EXPERIENCES IN THE BUBBLE:
ASSIMILATION AND ACCULTURATIVE STRESS OF CHINESE HERITAGE STUDENTS IN SILICON VALLEY

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ABSTRACT

Many students of Chinese heritage experience schooling in Silicon Valley – a high-stakes, resource-rich area with distinctive social and educational dynamics – in an atmosphere that can appropriately described as a bubble. This study uses semi-structured, open-ended, qualitative interviews with nine participants who reflected on their experiences attending high schools in the Silicon Valley region, while also describing their experiences as students at higher education institutions. I interpret the findings through the lenses of segmented assimilation theory and social capital theory. Although they easily establish social networks with other ethnic Asians in majority-Asian population high schools, the norms of intense competition and high expectations are a source of stress. Due to an insular ethnic environment, some participants find difficulty adapting to a comparatively diverse post-secondary social dynamic, resulting in acculturative stress. Ethnic Chinese students can create social capital beyond their ethnic group via participation in school- and community-based extracurricular activities, and via participation in religious communities, while simultaneously aiding in identity formation.
In “Silicon Valley” a highly skilled labor force, with many workers from Chinese backgrounds, enters a resource-rich environment that breeds both success and stressful high expectations. Coined in 1971, the term "Silicon Valley" refers to a region in the San Francisco Bay Area that encompasses the concentration of several high-profile, resource-rich, and wealth-producing companies (Hoefler, 1971). High-skilled workers are entering the area’s labor market to take advantage of the job opportunities generated, infusing the area with large amounts of human and financial capital (Glaeser & Berry, 2006; Lécuyer, 2006; Rao & Scaruffi, 2011; Wong, 2006). Many of these skilled workers have origins in Asia, with a significant portion having Chinese ancestry (Rao & Scaruffi, 2011; Wong, 2006). As this skilled labor force of Chinese heritage enters Silicon Valley, they bring along children who enter an area with a reputation for high academic achievement (Wong, 2006). With the reputation and expectation for students at some Silicon Valley high schools to perform well academically (Hwang, 2005; Shankar, 2008), issues of acculturation¹ and structural barriers to assimilation² can lead to acculturative stress³ for many immigrants and children of immigrants, including those of Chinese heritage. Nonetheless, there is little research as to how they fare socially and emotionally while adjusting to life in America. For students of Chinese descent entering this type of environment, there are both resources and unexplored barriers that they encounter that may affect their acculturation, assimilation, and level of acculturative stress.

The purpose of this study is to examine how ethnic Chinese students who immigrated in their adolescence (first-generation), in their childhood (1.5 generation), or are the children of immigrants (second-generation) acculturate and assimilate to a high-stakes, resource-rich educational environment, such as Silicon Valley, by exploring students' retrospective experiences in high school and their experiences as students at higher education institutions⁴. This study is
different from previous studies in that I examine how an Asian subgroup of high school students from high-resource backgrounds, rich in human and financial capital, interact with the American education system as the majority group in school rather than the minority. In addition, my study makes an important contribution by investigating how Chinese heritage students' high school experiences in Silicon Valley shape their experiences in more diverse college and university settings.

Using segmented assimilation and social capital theories as my lenses of interpretation, I focus on the role of culture in managing relationships between Chinese immigrant youth and parents. I also investigate how expectations and stereotypes influence interpersonal relationships and emotional well-being of Chinese heritage students. Furthermore, I examine the dynamics of social capital for Asian students both in Silicon Valley high schools and in post-secondary institutions. Finally, I explore the development of stress and acculturative stress due to the above factors. This research is important for understanding the challenges that high-resource immigrants encounter in American school systems that harbor high expectations for educational success, as well as how those expectations impact these students’ post-secondary educational experiences.

**CHINESE IN SILICON VALLEY**

Asian Americans represent the fastest-growing racial group in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2012) with an increase of 46% between 2000 and 2010 (U.S. Census, 2013). They also have the highest incomes – a median household income of $66,000 for Asian Americans, compared to $54,000 for Whites, $40,000 for Hispanics, and $33,300 for Blacks – and the highest levels of education among all racial/ethnic groups, with 61% of adults aged 25 to 64 who come from Asia possessing at least a bachelor’s degree (Pew Research Center, 2012). Approximately 23% of Asian Americans can be described as individuals of Chinese heritage, a quarter of this
The expanding Chinese population in Silicon Valley is attracted to the academic excellence pervading the school environment (Hwang, 2005; Shankar, 2008) and the existence of high-tech, skill-intensive industries and the job opportunities that they present (Glaeser & Berry, 2006; Wong, 2006). In fact, 30% of the high-tech workforce in Silicon Valley is composed of workers who were
foreign-born. About one third of these workers take positions as scientists or engineers, occupations that require a significant amount of education (human capital), and provide relatively large amounts of compensation in the form of high salaries (financial capital) (Rao & Scaruffi; Wong, 2006). In 2009, the median family income of Chinese families in Silicon Valley was $127,000 (Glantz, 2011); the median household income for the entire American population in 2009 was $50,221 (Noss, 2010). With large amounts of human and financial capital at their disposal, Silicon Valley workers and residents sustain and encourage high academic achievement in the area’s schools (Hwang, 2005; Shankar, 2008).

CULTURE, EXPECTATIONS, AND SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE CONTEXT OF CHINESE AMERICAN STUDENTS

In this section, I first review literature on the effects of traditional culture on Chinese American youth and their families as values may differ between parents and their more acculturated children. I then examine the expectations and stereotypes that may affect the ability of students with Chinese ancestry to adapt to the American educational environment. Finally, I review literature related to the social capital development of Asian immigrants in American schools.

Interplay of Culture, Achievement, and Acculturation

The values that children and their families carry into Western countries from their country of origin play a determining factor in their perceptions of education and its role in shaping success (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998; Li, 2001). Excellence in education is generally viewed by Chinese parents as an expectation of their children (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998; Li, 2001). Among Chinese parents in the United States, almost two thirds believed that hard work is another value that would lead to success (Pew Research Center, 2012). The high expectations of Chinese parents and the increased emphasis on educational achievement, in the form of formal educational
environments for their children, does not seem to have adverse effects on Chinese students’ social adjustment (Huntsinger, Jose, & Larson, 1998).

The high educational expectations held by many Chinese parents could be beneficial for their children in schooling because it can lead to high academic achievement. Hao and Bonstead-Bruns (1998) analyzed the student and parental survey data of 234 Chinese, 219 Filipino, 147 Korean, and 773 Mexican immigrant students, and 777 Mexican, 2,376 black, and 13,386 white native-born students. They were able to determine that Chinese parents of eighth-grade students in American schools had comparatively higher levels of expectation for educational attainment for their children. They also found that those parents and children had a high level of agreement on the expectations that students should live up to. They found that there was a positive correlation between increased expectations and higher achievement.

These high expectations are rooted in Chinese cultural norms emphasizing the importance of academic achievement. In her study, Li (2001) conducted open-ended, qualitative interviews with the parents of seven ethnic Chinese families of Canadian students to explore cultural values and expectations in relation to education. Li found that education was of the greatest importance to dissuade discrimination in the labor market, to provide the chance for successful careers, and for the proper maintenance of society, according to the parents. A primary goal was for their children to receive admission to elite universities. Li’s study, however, did not include the viewpoints of their children, nor did it discuss how the parents’ high expectations affected their children socially or emotionally.

Though this pressure may encourage students to achieve academically, it may be detrimental to a child's success as regimented, work-oriented parenting alone does not prepare children to adjust socially despite the result of academic excellence (Huntsinger, et al., 1998). Huntsinger, et
al. (1998) conducted a longitudinal study of 40 European American and 36 Chinese American first- and second-grade students, their parents, and their teachers to assess the structured nature of Chinese parenting in regards to their children’s academic performance and social adjustment. They found that Chinese American children in the study did not suffer from social maladjustment when compared to their European American counterparts. This phenomenon occurred despite Chinese heritage students spending comparatively more time on structured academic learning and relatively less time in free social play.

Children of Chinese immigrants that follow their parents' traditional values do not always benefit from their allegiances; the cultural mismatch between the values of the parents and the values of their children inculcating Westernized values may lead to intergenerational conflict. For instance, Wu and Chao’s study (2005) found that adjustment of Chinese adolescents to American values led to their perceiving a lack of warmth in their culturally Chinese parents. The results of surveys measuring perceived parental warmth and adolescents’ psychological well-being of 184 Chinese American and 80 European American high school students were correlated; they found that Chinese American students had cultural norms for parental warmth that were similar to those of their European American peers, with Chinese American students perceiving comparatively less warmth from their parents. In their study, this incongruity led to more problems associated with emotional adjustment than compared to their European American peers, resulting in stress.

An additional issue that may lead to stress for some immigrant students is the lack of tacit knowledge of ingrained norms for social interaction with a new culture upon arrival into the American educational system (Sternberg, 1998). Sternberg (1998) suggests that the lack of such knowledge could impact educational attainment negatively by impeding peer-to-peer social interactions, creating miscommunication between students and teachers, and narrowing students’
ability to problem-solve. Longitudinally, Sternberg found that tacit knowledge was essential for immigrant students to acculturate successfully into American schooling since a lack of tacit knowledge would lead to social isolation due to miscommunication with classmates and teachers.

**Expectations of Chinese American Students**

General expectations and stereotypes of minority groups have been shown to affect the perceptions that the minority group members have on themselves (Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2000; Lee, 2008; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Stereotype threat is a concept that demonstrates this phenomenon, and may inform the ways in which stereotypes about Asian students may affect their perceptions of their own performance and abilities. Stereotype threat occurs when a member of a certain social group has feelings of distress, tension, or worry in confirming a negative belief, perception, or stereotype about that member's social group (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Steele and Aronson's (1995) study of African American participants taking a standardized college entrance examination showed how the stereotype of lower intelligence in their racial group led to lower individual performances compared to their white counterparts.

Though Steele and Aronson (1995) found that stereotype threat was a factor for poor performance among students who are perceived – and in turn perceive themselves – as inferior; a similar effect can negatively affect the academic performance of students who are regarded with extremely high expectations, causing severe anxiety. For example, Cheryan and Bodenhausen's study (2000) of Asian American women correlated high expectations on quantitative skills tests with diminished performance. In their study, 49 Asian American female college students were randomly given questionnaires that manipulated their identity salience – which was their sense of self in comparison to others – toward either ethnicity, gender, or personal identity as a control. After taking a challenging quantitative skills tests, participants whose identity salience was
manipulated toward ethnicity scored significantly lower than the control group and the gender salience group. They concluded that an emphasis on their Asian ethnicity before the test, and the high academic expectations that are perceived to be an attribute of their ethnicity, led to "choking under pressure." The high expectations connoted via the "model minority" stereotype (Lee, 2008) of Asian Americans led to feelings of anxiety in a high-stakes academic environment and, ultimately, academic failure under pressure. In this way, the model minority stereotype might also lead to anxiety, stress, and pressure to perform at a high level among Chinese immigrant students.

**Social Capital Development in Immigrant and Minority Youth**

Asian immigrant youth may also be influenced by the social capital – the benefits garnered through social interactions – developed with parents and family members. Schneider and Lee (1990) found that, compared to white youth, students of Asian descent were influenced more by the wishes of their immigrant parents to perform well academically. After conducting ethnographic interviews with and observations of 46 East Asian and 49 white sixth and seventh graders at two public elementary schools, the researchers found that East Asian students performed better academically in comparison to their white peers. They found that self-expectations formed due to a home culture that emphasized their educational attainment accounted for higher achievement among the East Asian participants. Furthermore, the Asian students in their study were provided with more resources to improve their academic performance, such as via after-school tutoring services and structured timetables for studying.

Although the development of social capital in immigrant and minority youth can have positive effects, negative consequences for the educational achievement of those youth may also arise. In a case study of a Vietnamese community in a low-income urban minority community in New Orleans, Zhou and Bankston (1998) administered surveys and conducted in-depth, open-ended
interviews with stakeholders in the education system on the behaviors and social networks of Vietnamese American youth. They found that Vietnamese youth were exposed to a culture of low academic achievement pervasive in their urban community, while being encouraged to perform well in school by their parents and extended family as a consequence of traditional Asian values. In their case study, Zhou and Bankston found that Vietnamese youth fell into two distinct categories: high-performers, who followed the traditional values of their ethnic community; and low-performers, who dismissed the social capital of their ethnic community in favor of the social capital developed with American urban youth who did not value education. Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) note that Mexican American students who felt marginalized by the out-group majority were able to create social capital via the social networks available in their ethnic in-group. The solidarity developed within their ethnic group strengthened their pride in their minority status and increased students’ sense of belonging. However, the bounded solidarity of some of those Mexican American immigrant youths led to some members sacrificing their own interests for the sake of the group, and to maintain ethnic norms. In such cases, immigrant youths were unable attain upward mobility as they were tied to the norms of that ethnic group, adhering to a segmented form of assimilation. My study investigates the concepts of solidarity and adherence to norms in relation to the ethnic background of the participants.

SEGMENTED ASSIMILATION THEORY AND SOCIAL CAPITAL THEORY

Segmented assimilation theory and social capital theory provide a framework to understand the dynamics of acculturation and assimilation among Chinese immigrant students and their co-ethnic peers of immigrant parents.

Classic, or structural, assimilation theory posits that all immigrant groups would eventually assimilate into a majority culture by following the processes of first acculturating to the majority
group, then being accepted structurally into the majority group institutions (Gordon, 1964). In this case, the majority group is in reference to the white American mainstream. The immigrant groups would gain entry as members of the majority group by entering into primary relationships of shared culture and historical memories. However, this view has been criticized as Anglo-conformist, as it ignores race and the marginalization that results from perceptions of the foreigner, the other, and the outsider (Portes & Zhou, 1993). In contrast, Portes & Zhou (1993) state that immigrant and minority groups may follow divergent paths of segmented assimilation. Some immigrant and minority groups may tread a less successful road toward assimilation with the underclasses, or remain in their ethnic and minority group to attain upward mobility and success within their insular community. A major component of this last path is the immigrant students’ ability to tap into social networks in their community, as well as the shared values that the community holds. This concept of an insular community is relevant for this study as many ethnic Chinese students in Silicon Valley may be surrounded by classmates of similar background in their schools and community, providing a safe space that may not be representative of environments they will encounter later on in life. Viewed from the lens of segmented assimilation, the ease of adaptation to a high-stakes, resource-rich educational environment depends on the ethnic makeup of the student population at both the high school and post-secondary levels. The existence of a large Chinese or Asian student population in either of those scenarios would likely result in the ethnic Chinese student finding a secure place in the overall social structure of school. The student can then tap into the shared cultural values of that network in order to find motivation toward common goals.

In addition to segmented assimilation theory, I view my data through the lens of social capital theory to investigate the connections that are crucial to acculturating and assimilating into the educational environment, as well as perceptions of the culture pervading participants’ educational
environments. Sociologist James Coleman (1988) identified social structures – such as the relationships between people – as key elements to the development and dissemination of social capital. Social structures are specific to the context of relationships both between and among actors, such as the variation in relationships between peers, and between students and teachers. Social capital can be created when norms exist to guide social interactions that are dependent on trust between actors. These norms can be beneficial by building human capital via interpersonal connections. However, they may also be detrimental in their rigid rules that prevent exploration and diversification of social connections beyond certain communities.

For students of Chinese descent in the American education system, difficulty in developing social capital with out-group members may result in lower self-esteem due to fewer social connections among diverse peers. The lack of cultural understanding between out-group and immigrant student populations creates obstacles for establishing social bonds and friendships where trust can be formed and obligations made and repaid, segmenting assimilation into the mainstream, out-group culture. Without the interaction that could establish trust, opportunities for both social capital and human capital creation are nullified. In these cases, my initial expectations were that students of Chinese heritage would have formed bonds in high school mainly, if not exclusively, with other students of a similar cultural background based on ethnicity and race. Though this may provide a safe space for the immigrant student to operate, their segmented assimilation may lead to difficulty acculturating to a higher-education environment where students are expected to branch out and explore unfamiliar spaces.

Using this conceptual framework, I address the following research questions:
1. How do college students of Chinese descent from Asian-majority high schools, where financial and human capital are abundant, retrospectively view their high school experiences in terms of acculturation and assimilation?

2. How do these students adapt to the post-secondary institutional environment in the context of their ethnicity?

DATA AND METHODS

I investigated my research questions using a qualitative research design (Creswell, 2009). This design is appropriate for understanding the experiences of my respondents because the data gathered describe how the participants view and interpret the environment around them (Merriam, 2002). I used semi-structured, open-ended questions during interviews to understand these perspectives in the participants’ own words and elicited responses that encapsulate feelings and perceptions that have significance beyond what would be obtained via quantitative methods.

Participants

There were nine participants in this study. The criteria for my sample were individuals of Chinese descent who have attended high school in the Silicon Valley area and were currently attending a post-secondary institution at the time of the interviews. Participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 23. Countries of origin included China, Taiwan, and the U.S. Two participants are first-generation Chinese (born in Asia, but immigrated at or after age 13), four are 1.5 generation (born in Asia, but immigrated before the age of 13), and three are second-generation (at least one parent was born in Asia). Participants attended one of six Silicon Valley high schools (one participant was a student at two of these schools at different times), and were students at one of four post-secondary institutions at the time of the interviews. Four participants attended two-year community
colleges, and five attended four-year universities. Three participants were male and six were female. The characteristics of each participant can be seen in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

**Data Collection**

For eight of the nine participants, I conducted interviews in-person; due to distance, I interviewed one participant – a student at a university in the American southeast – via Skype, a voice-over-internet-provider software application. Each interview lasted between 60 and 105 minutes. I recruited participants using convenience and snowball sampling methods (Huck, 2012) by sending an engaging message via email with a detailed information sheet to potential participants via student mailing lists maintained by Asian American Studies faculty at community colleges and via student email lists for Asian-themed student organizations at several universities. I also visited several college campuses and distributed hardcopy information regarding my study. Additional participants were obtained via referrals from participants that were originally recruited from these methods. Though these types of sampling are not randomized, I cast a large net over several post-secondary institutions by targeting the most likely areas to have students that fit my criteria that also attended Silicon Valley high schools. Participants who agreed to be interviewed may be different from non-respondents in that they may have been more eager to share their experiences regarding acculturation and assimilation.

I included a link to an online Qualtrics survey in the recruitment message. This survey consisted of closed-ended questions to gather demographic information before the in-person interviews in order to assess respondents’ compatibility with the criteria for my sample. The survey questionnaire also included questions regarding acculturation and acculturative stress (see Appendix). The purpose of the questionnaire was mainly used to filter potential participants for
open-ended, in-person interviews, but also provided preliminary responses to concepts of acculturation that I followed-up with during interviews. In a four-week span, the survey received 62 unique responses based on Internet Protocol (IP) addresses, with 41 surveys completed. Nine respondents fit the interview criteria of being a first-, 1.5, or second-generation Chinese heritage student who had attended a Silicon Valley high school and was attending a post-secondary institution. All participants in the study completed the survey questionnaire. To increase response rates, I offered a chance to receive a $20 Amazon gift card for those who completed the survey.

**Analysis Methods**

Each interview was recorded using a voice-recorder, with the consent of each participant. I then transcribed selected portions of the recorded interviews while maintaining confidentiality by providing pseudonyms and changing identifying information of the participants. I then coded the resulting transcriptions with internal and external codes developed via a series of passes (Charmaz, 1983). With each successive pass, I developed codes of increasing depth, by first developing codes that were descriptive and moving onto codes that were more interpretive in order to develop a storyline (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). At the same time, I wrote initial memos to suggest overarching themes, and explored relationships between codes by using integrative memos (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995).

**Interview Protocol**

The interview protocol explored perceived expectations, and issues of acculturation and acculturative stress among students of Chinese heritage in an educational environment flush with resources, and high expectations for academic achievement. The aim was to uncover issues relating to their majority or minority status in high school that may be related to their social adjustment, and emotional well-being as students at higher education institutions. The protocol explored topics
such as peer-to-peer dynamics both in high school and college; ethnic and racial socialization; acculturative stress; school- and community-based extracurricular activities; and self and parental expectations, both in high school and as students in post-secondary education (see Appendix).

**Limitations**

As an immigrant of Chinese ancestry, my ability to relate to the experiences of participants was both helpful and detrimental. Though I could more easily establish rapport, our connection via race, ethnicity, and immigration status may have influenced the way in which I asked questions, and affected the way I view responses and the elements that I deem important within those responses. By keeping in mind my biases I mitigated my biases by distancing myself from subjectivity and by examining responses during the interview with the least bias possible (Peshkin, 1991).

Another limitation may have been having participants evaluate their experiences retrospectively. In many ways, retrospective recollection is a powerful tool since participants can reflect more deeply on their experiences given their added wisdom beyond the superficial and trivial attitudes that are characteristic of adolescents. However, their view on those incidents or experiences may have changed over time. Also, respondents may have provided responses that would paint themselves as more resilient given their challenges as immigrants and minorities adapting to American school culture. I addressed these limitations by placing the participant in the past using clear instructions in the questions asked.

**STUDENTS OF CHINESE HERITAGE IN THE BUBBLE: FOUR THEMES**

I present the findings in four major themes. First, participants in this study made reference to living in Silicon Valley and attending high school in this region as being types of *bubbles*. These bubbles represented unique spheres that have characteristics that are wholly different from their
counterparts in other regions of the United States. Second, as students of higher education institutions, many participants have gained an awareness of their ethnicity and cultural heritage that they had not contemplated as high school students, while feeling more unsettled in comparison to high school because of more diversity in college. Third, participants described pressures and expectations that were derived from their respective ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Finally, some participants were able to transcend ethnic ties and stress-producing expectations by finding shared interests with others via school- and community-related extracurricular activities, indulgence in hobbies, and participation in religious activities. Each of these themes do not exist in isolation; rather, they overlap in their effect on participants’ educational experiences. Table 2 includes codes associated with each of the themes described above.

[Table 2 about here]

In this section, I provide an overview of the above themes. I then give examples of those themes as described by participants, with descriptions of exemplars and outliers when applicable.

**High School: Living in a Bubble**

Seven out of the nine participants referred to Silicon Valley using terms such as bubble, comfort zone, and heaven. Five of those seven specifically used the word bubble to describe Silicon Valley, oftentimes with focus on high school dynamics. As described by these participants, main characteristics of the Silicon Valley bubble include the high percentage of Asians in the population, a high socioeconomic status, and high educational attainment among those Asian Americans. For the participants, the interplay between this community of Asians and school life was apparent in educational aspiration within the bubble. One participant, Dan, described the community as tight-knit. The situation is such that “everyone knows each other, and each other’s grades.” The concept
of the tight-knit community resulted in pressure for participants to perform well given that other members of the community expected high academic performance, knew of their students’ academic performance, and made judgments based on that performance.

Another participant, Elizabeth, felt so comfortable in this bubble that she felt a "subconscious connection to other Asian Americans.”

This is my parents and me when we first moved here [points to a spot on the table in front of the participant], in terms of being Asian and being foreign, right? This is like America America [points to the right of that spot]. And this would be Silicon Valley [points to a spot to between the two spots]. But then, not only is this process shorter [tracing a line from parents and me to America America], because Silicon Valley has so many Asian Americans, they made the process easier. So my parents adapted, but they didn't adapt to true America America. They adapted to Asian America [tracing a line from parents and me to Silicon Valley]. [See Figure 1] Elizabeth also noted that adaptation to life in America for her Asian immigrant family was made easier because of the presence of a large Asian American population in Silicon Valley. For this participant, Silicon Valley represented a place that is both Asian and American – it is more familiar than other parts of America.

The seven participants that referred to Silicon Valley in terms of a bubble had mixed feelings about being raised in or immigrating to this area: four of the seven participants said that they were appreciative of having many commonalities with others in their community, yet acknowledged the pressures and expectations that they said are linked to being Asian American. In particular, Adam viewed the concept of the Silicon Valley bubble as negative, saying that there are "too many Asians” and that members of the community “won’t learn anything by sticking with each other.”
Six participants also referred to their respective high school environments in terms of a bubble, whether by using this exact term, or by describing characteristics that include a significant Asian student population, high expectations for student achievement, and available educational resources. Eight of the nine participants perceived the Asian American student population at their high schools as significant in proportion to the total, with a range of 20% to 80%. According to six of these eight participants, being surrounded not only by other students of Chinese descent, but also of Asian descent, was a source of comfort. Having a shared ethnic identity also connoted a shared set of values, mostly based on their sense of educational attainment and perceived success in schooling. The four participants who attended Southland High School, a school with Asians representing approximately 80% of the student population, described the academic environment as rigorous, where peers were extremely competitive, where the goals were to collect achievements — in the form of grades and awards — and the ultimate aim was to receive admission to prestigious universities. The six participants who made reference to the concept of a bubble in high school state that this bubble was different from their perception of the average American high school in that their high schools had many Asian students, were academically competitive, and expectations were high.

Six participants expressed mixed feelings about their experience in the high school bubble. Speaking about her high school experience, Ashley stated:

I feel like we went to a well-funded school district. The school provided us with college counselors to help with the whole admissions process. We had great teachers. We had AP [Advanced Placement] classes. I think that the environment can actually be beneficial because, you’re pressured to do well, but it’s better than an environment that doesn’t value academics. And if you want to live in [Silicon
Valley], I think you have to be pretty well-off because the housing prices are pretty ridiculous. So, I think that a lot of us are socioeconomically well-off as well. And our parents can pay for sports classes, SAT classes, and all these things to bolster our resume to get into college.

Reflecting upon her experiences, Ashley realized the privileges that students in her high school had – in terms of access to resources and emphasis on the importance of education – that students in other places in the United States didn’t have. However, Dan said:

The pressure, I would say, adversely affected a lot of people, where they just felt like there was a force behind them. And I think it really fosters a sense of inadequacy, or fear of inadequacy that, "I won't be good enough to get into college."

This quote highlights the notion that the competitive nature of the high school bubble created a sense of inadequacy for many students, a notion that five other participants also talked about. The six participants said that they never felt out-of-place in high school when thinking about their Chinese heritage because of the large Asian ethnic make-up of their schools. Participants Dan, Elizabeth, and Ashley stated that the resources available and competitive nature of high school kept them motivated, and ultimately resulted in their admission to elite universities, since the competitive nature of their high schools was an essential part of the bubble, according to the participants. At the same time, the cost associated with having these resources was the constant pressure to perform well, creating a sense of inadequacy in some students.

In regards to diversity, seven participants felt very comfortable being surrounded by the significant number of Asian students. However, Elizabeth described the flip side of this feeling by saying, "It's definitely difficult to talk to people of other races because I've only had Asian American friends in high school." The lack of diversity in high school made it difficult for this
participant to relate to students of other backgrounds. This is an example of how the bubble is detrimental to a student's ability to adapt to diverse social situations.

Not all participants expressed satisfaction with the large Asian population. Adam said:

I hate that, here we are in America, but there are still lots of Chinese groups hanging around. I mean, since we're here, we should do something new, right? Go out and speak to Caucasian people. But why those Chinese people still sitting there, hanging out with Chinese only? You can never improve when you stay in a comfort zone.

You should take some challenge for yourself.

Adam described the conscious rejection of the insular group dynamics of many of his Chinese peers because of his dissatisfaction with the insularity of his environment. In addition to Adam, participants Amanda and Li Na spoke of dissatisfaction with the cliques that form in majority-Asian environments and the discrimination faced by more acculturated co-ethnic peers.

Three participants described situations when Asian Americans that were more acculturated would bully recent Asian immigrants; in particular, Li Na – a first-generation immigrant from Taiwan who spoke with an accent – described being a target of this bullying. She said, 

"[My family] didn't like too many Chinese people [in Silicon Valley] at first because the old immigrants would isolate us for being new immigrants." Li Na went on to say that her and her family's lack of tacit knowledge and unfamiliarity with English led more acculturated Chinese Americans (old immigrants) to discriminate against recently-arrived Chinese immigrants like herself (new immigrants), leading to stress.

Amanda described how she felt incongruous because she identified more with recent immigrants, but was not included with that group because, as a 1.5 generation Chinese, she was viewed as "too American." At the same time, she did not feel she could relate to the interests of
her 1.5-generation peers. She stated, "I feel like I relate more to the international students, but I'm so far on the American side of the spectrum for them to relate to me very much." Amanda is an example of a student whose identity is in crisis because of the incongruity of her environment, where the level of acculturation she identified with is not the level that she had experienced.

The bubbles that the participants described contain characteristics that encourage high academic performance among students of Chinese descent. However, the cost is stress due to the hyper-competition the students had to endure. Also, the incongruity of Asian heritage in the American context was difficult to navigate for some students. These factors led to socio-emotional and acculturative stress for some participants.

**Bursting the Bubble: Identity Formation in College**

Six participants said that they were never fully aware of their own ethnicity, privilege, or discomfort with non-Asians in high school since there were such large Asian American student populations; moreover, they never felt to be in the minority in their communities as Silicon Valley is populated with so many ethnic Asians. Table 3 includes statements from participants regarding these concepts.

[Table 3 about here]

Most participants developed their cultural awareness after being introduced to the diversity of college campuses. In particular, one participant, Ashley, who left California to attend a university in the southeast that is majority white described the initial transition to that environment as "horrifying" and described a period of culture shock that she had to adapt to. She described her college orientation week as follows:
It was the first time I was made aware of my cultural identity. Before, I knew I was Asian, but everyone else was Asian. So, I wasn't different. But I went to Mackay University, and I was made aware of the fact that I was Asian.

Ashley's statement, along with the statements of other participants as noted in Table 3, demonstrates that some students in these Asian-majority high schools would have at least some discomfort adjusting to a more diverse environment beyond the comfort of their high schools.

**Pressure and Expectations in the Bubble**

As students of high-resource, nationally-ranked high schools in Silicon Valley, all participants described expectations of Asian American students that they either experienced directly, or expectations that affected their peers. Six participants stated that pressure from parents to perform well academically was a source of frustration in high school. Four expressed varying levels of appreciation for the pressure as they thought it was instrumental in their success. One participant embraced the pressure: Matthew described incidents when his parents would arrange meetings with his high school teachers to discuss improving performance whenever he received a B grade. He said, "[My parents] would be pissed off if I got a B. If I got an A-, they would be like, 'you should work on that.'" For this participant, his parents expected perfection in the form of A grades, and they pressured the student to perform better when he did not attain those grades. Nonetheless, Matthew was glad that his parents took an active role in his educational success; he stated, "I appreciated the pressure since I'm a lot better off now than if I had slacked off."

Four participants reported feeling a significant amount of peer pressure. The academic environment at some of these high schools – most notably at Southland, Stewart, and Cook High Schools – was very competitive. Elizabeth said that students were "watching what each other was doing." She also expressed frustration with having to "compete with friends." Ashley stated that
students who talked about their academic achievements were met with scorn and were seen as "bragging."

An additional pressure came from stereotypes that exist of Asian students. All nine participants referred to the stereotype of Asian students being expected to succeed academically, with one participant referring to the term *model minority* in describing this stereotype. Four participants were caught in a conundrum of feeling the pressure to succeed, while fulfilling the stereotype by achieving academically. See Table 4.

[Table 4 about here]

However, their academic success was validation for fitting that stereotype. Matthew indicated that he felt comfortable at Cook High School because he "fit the stereotype of being the model minority." By having strong interests in math, robotics, and Japanese anime, he embodied the stereotypical Asian student; at the same time, he accepted that following his interests meant nurturing his "true self." He reached this comfort level by meeting both his own expectations and those of everyone around him.

**Beyond the Bubble: Extracurriculars, Hobbies, and Religion**

Participants cultivated their identity beyond academics via extracurricular activities, hobbies, and religious devotion. Three participants described sports as their "passion" and source of contentment beyond the pressures and expectations of school. Morgan based her identity in high school and college on sports. She was a three-sport athlete in high school, gaining the annual distinction as the top female athlete upon graduation. Her younger sibling, Melissa, also partook in the same sports as her sister. Sports opened up avenues for expanding social networks beyond ethnicity. Adam described his social networks as being ethnically diverse due to his participation
in sports during high school. Instead of ethnicity as the bond for his social group, sports were the reasons for their friendship. See Table 5.

[Table 5 about here]

Other participants found both meaning and connections through various activities and hobbies. Li Na said that:

Marching band is like family… We trained together. Every morning, 7 o'clock, we are out there on the field. Every day after school, we're out there on the field together. We feel the hardships together. We make something together. We feel the music together. It's actually fun.

Li Na found herself socially isolated at her high school because she was the only first-generation Taiwanese immigrant student. Although she was a target of bullying from more acculturated Asians, she found friendships as a member of the marching band.

Matthew was enthusiastic about his involvement in Japanese anime (cartoons) and manga (Japanese comic books). Many of his friendships both in high school and college sprung from this enthusiasm. Though many of his friends were Asian, he described that anime, not ethnicity, was the common bond: "I'm fine with [them being Chinese Americans] because we all share the same interests. Because I want to talk to people who like the things I care about." For these participants, sports, extracurricular activities, and hobbies was the means for connecting to others, overriding the notion of making connections based on ethnicity. Indeed, some participants found that extracurricular activities, both in the form of formal, school-based activities and in the form of interests and hobbies, were a source of friendship and sense of belonging instead of ethnic familiarity.
A significant variable for participants’ resilience was the role of religion in six of the participants’ lives. Four of the six considered it to be a significant part of their lives, and found comfort and relief from stress via church affiliations and activities. Interestingly, all six of the religious participants attended Chinese-only Christian churches; though they downplayed ethnicity when discussing religion, they alluded to the comfort they felt at everyone having shared backgrounds. See Table 6.

[Table 6 about here]

The findings in Table 6 suggest that a majority-Asian population both in the community and in high school is a source of comfort for many high school students of Chinese descent. They found commonalities via shared values. Participants stated that one of these shared values was the importance of academic achievement. However, participants also said that the emphasis on academic achievement created an atmosphere of competitive and high expectation that resulted in stress. Also, the insular nature of a majority-Asian high school population made it difficult for some participants to adapt to a more diverse social landscape at post-secondary institutions. The findings suggest that some avenues for easier adaptation lie in participation in school-based and community-based extracurricular activities, and participation in religious communities. In the next section, I discuss more deeply the meaning attached to the above-themes.

**INTERPRETATIONS OF THE BUBBLE**

The findings suggest that four main themes connect the experiences of the nine participants in this study. First, the distinctive characteristics of the participants’ high school environments, as well as the specific characteristics of Silicon Valley, were perceived as bubbles for these participants. Bubbles are domains separate from the mainstream American experience. Based on the characteristics of the bubbles, pressures and expectations existed for the participants that are
unique to students of Chinese heritage in the Silicon Valley area. Furthermore, participation in extracurricular activities, in hobbies, and in the participant’s respective religious community served as a means of promoting diversity in one’s social networks, and in relieving pressures and anxieties. In addition, the college experience served as a means to tap into a deeper understanding and awareness of one’s cultural background.

I argue that a competitive, high-stakes, Asian-majority high school environment can prepare students to perform well academically, though may produce stress due to high expectations. This stress may be more pronounced at the post-secondary level when students leave the comfort of an insular community, signaling difficulty acculturating to a diverse social domain. The existing literature on racial socialization, social capital among immigrants, acculturation and assimilation describes difficulty for immigrant children in their adjustment to the diversity that exists in America (Lee & Padilla, 2013; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Wu & Chao, 2005). However, the high-stakes, resource-rich area that is the base for my research – Silicon Valley – lacks the diversity that is characteristic of many other parts of the United States (Wong, 2006). This area’s high density of Asian Americans provided a safe ethnic and cultural space for many of the participants in the study. All participants in the study referred to some degree the perception of a Silicon Valley bubble and a high school bubble. In these bubbles, large, majority Asian American populations provided participants with peer networks of similar cultural backgrounds. Because of the comfort they felt from these peer networks, participants did not experience the significant acculturative stress that students of Asian backgrounds in Lee and Padilla’s study (2013) experienced at elite post-secondary institutions.

Viewed from the theoretical perspective of segmented assimilation (Portes & Zhou, 1993), the findings suggest that more than half of the participants easily acculturated to an environment where,
as students of Chinese descent, they were the majority ethnic group in their respective high schools. Seven out of nine participants developed a sense of motivation to perform at high academic levels because of the shared values instilled upon them from their shared cultural heritage; the emphasis on education was seen by participants as an important cultural attribute (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998; Li, 2001). The goal of high academic achievement was to gain admission to prestigious universities. Even for the two participants that rebelled against their parents’ desire for them to achieve high academically, admission to an elite university was a goal that was defined for them by their parents. However, by finding commonalities within an insular ethnic community, seven participants expressed frustration with the constant pressure to perform to the high standards set by both their parents and their peers. Nonetheless, many participants internalized these pressures and, in turn, exerted pressure on themselves to achieve highly. By being compelled to assimilate into the ethnic bubbles of their high schools and communities, participants found strength to succeed, yet felt the stress of having to meet the expectations set for them by others and by themselves.

From a social capital perspective (Coleman, 1988), participants, as students of Chinese descent who were surrounded by an Asian American majority in both high school and in the Silicon Valley community, easily created social capital based on the shared ethnic backgrounds and shared values (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993). This social capital led to students’ willingness to take on challenging coursework in high school, such as enrolling in numerous Advanced Placement classes, as well as to participate in other activities to garner awards and accolades. However, 78% of participants indicated that learning was not the main goal of high achievement in academics and competitive activities; instead, the goal was to build strong resumes that would resonate with admissions committees at elite universities. These findings are consistent with Pope’s study (2001)
of high-achieving students in high school who displayed behavior that was detrimental to learning while maintaining high academic achievement. The competition and stress experienced by the students in this study and in Pope's study negatively impacted those students’ emotional well-being.

The findings indicate that acculturative stress and, to a lesser extent, discrimination were felt by participants more in the post-secondary setting when compared to the perceived bubbles of high school and of Silicon Valley. Much like the Korean and Korean American participants in the study conducted by Lee and Padilla (2013), participants in my study indicated feelings of stress when having to adapt to a more diverse student population at their respective post-secondary institution. The more diverse the student body at the university level, the more the participants in my study indicated feeling acculturative stress. This phenomenon is exemplified by the participant that experienced "culture shock" at attending a white-majority, southeastern university where the cultural norms were different from those that she was accustomed to in high school. As a consequence of the unfamiliarity felt in a more diverse school environment, eight out of nine participants found comfort in maintaining friendships with peers of the same cultural background. This is consistent with Portes and Zhou’s (1993) notion of finding strength within an insular ethnic community. Those eight participants chose to establish social bonds with individuals of the same cultural background, citing ethnicity as a significant factor for making and maintaining those social connections; a sense of shared values was an important aspect for establishing these friendships (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993).

The culture of academic achievement that is pervasive in many Silicon Valley area high schools is a consequence of the stereotype of Asians as model students. The findings point to the model minority stereotype as a common theme across all participants, where the perception of participants as high academic achievers brought high expectations commensurate with the
stereotype (Lee, 2008; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Participants felt pressure to meet the perceived expectations of teachers, peers, and parents that this stereotype brought upon them (Steele & Aronson, 1995). This created anxiety, especially during instances when participants achieved below expectations. Peers of the participants in this study, having high expectations of each other’s student performance, marginalized those that did not fit their peer group’s standards, and felt jealousy when peers spoke of their high achievements. As Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) have indicated, identifying with one’s ethnic group can provide a sense of solidarity, yet also require individuals to conform to the norms of that group, which, in this case, required students to continually meet the high educational expectations of their peer group. In some cases, pressure from parents of participants, both overt and subtle, prepared students to achieve academically, but was detrimental to their children’s social success in college, contrary to the findings by Huntsinger, et al. (1998).

The findings suggest that participation in extracurricular activities and in hobbies, and identification with religious communities was a remedy for the pressures and expectations of the high school environment, as well as a means of extending social connections beyond ethnicity. Consistent with the study by Melnick, Sabo, and Vanfossen (1992) regarding interscholastic athletic participation among minority youth, four of nine participants considered their participation in high school sports as a resource for social cohesion among their peer networks, as well as a key component to their identity. One participant strongly identified with sports participation and used it as his main resource for social bonds, transcending ethnicity as a mode for connecting with others. Other extracurricular activities and school-based hobbies were important for two other participants to build social cohesion and self-identity: one participant found salvation from ostracism by becoming a member of her high school’s marching band; another participant
developed strong social networks via his high school’s Japanese culture club, where he shared a passion for anime and manga with other club members. These findings suggest that participation in structured school activities improved peer social relations while reducing antisocial behavior (Mahoney & Stattin, 2000). A strong belief in religion and participation in a religious community was also a source of strength for four of the nine participants. These participants were able to relieve anxiety from peer and parental pressure by relying on overarching structures as prescribed by their faith. This resulted in a higher satisfaction with school experiences. Similar to the participants in the Glanville, Sikkink, and Hernandez (2008) study, participants in my study developed significant levels of social capital by extending their peer relations.

CONCLUSION

Some students of Chinese descent – and Asian American students in general – in Silicon Valley are achieving high academic performance relative to the mainstream American population. For some of these students, the educational environment of high school has ample resources for preparing them to attain high grades, awards, and admission to elite universities. However, even those Chinese American students that are performing academically well in school face a path wrought with competition and high expectations, producing stress. For some Chinese heritage students who experience high school as part of the majority ethnic group, they may experience culture shock as they struggle to adapt to a more diverse social climate at higher education institutions. This study has shown that educators should be cautious of the social and emotional well-being of these students, even as they appear to be excelling in the school sphere.

This type of environment exists in Silicon Valley since it is a center of innovative, technological, and financial activity. The draw of this area for the world’s brightest scientists and engineers has brought highly-skilled individuals from areas as far away as Hong Kong, Taiwan,
and China. In addition to seeking high-paying jobs, many of these immigrants pursue upward economic and social mobility. The main mechanism of their pursuit is educational success for their children. A measurement of educational success is gaining admission to prestigious and highly-selective American universities. For some Chinese American students, chasing admission to elite colleges results in competition with your fellow peers. It also means constantly meeting the high expectations of peers, family members, and themselves. With such high expectations, students often feel pressure and stress throughout their high school experience.

This study focuses on the experiences of the Chinese student population of Silicon Valley, who have relatively high levels of human and financial capital. These students have access to tutors, SAT preparation classes, and other non-school extracurricular activities that are funded privately by parents with the understanding of college admissions process. Further research is needed on the experiences of ethnic Asian students that are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who operate in a high-stakes educational environment. Without access to the same types of resources, their ability to achieve academically may be different from their more-privileged peers.

The participants I interviewed for this study span multiple generational statuses, from first-generation to 1.5 generation to second-generation. Some participants immigrated to the U.S. as adolescents, while others immigrated as children, others as toddlers, and yet others were born in America to immigrant parents. By obtaining the perspectives of Chinese heritage students from diverse origins, I garnered a wide array of thoughts about their experiences. However, it may be worthwhile to focus on the insights of students that are of the same generation; by focusing on one generation, more specific themes may emerge.

Although this study’s participants were all students of Chinese descent, other actors in the Silicon Valley high school environment are also instrumental in the academic success of students
in the region. Future research can explore the perspectives of other minority groups in Silicon Valley high schools. In many cases, it is the white students who are in the minority, while Asian students are in the majority. Though they may have similar socioeconomic backgrounds, and their parents may possess similar amounts of human capital, as their Asian peers, it may be prudent to explore the experience of white students as the minority when they are normally in the place of the majority. Understanding their experience would be beneficial for students of all ethnicities to augment the high school social dynamic to be more diverse and inclusive.

The relative wealth and high educational attainment of Asian Americans is touted as evidence that little or no attention to the welfare of Asian American students is needed. In a place like Silicon Valley, outward appearances seem to support this perception. However, this study shows that many of these students must persevere in hyper-competitive high school environments, while negotiating significant pressures – from parents, from friends, from other students, and from themselves – to live up to expectations that were placed on them. Though these pressures may encourage Asian American students to do well, they also create stress, a detriment to their social and emotional well-beings. In addition, the findings demonstrate that students conditioned to the insular Asian-majority communities from which they originate have difficulty adapting to diverse environments that are more typical of post-secondary institutions, stunting social growth, and highlighting possible struggles in the future with adaptation to larger spheres of mainstream America. These themes are not confined to the Chinese American, or even the Asian American communities in Silicon Valley; the acculturative, socio-emotional, and psychological pressures that this study uncovered have implications for many minority communities that have shared values based on nationality, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, culture, or religion. This research illuminates the social difficulties of and stress felt by these populations despite the general
perception that they may be achieving academically. By exploring these difficulties, this study sheds light on ways for students of similar background to better navigate the American educational system.
NOTES

1. Acculturation is the process of psychological and behavioral adjustment in immigrants forced to adapt to unfamiliar social dynamics, attitudes, and languages of their new host culture (Berry, 1995; Berry, 1997; Redfield, Linton & Herskovits, 1936).

2. Assimilation is the process of acquiring the cultural and social values of a host society by newly arriving immigrants so as to gain membership and access to the institutions available to members of the majority group (Gordon, 1964; Park & Burgess, 1924).

3. Acculturative stress is the stress associated with the psychological and social difficulties associated with the process of acculturating to a new culture and environment (Berry, 1996).

4. The participants, high schools, and post-secondary institutions discussed in this paper are referred to using pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.
REFERENCES


# Tables and Figures

**Table 1: Description of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age (as of interview)</th>
<th>Age Immigrated</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Generational Status</th>
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<td>Amanda</td>
<td>Being at Newcastle has made me want to be closer to my culture, but also I don't feel like I really have a way to do it. One thing I felt at Newcastle was that I felt very intimidated by the Asian American community here. There's a lot of undergraduate Asian American associations here, and they're all very outgoing, and I didn't find any similarity between that and what I felt was Asian American from my own experience. I wanted to find a way to be closer to my culture, but I couldn't find a way to do that.</td>
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<td>Ashley</td>
<td>[Now] I'm aware of the privileges that I had growing up. I'm also aware of the privileges that I don't have. Like the privilege of being white; the outcry over the party held at Mackay [where Asians were being mocked by white students]. A lot of Asian people found it offensive, but a lot of white people didn't because they didn't understand.</td>
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<td>Dan</td>
<td>[Regarding the notion that &quot;people of Asian ethnicity could never truly be American&quot;]: I especially realized it after getting involved in the Asian American community here [at Newcastle] and learning more about Asian American issues, and about the perpetual foreigner stereotype. It was something that I never really thought of in high school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>[Regarding her first impressions of sororities at Newcastle]: Yeah, that was weird! I've never see so many white girls dressed up in my life. I was like, &quot;what is going on?&quot; Even meeting my roommate – she's a white girl from New York – it's still different talking to her. It might just be just an East Coast/West Coast thing, but still, I don't see myself getting close to her.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>Because of my ethnicity, I would usually only approach the Asians. I think ethnicity is something you share a common ground with. That can lead to a lot of conversations - it could be food, or parents, or culture. That's why I find it easier to carry a conversation with them.</td>
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<td>Morgan</td>
<td>When I visited Gladstone University's campus, I felt pretty out-of-place because there was mostly white people. I also applied to a school called Rockhampton College, and I read that it had a very small Asian population and I knew that I would feel very uncomfortable because I've been hanging around mostly Asian people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Referring to the Model Minority Stereotype</td>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Morgan</td>
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<tr>
<td>I don’t like to talk about [being born in China] because if I say that I was born in China, then people would think that I’m like all Chinese and stuff even though I’ve never had schooling there.</td>
<td>The white people at my school weren’t expected to achieve as much as their [Asian] peers... It’s just part of the social structure of the school.</td>
<td>Growing up in the Bay Area, a lot of us actually fed into the model minority stereotype. So, my high school was very competitive, the Asian parents would gossip often about what their children would be doing in terms of academics, we also would be watching over what our peers would be doing. And [high school] was just a really stressful time.</td>
<td>Everyone would say, “Oh, you’re Asian, you should be smart at math, you should be smart at this.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perception of the Self or Peers in Regards to the Model Minority Stereotype</td>
<td>I feel like I’ve become more stereotypical, as in more focused on academics and quiet and everything.</td>
<td>It’s just a culture to study. Like, it’d be weird to not study. At least among my group of friends. People were always doing assignments, and worrying about the next test. And if you were the person who was not worried and sitting back and relaxing, that’s just not cohesive to the social structure. That’s like a way that people bond; people bond over having to do a lot of work.</td>
<td>I’ll just be honest: I feel like a lot of the things I did in high school I really did do just because I think it would’ve made myself look better to the parents. Because, again, I was pulled into that stereotype that I wanted to portray myself as what they wanted to see me as. And not as my “true self,” whatever that means.</td>
<td>So I guess to fulfill that stereotype, I had to work hard. Even though I knew I wasn’t that good at math.</td>
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</table>
## Table 5: Participant Reflections on Extracurricular Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>I played sports with [Mexican and Caucasian students]. I played football and soccer. And baseball, also. So I made with them these friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>As I slowly started getting better, I just realized how much dance meant to me. I began to see that dance was more than physical fitness because a lot of the other teams were just trying to do tricks in their routines. And that’s when I realized that Chinese dance in itself was more like keeping heritage alive.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Li Na</td>
<td>Most of [the people in marching band] were white. And some of them were Asian, but not a lot of them. So Asians are actually the minority in the marching band. And they are so open to accept who you are. I guess it’s the feeling of those geek and nerd people, because you all like music and we can be friends together.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>[Speaking about his interest in anime]: I want to find people who I’m interested in and share similar interests, and because of demographics, and history, and immigration flows, and economics, that sample size is biased towards Asian Americans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>I really enjoyed that. When I participated in sports, I was surrounded by people who weren’t the materialistic people. I just knew them for their true personality.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>I love [high school] and that’s where I call my home. Because I made a name for myself through sports and through academics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>I’m teaching guitar at church for the youth group because some kids want to learn guitar. So I teach them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>Back when I going to a Chinese church [during high school], it was all I could imagine being in. Like, when people would ask me what kind of Christian I am, I would say that I was a Chinese Christian… But after coming to Newcastle, I realize that I have a strong connection to other Christians as well because of our mutual beliefs, and I don’t think that ethnicity ever got in the way.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>[My mom] was glad that I didn’t fight the religion because that really instilled a lot of good morals in my head.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>I really appreciated that [church] was another social group. I learned a lot of lessons. I learned how to be a leader. And we would organize events, and I felt like I’m doing something.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1: “The Silicon Valley Bubble” according to Elizabeth Parents & Me

Shortened process of acculturation and adaptation to Silicon Valley (“Asian America”) for Asian immigrants in relation to “America America.”

The normal, longer process of acculturation and adaptation for Asian immigrant families who do not immigrate to Silicon Valley (“Asian America”).
APPENDIX

Demographic and Acculturation Questionnaire

Q1 Thank you for your interest in this research. Your participation may help students who have similar experiences better navigate the American school system.

This survey is intended for current students of Chinese heritage who also attended high school in California. Please answer as honestly as you can. Please answer every question. The survey will take approximately 5 to 10 minutes

Click "NEXT" to begin.

Q2 Where were you born?
   Country
   State/Province
   City/Town/Village

Q3 Where was your mother born?
   Country
   State/Province
   City/Town/Village

Q4 Where was your father born?
   Country
   State/Province
   City/Town/Village

Q5 Which city, town, or village did you live in before moving to the U.S.?

Q6 At what age did you move to the U.S. to live permanently?
Q7 I am a citizen of the following countries (please check all that apply):

- US
- China
- Taiwan
- Hong Kong
- Other (please specify) ____________________

Answer If I am a citizen of the following countries (please check all that apply):

- China Is Selected And I am a citizen of the following countries (please check all that apply)
- US Is Not Selected Or I am a citizen of the following countries (please check all that apply)
- Taiwan Is Selected And I am a citizen of the following countries (please check all that apply)
- US Is Not Selected Or I am a citizen of the following countries (please check all that apply)
- Hong Kong Is Selected And I am a citizen of the following countries (please check all that apply)
- US Is Not Selected Or I am a citizen of the following countries (please check all that apply)
- Other (please specify) Is Selected And I am a citizen of the following countries (please check all that apply)
- US Is Not Selected Or I am a citizen of the following countries (please check all that apply)
- Other (please specify) Is Not Empty And I am a citizen of the following countries (please check all that apply)
- US Is Not Selected

Q8 Are you a U.S. permanent resident?

- Yes
- No (please specify status) ____________________

Q9 Are you currently a high school student?

- Yes
- No

If Yes Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Q10 When did you start attending high school?

- Year
- Month

Q11 When did you stop attending high school?

- Year
- Month
Q12 Some people attended more than one high school. Think about the high school that you attended for the longest amount of time. What is the name of that high school, and what city is that high school located in?

High school name
City

Q13 During high school, where were you living?

City, State
5-digit zip code

Q14 Are you currently attending a college, university, vocational school, or any other type of schooling?

☐ Yes (please indicate type of schooling) ____________________________
☐ No
If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Q15 What is your current student status?

☐ Full-time
☐ Part-time
☐ Other (please describe) ____________________________

Q16 What is the name of the institution you are currently attending?

Q17 When do you plan to complete your studies?

Year
Month

Q18 Please rate your language ability.

_____ Speaking - Chinese (please specify primary dialect)
_____ Writing - Chinese (please specify primary dialect)
_____ Reading - Chinese (please specify primary dialect)
_____ Speaking - English
_____ Writing - English
_____ Reading - English
Q19 A guardian has the most responsibility for someone’s care. An example of a guardian is a parent, grandparent, older sibling, or other relative that cared for you while you were growing up. When you communicate with your primary guardian(s), in which language do you prefer to communicate?

- Chinese only
- Mostly Chinese
- About half Chinese and half English
- Mostly English
- English only

Q20 Thinking about high school, what language(s) did you use to communicate with your close friends while in school?

- Chinese only
- Mostly Chinese
- About half Chinese and half English
- Mostly English
- English only

Q21 Thinking about high school, what language(s) did you use to communicate with your close friends outside of school?

- Chinese only
- Mostly Chinese
- About half Chinese and half English
- Mostly English
- English only

Q22 Thinking about your current school experiences, what language(s) do you use to communicate with your close friends while in school?

- Chinese only
- Mostly Chinese
- About half Chinese and half English
- Mostly English
- English only
Q23 Thinking about your current school experiences, what language(s) do you use to communicate with your close friends outside of school?

- Chinese only
- Mostly Chinese
- About half Chinese and half English
- Mostly English
- English only

Q24 Please rate the amount of stress you felt in the last six months when thinking about the following statements. (1 = Not stressful, 5 = Extremely stressful)
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not stressful</th>
<th>A little bit stressful</th>
<th>Moderately stressful</th>
<th>Very stressful</th>
<th>Extremely stressful</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel uncomfortable when others make jokes about or put down people of Chinese background.</td>
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<td>I have more barriers to overcome than most people.</td>
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<td>It bothers me that family members I am close to do not understand my new values.</td>
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<td>Close family members and I have conflicting expectations about my future.</td>
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<td>Many people have stereotypes about my culture or Chinese background and treat me as if they are true.</td>
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<td>I don't feel at home in America.</td>
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<td>People think that I am unsociable when in fact I have trouble communicating in English.</td>
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<td>It bothers me when people pressure me to assimilate.</td>
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<td>It bothers me that I have an accent.</td>
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<td>I often think about my Chinese culture.</td>
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<td>Because of my Chinese background, I feel that others often exclude me from participating in their activities.</td>
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<td>People look down on me if I practice customs of my culture.</td>
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</table>
I have trouble understanding others when they speak.

Q25 There are many different ways in which people think of themselves. Which ONE of the following most closely describes how you view yourself?

- I consider myself basically an Asian person (e.g., Chinese). Even though I live and study in America, I still view myself basically as an Asian person
- I consider myself basically as an American. Even though I have an Asian background and characteristics, I still view myself basically as an American
- I consider myself as an Asian American, although deep down I always know I am an Asian first
- I consider myself as an Asian American, although deep down I view myself as an American first
- I consider myself as bicultural. I have both Asian and American characteristics, and I view myself as a blend of both
- I don't view myself in any of these ways. Instead, I view myself in the following way: _______________________

Q26 What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

Q27 What is your date of birth? (mm/dd/yyyy)

Q28 What was your family's annual income during your last year of high school?

- $0 to $20,000
- $20,001 to $40,000
- $40,001 to $60,000
- $60,001 to $80,000
- $80,001 to $100,000
- $100,001 to $120,000
- More than $120,000
- Don't know
Q29 Understanding your personal experience will help other students in the future. To understand your experience, I would like to interview you. Are you available to meet for approximately one hour for an interview to speak about your experiences as a student of Chinese descent?

- Yes
- No

Q31 Please write your name, email address, and phone number if you wish to be considered for a $20 Amazon gift card. For those that are available for an interview, this information is important for me to make arrangements with you.

   - Name (Last, First, Middle)
   - Email address (username@example.com)
   - Phone number (650-555-5555)

Q32 Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Please click on the Next button below to submit this survey.
Interview Protocol
(Bolded questions take precedence over unbolded when running short of time)

Informational Questions:

1. You mentioned that you were from [home country]; please tell me about your experiences in school in [home country].

2. Please tell me about your family.
   - What sort of education did your father receive? And your mother?
   - Please tell me about your parents’ job history. (What jobs did they have in their home country? And when they arrived? And now?)
   - Do you have any siblings? Tell me about them.

3. How did you end up in Silicon Valley?

4. Tell me about your high school. What were the academics like? What were the students like?

5. Please tell me what you think a typical American high school student is like.
   - How did you fit or didn’t fit that description?

6. Tell me about your friends in high school. (Characteristics of your group. What language(s) did you speak? What activities did you do together?)
   - Please compare them to your friends now.

7. How would you describe your English-language ability? And your Chinese-language ability?
   - What was your ability like when you arrived in the U.S.?
   - What was it like in high school?

8. What aspects of your Chinese culture did you feel were important to maintain in the U.S.?
• How did your high school experience help you or didn't help you maintain your Chinese culture?

• How does your experience in school now (college) help or didn't help you maintain your Chinese culture?

9. Thinking about your Chinese ethnicity, was there a time that you felt very different or out-of-place in high school? Tell me about that incident.

10. Tell me about a time when you wish you weren’t Chinese.

11. Oftentimes, when families immigrate, children adjust faster than parents. This creates conflicts in the family. Did this happen to you? If so, can you talk about that incident?

12. What role does religion play in your life? How does religion influence your high school and college experiences?

13. There are lots of different students in high school; if you had to put them into categories, what categories would you have? And can you describe those categories?

• Which category or categories did your friends fit into? Why?

• Which category or categories did you feel that you fit in? Why?

14. Can you tell me what "doing well" in school means to you?

• What did "doing well" mean to your parents?

• What did "doing well" mean to your friends?

• Did you "do well" in high school? How?

• Are you "doing well" now?

• Was there a time that you didn't "do well"? Tell me about that.
• How did your parents react when you didn't "do well"? How did you feel about that?
• How about your teachers’ reactions?
• How about your friends’ reactions?

Evaluation Questions:

15. What has been the hardest part about adapting to life in America?

16. Thinking about your experience now, what has changed and what has stayed the same in comparison to high school?

17. What role has your Chinese culture played in your experience as a college student?

Hypothetical Questions:

18. What advice would you give to someone of the same background as you to help them better navigate high school and college?

19. If you could change anything about your experience in high school or college, what would it be?

20. Is there anything that I didn't ask about that you think is important to talk about?