolic Interactionism as complicated by feminist and poststructural insights (Denzin 2007, 2001) allows me to navigate through the less-explored muddy spaces between governmentality and everyday lives. Governmentality and subject-making (Foucault, 1977, 1982) are often explored in discourse analysis which relies less on real subjects' personal voices than on philosophical explications (Foucault, 1977; Butler, 1990). While some anthropological, sociological and geographical accounts have aimed at documenting governmentality in its everydayness (e.g., Ong 1996; Bettie 2003; Pratt 2004), more studies in this gist needs to be done. My study builds upon and extends on these endeavors.

It is certainly alarming to witness how, through disciplinary power, subjects have become vehicles and effects of power itself, in their everyday life, and even in my participants' precious social life at the Chinese school. It can also be disheartening to see how pervasive and productive such power is, in these subjects' active self-defining, self-governing and self-policing. On the other hand, I remain profoundly hopeful. It is still my

belief that better understanding of how modern disciplinary power works in our situated lives will bring us enormous strength to move forward. Collectively we can seek ever-more freedom (from normalized taken-for-granted boundaries and boundary work).

So my journey goes on, with your precious support.

APPENDIX A DETAILS OF CODING: CODES, THEMES AND GROUPINGS

Included below are first an overview of key themes and subthemes, and then a (what I call) “messy data map” - an intermediate step during my data analysis, where I listed all the recurring codes which had emerged during my open coding, without imposing any order on them, but instead allowing these codes to speak to each other, directing me toward noticing connections between them and hence recognizing subthemes and themes.

Thesis: Chinese school as a cultural production - Culture as process

1. Cultural logics of desire – pursuing the American dream, feeling lost, and then seeking the weekend Chinese school

1.1 The orchestrated American dream:

“I always knew I’d go to the U.S.”
 “I want to go to the U.S.!”
 “Impulsive!”
 “Just a vague idea, to come to the U.S.”

1.2 Gaps - Feeling lost after coming to the U.S.:

“you need to know where your background is.”
 “[otherwise] you might wonder whether this is the place I should reside in”
 “if without this, you will feel relatively lost and frustrated”
 “Regret!”
 “can’t go back”
 “outsider”/“foreigner”

1.3 Why seek out the Chinese school:

Cultural roots, community - “finding home in the weekend Chinese school”
 “It is like the Chinese church here, a spiritual sustenance.”
 Reproducing class - “learning Chinese will cultivate an edge in our kids”
 “we talk about kids’ programs here, share resources”
 Reconnecting to professional selves - “through these activities, I kept myself busy”

2. The making of the place – how issues of social class, gender, and suburban parenthood structure the Chinese school experience

2.1 Social class - Exclusion of restaurant workers/owners:

“She asked me for the phone number for ‘the principal’s office’ [starting to laugh]”
 “the *Fujian* mama”

2.2 Gendered spaces and activities:

Dance group, pool table, reception desk ...

2.3 Suburban Parenthood - Hallway conversations and topics:

Kids’ schooling, House purchase and maintenance, Shopping, Educational programs, Recreation and Entertainment

3. *The making of the model minority – they are often apolitical not so much because of “Asian values” but are disciplined into so*

3.1 Feeling trapped and stressed in their racialized job and isolated suburban family life:

“The visa issue!” “you can’t run away.”
 “Busy or not [at my job]? Of course busy, if not, it’s time to let you go.”
 “Our weekends are even busier than weekdays”
 “I am basically the kids’ chauffer and cook”
 “It’s so difficult to go around here without a car!”

3.2 Boot-strapping through shared individualized explanations and distancing strategies:

“I didn’t manage well”
 “I can do it. I just need to look it up.”
 “we ... you ...” – distancing from pain by switching pronouns

3.3 Boot-strapping through communal resource-sharing, stress-reduction and disciplining:

“Coming to the Chinese school is very relaxing for me”
 “Anything you need to know, you can ask other parents here.”

3.4 Gendered sacrifices: emotional work at home and deskilling at job:

“I *seemingly casually* brought up the topic with him”
 “It would’ve been nice, if I had a job.”
 “Every time I wanted to start doing something, my family ... would discourage me from trying.”
 “[My wife] is now teaching Chinese. She is relatively flexible, following where I [found a job].”

3.5 Parenting with privileged hopes and mediated worries:

“In the U.S., in general, education, college is not a problem.”
 “One thing I worry about for my child, is integration into the society.”
 “But I feel that in the U.S. the society is quite open”

parents (don't) hang out
 social network
 charity work
 international mobility
 social
 race, ethnicity, gender class
 professionals
 professionals / immigrants
 ex-professionals / immigrants
 visas / immigration status / citizenship
 family
 "whiteness"
 "big time"
 geo (big vs small / medium city)
 neighbors
 friends
 school districts
 church facilities
 needs
 "guests" / home
 cultural immigration (Wong)
 vs. body in line
 vs. body in line
 "displacement"
 Hallway conversations
 "transnationalists"
 grand parents
 professional identity
 being - regret
 volunteer teachers
 administrators
 grand diaspora
 model minority
 "displacement"
 "liberal subjects"
 family
 apprentice citizens
 "displacement"
 school districts
 church facilities
 needs

APPENDIX B INFORMED CONSENT

Chinese Academic Migrants in the U.S.: Volunteer Experiences at an Ethnic Sunday School

Informed Consent Letter 1 –Volunteer Administrators and Teachers

My name is Jianping Xu, and I am a graduate student at Syracuse University. I am inviting you to participate in a research study for my dissertation. Participation is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not. This letter will explain this study to you. Please feel free to ask questions about the study if you have any. I will be happy to explain anything in greater detail if you wish. I can be contacted at either 315-558-9272 (cell) or jxu04@syr.edu.

I am interested in studying how Chinese intellectual migrant group understand their involvement at Chinese ethnic Sunday schools, and their experience in general here in the U.S.. You will be interviewed about your involvement at the Chinese school, your study/work/life here in Syracuse. I may ask to interview you a second time, or ask you to join a focus group time where you and other volunteers will get together to talk about the same topics while I facilitate your discussion and take notes. These will each take approximately 1 hour of your time. The interviews and the focus group discussion will be audio taped. I will also, with your permission, observe at teacher's and administrators' meetings, as well as some of your classes. I will keep all interview and observation information confidential. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in group situations. Other participants in your group will know how you answer questions. While we will discourage anyone from sharing this information outside of the group, we cannot guarantee confidentiality by other group members. We will do our best to keep all of your personal information private and confidential, but absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in group discussions. In any articles I write or any presentations that I make, I will use a made-up name for you, and I will not reveal (or I will change) any details that could identify you, such as your work and family.

The benefit of this research is that you will be helping me understand how Chinese intellectual migrants make sense of their involvement at local Chinese ethnic Sunday schools. Together we can reflect upon critical issues such as education, work, family, and life in migration. Your perspectives and your community involvements will be informative for the larger society. The risk to you in participating in this study is that you might feel uncomfortable recalling and telling about certain memories. The risk will be minimized by me suggesting that you take a rest if you seem uncomfortable or stressful. Also, you can decline a question or take a break whenever you feel the need to. And the audio recorder can be turned off upon your request anytime. Furthermore, you can walk

away from the interview or focus group discussions, or withdraw completely from the study, if you so decide, without penalty. If you have any questions, concerns, complaints about the research, you may contact my academic advisor, who is also an investigator on this study, Professor Sari Biklen at 315-443-9075, or skbiklen@syr.edu. If you have any question about your rights as a research participant, you have questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than the investigator, or if you cannot reach the investigator, you can contact Syracuse University Institutional Review Board at 315-443-3013.

All of my questions have been answered, I am over the age of 18 and I wish to participate in this research study. I have received a copy of this consent form.

___ I agree to be audio taped.

___ I do not agree to be audio taped.

Signature of participant _____

Print name of participant _____

Date _____

Signature of investigator _____

Print name of investigator _____

Date _____

**Chinese Academic Migrants in the U.S.:
Volunteer Experiences at an Ethnic Sunday School**

Informed Consent Letter 2 – Spouses/Parents who are not volunteers

My name is Jianping Xu, and I am a graduate student at Syracuse University. I am inviting you to participate in a research study for my dissertation. Participation is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not. This letter will explain this study to you. Please feel free to ask questions about the study if you have any. I will be happy to explain anything in greater detail if you wish. I can be contacted at either 315-558-9272 (cell) or jxu04@syr.edu.

I am interested in studying how Chinese academic migrant group understand their involvement at Chinese ethnic Sunday schools, and of their experience in general here in the U.S.. You will be interviewed about your and/or your spouse's involvement at the Chinese school, your study/work/life here in Syracuse. I may ask to interview you a second time, or ask you to join a focus group time where you and other parents will get together to talk about the same topics while I facilitate your discussion and take notes. These will each take approximately 1 hour of your time. The interviews and the focus group discussion will be audio taped. I will keep all interview information confidential. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in group situations. Other participants in your group will know how you answer questions. While we will discourage anyone from sharing this information outside of the group, we cannot guarantee confidentiality by other group members. We will do our best to keep all of your personal information private and confidential, but absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in group discussions. In any articles I write or any presentations that I make, I will use a made-up name for you, and I will not reveal (or I will change) any details that could identify you, such as your work and family.

The benefit of this research is that you will be helping me understand how Chinese academic migrants make sense of their involvement at local Chinese ethnic Sunday schools. Together we can reflect upon critical issues such as education, work, family, and life in migration. Your perspectives and your community involvements will be informative for the larger society. The risk to you in participating in this study is that you might feel uncomfortable recalling and telling about certain memories. The risk will be minimized by me suggesting that you take a rest if you seem uncomfortable or stressful. Also, you can decline a question or take a break whenever you feel the need to. And the audio recorder can be turned off upon your request anytime. Furthermore, you can walk away from the interview or focus group discussions, or withdraw completely from the study, if you so decide, without penalty. If you have any questions, concerns, complaints about the research, you may contact my academic advisor, who is also an investigator on this study, Professor Sari Biklen at 315-443-9075, or skbiklen@syr.edu. If you have any question about your rights as a research participant, you have questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than the investigator, or if you cannot reach the investigator, you can contact Syracuse University Institutional Review Board at 315-443-3013.

All of my questions have been answered, I am over the age of 18 and I wish to participate in this research study. I have received a copy of this consent form.

I agree to be audio taped.

I do not agree to be audio taped.

Signature of participant _____

Print name of participant _____

Date _____

Signature of investigator _____

Print name of investigator _____

Date _____

APPENDIX C

BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT INTERVIEWEES

Name	Role at Chinese school	Current profession	Male/Female	Age range (approximate)
Anyun	Volunteer Administrator, Parent	University Professor	M	late 30s or early 40s
Chunteng	Long-term Volunteer Teacher	Lab Researcher at university	F	40s
Dan	Volunteer Teacher, Parent	STEM Professional	M	late 30s or early 40s
Dianyan	Teacher	Graduate Student, Adjunct Instructor	F	late 20s or early 30s
En*	Volunteer Administrator, Parent	University Professor	M	late 30s or early 40s
Jiemin	Volunteer Teacher	Stay-at-home mom	F	40s
Jieting	Parent	Stay-at-home mom	F	30s
Jun	Volunteer Teacher	Graduate Student	F	late 20s or early 30s
Kuan*	Parent	University Professor	M	late 30s or early 40s
Kong	Parent	Stay-at-home mom	F	late 20s or early 30s
Qin	Volunteer Teacher	IT Professional	F	late 20s or early 30s
Rong	Volunteer Administrator, Parent	IT Professional	M	late 30s or early 40s
Wenzhuo	Parent	Stay-at-home mom	F	early 30s
Xuan*	Volunteer Teacher, Parent	Stay-at-home mom	F	early 30s
Yanke	Volunteer, Parent	University Professor	M	late 30s or early 40s

Yinzhi	Parent (outlier)	University Staff	F	late 30s
Yongze	Parent (outlier)	University Professor	F	early 40s
Yueru	Parent, Also dancing team key member	IT Professional	F	40s
Yun	Administrator, Parent, Also dancing team key member	STEM Professional	F	early 40s
Zhen	Volunteer Teacher, Parent	Lab Technician at university	F	mid 30s
Zinuo	Volunteer, Parent	Professional	M	late 30s or early 40s
Zukai	Volunteer Teacher	Graduate Student	F	late 20s

Note: Interviewees whose names are marked with an* are my key informants.

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONS USED TO CONDUCT SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

First, how would you describe yourself?

Involvement at the Chinese school:

What do you do at the school? What do you get out of it?
 How did you come to know about the school?
 How or why did you become involved in volunteering – helping at the Chinese school?
 Why did you choose to send your child(ren) to the school?
 How do you understand Chinese culture?
 What meaning does this Chinese school have for you?
 What interests you most at the school?
 How do you participate in the school activities?
 What do you think of your teaching at the school? What do you like most, and what do you struggle with?
 What do you know about the history of the school? How did it start and evolve? Who started it?
 Why did she decide to set up the school, if you remember anything relating to that?
 Do you know about other schools? If so, how does this one compare?

Life stories in general:

What do you usually do for fun? How do you spend your evenings and weekends?
 What do you like about your study/work/life here?
 How does/did your graduate study here in the US influence how you understand yourself?
 How do you see Chinese society and American society? What do you appreciate most, in each? What do you struggle with the most in each society?
 What does “being Chinese” mean to you here?

Early memories:

How do you understand your decision to come to the U.S. for graduate study (or post-doc)?
 What did you know about the U.S. before you came over? Where and how did you learn about these?
 Would you like to share some of your experiences in coming to the U.S.? The early memories?

- Who picked you up? Who became your friends here?
- What were your first steps of settling down here?
- What were some happy moments that you remember?
- What were some difficult moments?

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Education

M.S. Cultural Foundations of Education, Syracuse University, 2009

B.A. English, Southeast University, China, 1996

University Teaching Experience

Co-Facilitator, Rutgers - Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, spring 2015:

Co-facilitated Friday workshops on Scientific Teaching for postdoctoral trainees;

Instructor, School of Education, Syracuse University, spring 2010:

Independently teaching (after designing) a new advanced undergrad seminar, “International Education: Cultural and Social Transformations” with 14 students;

Teaching Assistant, Cultural Foundations of Education, Syracuse University, 2005-2006 & 2003-2004:

Leading weekly small group discussions for the class of over 90 students, grading papers, as well as advising graduate students on their research experience, for a graduate and undergraduate combined course;

Major Administrative Experience in Educational Programs

Program Coordinator, Rutgers - Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, for the NIH-funded IRACDA-INSPIRE postdoctoral training program, 2015 – now;

Administrative Assistant, Office of the Dean of School of Education, Syracuse University, spring 2010:

Developing disability-related resources to use for the Dean’s documentary film’s website;

Graduate Assistant, Cultural Foundations of Education, Syracuse University, fall 2009:

Helped our department chair develop a new Master’s program “International Education.”

University and Community Volunteer Services

Department Peer Committee member, Cultural Foundations of Education “peer orientation” initiative, 2009;

Volunteer teacher, Central New York Chinese School, Sep. 2006 – Jun. 2007;

Student representative, Cultural Foundations of Education Department monthly faculty meeting, Sep. 2005 - May 2006;

Initiator and organizer, Cultural Foundations of Education peer support groups /academic Brownbags, Oct. 2005 - May 2006;

Peer Assistant, Syracuse University Slutzker Center for International Services, winter & summer 2005/6;

After-school Tutor, Community United to Rebuild Neighborhood program, Syracuse, NY, Sep. 2004 - May 2005.

Professional Affiliations

American Educational Studies Association (AES A)

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