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and Stacey J. Lee

Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling

***Clara C. Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling
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PREFACE

Most contemporary conversations by and about Asian and Pacific Americans highlight how diverse they are as a racial category (Hsia & Hirano-Nakanishi, 1995; Pang, 1995). Dozens of ethnic groups are included or identify as Asian and Pacific American, and these dozens of ethnic groups speak hundreds of dialects and languages. In fact, 1990 U.S. Census data indicate 30 Asian groups and 21 Pacific Islander groups. It should, therefore, be common knowledge that Asian and Pacific American groups represent amazing levels of diversity, yet their diversity is typically obscured or ignored by mainstream scholarship. Asian and Pacific Americans are either excluded entirely from studies that focus on people of color or make comparisons between the experiences of European Americans and “minorities,” or they are (re)presented as a monolithic racial Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) category, which implicitly suggests that all Asian and Pacific American group members share common experiences, backgrounds, aspirations, and Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) stories. The absence of Asian and Pacific American experiences and perspectives from academic and policy literature stands in stark contrast to their growing presence in U.S. schools and society as Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) their numbers increase exponentially. Indeed, Census 2000 figures reveal that Asian and Pacific Americans make up 4.1% of the population, or about 11.3 million people, a figure that is expected to rise to 10% of the population by 2050 (Shinagawa & Jang, 1998). Clearly, more research that speaks to the issues most relevant to Asian and Pacific Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) Americans is necessary.

This research anthology intends to interrupt the silence surrounding Asian Americans in education and society by creating a space for scholar-practitioners to share empirical work that seeks to explicate the lives and experiences of Asian Americans. It is the second volume in the series cosponsored by the Special Interest Group (SIG)—Research on the Education of Asian and Pacific Americans of the American Educational Research Association, and the California Association for Asian and Pacific American Education. By examining the specific ways in which Asian Americans shape their own existence, support and inform one another academically and socioculturally, and struggle through the complex and varied processes of identity development, family socialization, and schooling, each chapter Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) helps to differentiate and particularize Asian American ways of being and knowing.

The volume is divided into two sections: *Asian American Identities and Families*, and *Asian American Students in School: Achievement and Aspirations*. In *Asian American Identities*,

Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) Part I, five chapters speak specifically to issues of identity development, race and family relationships through multiple lenses, using the words of participants to gain insight into their lived experiences in U.S. society. In Chapter 1, Goodwin explores the racial identity development of Asians (Chinese, Korean, and South Asian) growing up in America in relation to context, educational experiences, and family expectations. Chapter 2 by Mehra offers a window into how a collection of Asian Indian Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) families straddle the divide between their ethnically specific home cultures and the larger “American” culture. Kim looks at the impact of the campus community /environment, and notions of dual identity—Korean and American—in the formation of a political identity among Asian undergraduates in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, Newton’s study provides a space for Asian American student teachers to analyze the disjuncture Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) between children’s and cooperating teachers’ perceptions of them in contrast to their own sense of identity and self. Finally, in Chapter 5, Kim and Greene examine the sacrifices and decisions made by Korean families when they immigrate for the purpose of improved educational opportunities for their children.

In Part II, five Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) chapters focus on informal networks within Asian American communities and the educational experiences and aspirations of Asian American students. In Chapter 6, Park conducts a comparative study of educational aspirations among different Asian ethnic groups (Chinese, Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Japanese American) and between these Asian groups and white students. In Chapter 7, Lew describes how ethnic networks support academic success among second-generation Korean American high school students. Brittain, in Chapter 8, studies the transfer of key information about U.S. schools between Chinese immigrant children and their conationals. Zhang, in Chapter 9, looks at academic achievement in terms of intergenerational differences. The volume closes with Chapter 10 where Wright documents and analyzes the creation, Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) and end, of a Khmer bilingual education program Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) in the wake Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) of Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) Proposition 227.

By presenting and integrating knowledge across Asian ethnic groups and domains, the authors collectively illuminate the complexities of Asian American lives and relationships. *Asian American Identities, Families, and Schooling* is a work of passion, commitment, and much energy. Without the hard work and dedication of the authors, such important work would not be possible. The series coeditors express their gratitude and appreciation to all the contributors for participating in the development of this meaningful and sorely needed resource.

Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans)

part I

ASIAN AMERICAN IDENTITIES AND FAMILIES

CHAPTER 1

GROWING UP ASIAN IN AMERICA

A Search for Self

A. Lin Goodwin

ABSTRACT

This qualitative, interpretive study looks at the process of developing a sense of self or identity through the eyes of nine Asian Americans growing up in this country as “Other.” It explores the question: What does it mean to be Asian in America where society is racialized, people of color are “Otherized,” and Asian Americans are both marginalized and deified? Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) How might hearing one another’s stories help Asian Americans in their search for self and place? Using interviews to capture personal narratives, this study reveals lives lived Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) on the margins and in the cultural spaces in between who is defined as “American” on the one hand,

and how one is located and identified as “Asian” on the other. Through stories and vignettes, patterns of personal meaning-making Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) emerge, not for the purpose of blanketly explaining Asian American life, but for understanding and deconstructing some of the specificity and diversity that characterize this monolithic category named *Asian*.

My parents and everyone in school would drill into me that I wasn’t American, that I would never be American.

According to the latest census, Asian Americans constitute 4.1% percent of the population, or 11.3 million people (Park, 2001), an increase of approximately 100% since the last census conducted a decade ago (Reid, 2001). While such exponential increases in the Asian American population describe our more recent history, we are not a new phenomenon: Asians have been a part of the U.S. Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) landscape from as early as the 17th century (Karnow & Yoshihara, 1992). And yet, our perennial visitor status persists despite our long presence in this country; the irony is that we remain “strangers from a distant shore” (Takaki, 1989), forever perceived as foreigners (Lee, 1996). Indeed, even while we Asians “have been pressured into assimilating within an inflexible mold of Americanization” (Suzuki, 1977, p. 151), and despite our efforts to “out-Yankee the Yankees” (Chun, 1995, p. 108), full membership in U.S. society remains illusive. Our perceived “foreign-ness” Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) accentuates our “two-worldness,” our existence in between old and new worlds, not Asian enough to repatriate, not “American” enough to integrate.

This study looks at the process of developing a sense of self or identity through the eyes of those growing up in this country as “Other.” We are learning more and more about racial and ethnic identity development (see, e.g., Cross, 1992; Gay, 1978; Helms, 1990; Tatum, 1997; Thompson & Carter, 1997), but there continues to be sketchy information about the identity development of Asian Americans—how they perceive themselves, and what kinds of experiences and life events seem to have a Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) significant impact on their sense of self. What does it mean to be Asian in America where society is racialized, people of color are “Otherized,” and Asian Americans are both marginalized and deified? How might hearing one another’s stories help Asian Americans in their search for self and place? Using interviews to capture personal narratives, this study reveals lives Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) lived on the margins and in the cultural spaces in between who is defined as “American” on the one hand, and how one is located and identified as “Asian” on the other. Through stories and vignettes, patterns of personal meaning-making emerge, not for the purpose of definitively explaining Asian American life, but for understanding and deconstructing some of the specificity and diversity that characterize this monolithic category named *Asian*.

Data for the study were collected primarily through telephone interviews, although two study participants responded to the interview questions via email. Each phone interview lasted about an hour and all interviewees responded to the same set of questions. Respondents were either invited to participate in the study or identified through a nomination process, using three criteria: (1) geographic, that is, living and growing up in the Northeast U.S.; (2) membership in one of three Asian ethnic groups: Korean, Chinese, or South Asian; and (3) willingness to participate in the study.

Using these criteria, a sample of nine participants was identified: three Chinese Americans, four Korean Americans, and two South Asians or Indian Americans, an ethnic breakdown that represents the largest Asian groups residing in the Northeast region of the United States. Five of the nine are teachers and were known to me prior to the study; the other four I came to know through the study—three came from the business world and one was a college student. The group, with the exception of one, was female, and ranged in age at the time of the study from 18 to 39, with a mean and median age of 28. Six of the 9 are first-generation immigrants, that is, they were born elsewhere and immigrated with their parents to the United States at Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) a young age, ranging from 3 to 7 years old; two are members of the second generation and are the children of immigrants; the Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) final respondent's family has been in this country Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) for four generations. Two of the sample grew up in neighborhoods where there were other Asian Americans; the rest lived in communities where they and their family were often the only Asians. Two of the respondents grew up in the suburbs, although one of the two did spend some of her early childhood living in a city; all the others grew up in a major city in the region. This city is typically characterized as diverse and multiethnic. Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) Yet, despite the fact that close to all the respondents spent significant portions of their lives in this urban and multicultural environment, seven Asian American Identities, Families, & Schooling (Research on the Education of Asian Pacific Americans) of the nine were physically and/or culturally isolated from other Asian Americans. Of the nine, only two would be considered equally fluent in both their home language and English, although the majority can understand their home language and speak it "a little." The brief portraits below introduce each participant.

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