LEARNING TO BE CHINESE AMERICAN

Community, Education, and Ethnic Identity

LIANG DU

Learning to Be Chinese American

Community, Education, and Ethnic Identity

Liang Du

LEXINGTON BOOKS
A division of
ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD PUBLISHERS, INC.
Lanham • Boulder • New York • Toronto • Plymouth, UK

Published by Lexington Books
A division of Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
A wholly owned subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706
http://www.lexingtonbooks.com

Estover Road, Plymouth PL6 7PY, United Kingdom

Copyright © 2010 by Lexington Books

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote passages in a review.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Du, Liang, 1976–
Learning to be Chinese American : community, education, and ethnic identity / Liang Du.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-7391-3848-9
1. Chinese Americans—Ethnic identity. 2. Chinese Americans—Social conditions. 3. Chinese Americans—Education. I. Title.
E184.C5D8 2010
305.895'1073—dc22 2010022270

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America

Learning to Be Chinese American

Dedicated to Debbie Tang

An always smiling friend who will live in my memory forever

试读结束：需要全本请在线购买： www.ertongbook.com

Acknowledgments

This book is based on my doctoral dissertation. I thank my committee members, Dr. Lois Weis, Dr. Greg Dimitriadis, and Dr. Guofang Li, for the invaluable help they provided during my dissertation project. Dr. Weis, in particular, has guided me through the process with her exceptionally encouraging and thought-provoking advice, whose influence I believe will be far-reaching in my future academic pursuit. My appreciation also goes to Dr. Nozaki, Dr. Inokuchi, and Dr. Des Forges, as my work benefits so much from the numerous discussions with them. It is the help of many friends in the local Chinese American community that make my project possible. To this day I am still impressed by the generosity and friendship displayed by them, and urged to carry on my exploration of the questions that remain unanswered in my dissertation, as many of them encouraged me to. I would like to thank Michael Sisskin at Lexington Books for his expertise and guidance through the publication process. Thanks to the anonymous reviewer for the helpful comments on the book manuscript. A lot of other friends have lent me a helpful hand during these memorable years, to list whose names here would make the acknowledgements too long. Thank you all!

Finally, I would like to thank my family, especially my wife Yulin, whose support makes the long and laborious years of doctoral study endurable, and the final product cherishable. The arrival of my first son, Roger, right upon the completion of my dissertation has made the fruit of the whole process even sweeter.

Lightning Source UK Ltd.
Milton Keynes UK
UKOW050410051111

181521UK00001B/2/P

Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Chapter 1 Chinese Americans: Communities, Education, and Identities 1

Chapter 2 Rationales behind an Education: "That Box Doesn't Belong to You" 27

Chapter 3 The Creation of a Diaspora Identity 47

Chapter 4 The Limits of Ethnicity: Community-based Education as a Contesting Site 79

Chapter 5 Learning to be Chinese American in New Times: Community, Identity, and Globalization 115

Appendix 127

References 129

Index 137

About the Author 141

Chapter 1
Chinese Americans: Communities, Education, and Identities

Introduction

February 2005, it was the time for the annual Chinese New Year celebration in the local Chinese community again. This was the third time I attended this event in the community. Sitting quietly at the back of the auditorium, I watched what was going on. Two-thirds of the hundreds of seats in the auditorium were filled by Chinese American men, women, and children, mixed with occasional White faces. The activists in the community were busy preparing for the stage show; many men were setting up their digital Camcorders in positions that would assure a best shot of the entire stage; some women were busy greeting acquaintances and chatting with others; and the kids were running around and chasing each other, laughing loudly. Everyone seemed to be enjoying this unique moment of celebration, just like their ancestors had done in the past hundreds or even thousands of years. There was no doubt that this is *their* time, a special day for them to unite with the family members and make connections with their people. Others, though allowed to present themselves during the performative expression of "oneness" or even to take a role in the show, were nevertheless tacitly and politely excluded from the network of mutual recognition.

According to the Census 2000 (Bureau of the Census, 2000), the population of Chinese Americans has reached a little more than 2.43 million, close to one percent of the whole U.S. population. This figure stands for a 50 percent increase from the Chinese American population in 1990. Chinese Americans also claim the largest subgroup of Asian Americans. In addition to the noticeable population increase, the visibility of Chinese Americans in American society is further enhanced by the rise of China's economic power in the new century. The increasing social and economic visibility of Chinese Americans, among other

factors, has made the question of Chinese American identity particularly interesting. Historically, such a Chinese American identity has long been shoved back and forth largely as a result of the positioning discourses and practices of the dominant groups and the painstaking struggles of generations of Chinese Americans in the United States. The dazzling labels that have been attached to the group range from "yellow peril," "bachelors' society," "silent victims," to "model minority." The intensive flow of material and cultural resources, especially the massive migration and frequent travel of people in an era of globalization have drawn the outline of a future world that witnesses various greatly blurred boundaries across the globe, including, but not limited to, nation-state, racial, ethnic, and cultural boundaries. Such a prospect of the coming age further shows us the academic meaning and practical promise contained in the study of the identities of Chinese Americans, as one of the largest immigration groups in America.

Based on the above recognition, this book sets out to examine how the community-based ethnic education, including the heritage language educational programs and other community-based cultural activities, affect the ethnic identity formation in a local Chinese American community, in particular the ethnic identity of the youth in the community. The education I am talking about here is characterized by two facts: one, it has to be community based or at least closely related to the collective life in the community; two, it is ethnic and/or cultural in its nature and therefore plays an essential role in the formation of ethnic identity in the community. While I fully recognize that youth identity formation consists of various intricately interconnected facets, including gender, class, and political identities, I focus my analysis mainly on the ethnic/cultural aspect of the identities of the local Chinese American youth.

To be specific, the questions I embark on in the investigation are two-fold: first, I am interested in how the ethnic identity of the Chinese American group—the local youth in particular—was sustained and/or (re)constructed within both the macro racial and cultural contexts in American society and the micro cultural environment at the local community level. In relation to it, in what ways does the local community interact with the broader social and cultural contexts at both national and global level? How do such interactions shape the production of local identity? In short, my exploration addresses both aspects of the identity formation process in the community, i.e., the ways in which the local Chinese Americans perform their ethnic identity, and how broader material and cultural structures and power relations frame the process. Second, I am particularly interested in the role that community-based ethnic education and other cultural programs play in the identity formation process of the local youth. There is little doubt that the community-based ethnic educational programs lie at the core of the local ethnic community life. But to this day we still know little about this informal education in terms of its impact on the ethnic identity of the students. Does it create a microenvironment that provides structural support to the production of ethnic identity of the youth? And how? What are the specific cultural elements and ideological methods that are involved in the production process?

How do the local youth themselves perceive and respond to the community-based ethnic education? To what extent is it effective and how does it meet the expectations of the parent generation? Before we seek to address these questions, it would be helpful to learn what researchers already know about these issues.

Theoretic Framework

In this section, I intend to accomplish two things and appropriately anchor the questions I want to address in the book. First, I try to frame my research question in a theoretical context. For this purpose, I examine three main theoretical frameworks, including one major approach that theorizes identity in relation to contemporary global reality of diaspora, the application of the theory of class status and habitus in racial context, and the relevance of compositional analysis in educational research. The second body of literature consists of research on Chinese American communities and identities. Again, this part of literature can be put into three large categories. The first category includes those historical and sociological studies about Chinese Communities in America. Some have specifically explored the development of Chinese American identities in historical and contemporary realities. The second category of literature examines the relationship between education and the identity of Chinese American youth. The third category explores the change of racial politics in the U.S. and its impact on Chinese American identity during recent years. In this section, I also review emerging Chinese American identities envisioned by scholars and activists in the field.

Diaspora Identity

Identity has emerged as an important theme in the contemporary educational research field during the past two decades. The notion of an integral, original and unified identity has long been challenged in education as well as in other social research fields (Hall, 1992, 1996). In this book, I borrowed Stuart Hall's notions about identity and its production process, as he points out,

> Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a "production," which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation (Hall, 1990, p.222).

According to Hall (1996, p.4), "identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from,' so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might

试读结束：需要全本请在线购买： www.ertongbook.com

represent ourselves." Therefore, identities are constituted within, not outside representation and discourse; within, not outside specific historical and institutional sites; within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies; and moreover, "within the play of specific modalities of power" and through, not outside, difference. It is in this sense that identities are related to invention as much as to tradition. They arise from the "narrativization of the self," but certainly with its "discursive, material or political effectivity" (Hall 1996, p.4). The construction of identities is as much a process of positioning, as one of self-positioning. It comprises at the same time both subjectization and performativity. "It is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the positive meaning of any term—and thus its 'identity'—can be constructed" (Hall, 1996, pp.4-5. Original italics).

What is noteworthy and particularly relevant to my current study, however, is the step that Hall takes in applying this notion of identity to the analysis of Diaspora identities. In line with a fluid concept of identity, he states,

> [Cultural identity of diaspora] is a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being." It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something, which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous "play" of history, culture and power . . . [I]dentities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past (Hall, 1990, p.225).

For Hall, as much as they recognize the many points of similarity, cultural identities of diaspora should also recognize "critical points of deep and significant difference" that constitute "what we really are." Diaspora identity is not about one homogenous experience or about essence or purity, but instead it is about ruptures and discontinuities, about heterogeneity and diversity. It is defined by "hybridity" and lived through difference.

Such a theorization of the cultural identity of diaspora is echoed by many other scholars (McCarthy, 1998). Dimitriadis (2001) and Dolby (2001), for example, provide empirical examples of how this notion of flexible identity played out in social reality through their close examination of the living experiences of various racial groups in different historical, social, and cultural contexts. It is, therefore, in line with this flexible notion of identity and the concept of a cultural identity of diaspora that I set out my exploration of the identity formation process in the local Chinese American community.

Ethos and Habitus in Racial Analysis

It is well-known that class ethos and habitus are two key concepts in Bour-

dieusian theoretic framework in relation to class analysis. According to Bourdieu and his colleagues, the concept of "habitus" contains meanings at both practical and ideological levels, and presents itself in the forms of "generative, unifying principle of conducts and opinions" (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, 161), and "*a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions*" (Bourdieu 1977, 83). As it constitutes an important part of *habitus*, "class ethos" represents specifically a system of dispositions as the product of the system of the objective relations in a class society in which a social agent lives. For specific individuals of a particular social class, their educational "aspirations," "motivations," and "hopes" are decisively formed under the objective social conditions in a society. These dispositions generate practices that are adaptive to the existing objective structures, and therefore reproduce them. Bourdieu and Passeron write,

> [T]he disposition to make use of the school and the predispositions to succeed in it depend, as we have seen, on the objective chances of using it and succeeding in it that are attached to the different social classes, these dispositions and predispositions in turn constituting one of the most important factors in the perpetuation of the structure of education chances as an objectively graspable manifestation of the relationship between the educational system and the structure of class relations. Even the negative dispositions and predispositions leading to self-elimination, such as, for example, self-depreciation, devalorization of the School and its sanctions or resigned expectation of failure or exclusion may be understood as unconscious anticipation of the sanctions the School objectively has in store for the dominated classes (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, pp.204-205).

Such dispositions and predispositions, especially "the negative dispositions and predispositions leading to self-elimination" of students from dominated classes in school are probably best illustrated in Willis'(1977) famous ethnographic study of a group of working-class boys, namely "the lads." For many, the most impressive and ironic fact revealed by the study is: the counter-school culture originally taken as a form of resistance by the lads eventually turns out to be a form of self-elimination and a way of reproduction of the existing social conditions of production. As Henry Giroux (1983) reflects, Willis has developed a notion of reproduction "in which working-class domination is viewed not only as a result of the structural and ideological constraints embedded in capitalist social relationships, but also as part of the process of self-formation within the working class itself." This way of self-elimination in education is a convincing example of Bourdieu and Passeron's theory of class ethos and *habitus* and powerfully demonstrates the processes of "internalization of externalization and the externalization of internality" (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, 205). That is to say, it is only through the mediation of class ethos and *habitus*—both as the products of social structures and producers of individual practices, that the reproduction of existing social conditions is realized.

The same pattern of social reproduction can also be found in racial field.

Specifically, the existing objective conditions that are particular to each racial group tend to produce certain racial ethos and *habitus*, which in turn generate individual or group practices that help to reproduce the current racial orders. In other words, a social agent (either an individual or a group) of a dominated racial group, after internalizing the objective conditions in response to its total racial experience, is likely to form a system of dispositions and expectations that recognizes its inferior racial status and that is always referred to when a decision is made.

Such an approach in racial analysis has been developed by some researchers on the intersection of racial and educational issues in the United States during recent years. For example, in his study on two groups of teenagers in a low-income neighborhood, the Hallway Hangers and the Brothers, MacLeod (1995) draws heavily on Bourdieu's theoretical framework. According to him, "habitus is constituted at the level of the family, and factors such as ethnicity, educational history, peer associations, neighborhood social ecology, and demographic characteristics (e.g., geographical mobility, duration of tenancy in public housing, sibling order, and family size) are all constitutive of the habitus" (MacLeod 1995, 138). Other studies have lent support to MacLeod's argument, both within and outside the United States (Reay, 1995; Mcdonough, 1998; Mcdonough, 1997; Horvat, 1999; Diamond, 2004; Reay, 1995; Reay, 2004; McClelland, 1990; Connolly, 1998; Rapoport, 2002). Reay (2004, p.436), for instance, after a systematical review of the possibilities and limitations of the application of the concept of *habitus* in education especially in relation to a critical research agenda, concludes:

> Habitus can be used to focus on the ways in which the socially advantaged and disadvantaged play out attitudes of cultural superiority and inferiority ingrained in their *habitus* in daily interactions . . . such dispositions are influenced by gender and "race" as well as social class.

By relating Bourdieu's theory to racial analysis, in this book, I examine how past racial experience has produced a unique racial ethos and a set of collective practices in the local Chinese American community.

Orientalism and Global Power Relations

The framework of "Orientalism" is one of the most elaborate and compelling arguments on existing global power relations to date. According to Said (1978, p.2), "'Orientalism' is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident.'" It is "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience," and consequently, "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" and, above all, as "one of its deepest and most recurring

images of the Other" (Said, 1978, pp.1-2). While ultimately, Said (1978, p.5) argues, Orientalism represents "a relationship of power, of domination, of various degrees of a complex hegemony" between Occident and Orient, it is nevertheless "a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political . . ., power intellectual, power cultural, power moral" (p.12). What makes "Orietalism" especially relevant to my analysis of the local Chinese American community, whose members are above all themselves "Orientals" residing in the West, is the fact that "[c]ontinued investment made Orientalism, as a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness, just as that same investment multiplied—indeed, made truly productive—the statements proliferating out from Orientlism into the general culture" (p.6).

Compositional Analysis

In their work, Weis and Fine (2004) explicate the notion of "compositional studies," a methodological theory that contends that analyses of public and private institutions, groups, and lives are lodged in relation to key social and economic structures. According to the theory, the remaking of any given society and a group/individual's position within a society can only be understood through a clear focus on bordering "others" as well as historically based social and economic trends (Weis, 2004). The theory echoes Apple's (1979; 1999) emphasis of the relevance of an approach of "relational analysis" in educational research, "[t]hat is, the institutions and events of our daily lives need to be understood not in an isolated way—separate from the relations of domination and exploitation of the larger society—but in ways that stress their interconnections with these relations" (Apple 1999, p.10). Apple's comments here represent part of his response to the so-called structuralist and culturalist debate in educational research, which centers on the respective roles of objective social structures and that of social agents in the schooling process. The two approaches, as I suggested earlier, have drawn closer to each other in recent years when an increasing number of researchers tend to take an eclectic path and draw strength from both theoretical frameworks. For example, in his attempt to unravel the persistent racial inequalities in American education, McCarthy (1990, p.7) reminds us to focus on the dynamic relationships between "(a) the structural and institutional arrangements of school knowledge and the instrumental rules which constrain the educator and the educated alike, and (b) the self-affirming agency and capacities of social actors (teachers and students) to resist and transform the structural arrangements and relations that exist within educational settings and in the wider social milieu." Weis' well-known two-phase ethnographic studies (Weis, 1990, 2004) about the relations between changing economic setting and emerging new iden-

identities serve as another good example in this regard. Situated in a rapid changing economic context characterized by the disintegration of the old industrial order in the United States, she examines and reexamines the lives of a group of White working-class men and women in a run-down industrial city in the US in the 1980s and early 2000s respectively, and demonstrates the complex ways in which a new identity of White working-class is forging in the new social and economic conditions. She argues that under the new economic and social contexts, working-class youth "are both 'created' by them and 'create' them at one and the same time" (Weis, 1990, p.5).

In addition, in her study Weis (2004) also shows us the need to expand the scope of such structural analysis if we attempt to fully understand social realities and processes that are becoming increasingly "globalized." The rapidly growing influence of globalization in contemporary social life more than ever requires us to look beyond the nation-state as well as other forms of conventional borders in order to grasp the full meanings of the multidimensional social reality today (Dolby & Rizvi, 2008). Given its strong international background, the impact of transnational elements on the perceptions and practices within immigrant communities is particularly salient (Braziel, 2003).

Chinese in America: Community, Education, and Identity

There exists a considerable amount of literature that concerns the topics about Chinese communities in America, their history, social structure, and problems. Neither is identity formation among Chinese Americans a new topic for educational researchers. However, with the continuous growth of the number and influence of Chinese Americans in the United States, and with the change of the economic, political, and cultural maps of the world, the issue of Chinese American identity has gained new meaning and interest in new times.

Chinese American Communities and Chinese American Identities

By now, perhaps the most readily accessible literature about Chinese Americans includes those about the history of Chinese Americans and sociological studies of Chinatowns in various regions and cities across the U.S. (Crissman, 1967; Lowen, 1971; Weiss, 1974; Wong, 1979, 1982; Kwong 1987; Kuo, 1977; Chen, 1992; Lee, 1960; Zia, 2000). It is widely known that the first peak of Chinese immigration to the U.S. appeared around mid-nineteenth century during the "gold rush" period, (Takaki, 1998) which was ended with the passage of the 1882 "Chinese Exclusion Act" by the U.S. congress. After nearly a century since then, did the door of America reopen to Chinese immigrants with the abandon-

ment of immigration quota based on national origins in 1965, amidst the turmoil of the 60s' civil rights movement (Okihiro, 2001). The number of Chinese immigrants has increased steadily thereafter and reached a little bit more than 2.43 million by 2000.

Early studies about Chinese communities in America provide us a picture of a "typical" traditional Chinatown, with Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) at the top of the social structure of the community, and clans, merchant associations or Tongs, *Hui Kuan*, and secret societies among the major social organizations (Crissman, 1967; Lyman, 1974). Also, many early researchers tend to employ an assimilation model in their analyses and, therefore, one of the main purposes of their studies is to determine at what stage the Chinese communities in America are along the road of assimilation and integration into the mainstream American society, and to identify the "problems" some Chinese immigrants might have that caused their resistance against full assimilation (Lee, 1960; Weiss, 1974). It is obvious that this notion of "half-assimilated" Chinese Americans serves, intentionally or unintentionally, the interests of the dominant groups. Under the label of "mainstream American society," the White is normalized in every aspect and the task and destiny of other racial groups, Chinese Americans included, is simply to (or to learn how to) assimilate to the "norm" as effectively and efficiently as possible (Gordon, 1964). In line with this way of thinking, Chinese Americans are often singled out as "a distinct minority," and are blamed for the slowness of their assimilation into the mainstream Americans because of their unique social structure, religious belief, and even their "racial visibility" that makes them "physically distinguishable from both the Caucasian majority and from other minorities" (Weiss, 1974, pp.251-252).

This static image of a "typical" Chinatown awaiting is thrown into doubt by later researchers, thanks to the arrival of an increasing number of new Chinese immigrants that caused a significant change of the component of Chinese American population after the 1960s (Nee, 1974; Wong, 1979, 1982; Kuo, 1977; Chen, 1992). Many new Chinese immigrants were much better educated than their forerunners in the "gold rush" age. In addition, some young Chinese Americans, who moved out of the traditional Chinatowns after having achieved better social and economic status than their parent generations through education and other means of social mobility, started to turn back to their original communities to help the people "left there," especially after their ethnic consciousness was "awakened" during their interactions with the "outside world." One important sign of the changes brought by such new elements in Chinatowns is the emergence of a number of new voluntary social organizations that provide a range of social services to the communities (Nee, 1974; Wong, 1979; Kuo, 1977). With the weakening of the influences of the traditional organizations and the flourish of the modern voluntary organizations in the Chinatown, researchers foresee the emergence of a transformed Chinatown, which would neither continue to exist as an insulated community and an urban ethnic ghetto, nor completely integrate into U.S. society socially and culturally. Instead, it would more likely turn into

试读结束：需要全本请在线购买： www.ertongbook.com