

SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

RESEARCH QUESTION

How do experiences in different countries affect the social identities of American-born-Chinese (ABC) students?

Researcher

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AIM

As an American-born-Chinese student myself who has gone through the process of discovering my identity and coming to terms with both my Western and Eastern values, the aim of this sociological research is to discover how other ABC students form their identities and understand the influences of their academic and cultural experiences in China and/or America. The focus on this research is on ABC students who have spent over five years studying in China, as opposed to ABC students who have spent most of their lives living in the United States.

SUB-QUESTIONS

- How do ABC students form their social identities? How much have their experiences in China and America shaped who they are?
- What are the values and personalities of ABC students? Are they different to the Chinese/American students around them? How does this affect their relationships with Chinese/American (and other) students?
- What are the effects of being exposed to both Western and Eastern cultures? What are their perceptions of the future? How do they feel about their background and experiences?
- What fears or problems did ABC students have during the transition from one country to another? Have they been resolved?
- How do ABC students view China and America?
- How do ABC students view the current problems that Asian American students seem to be facing these days (e.g. model minority stereotype, discrimination, pressure from family)?

KEY TERMS

- ✚ Social identity: the conception, beliefs, qualities and expressions that characterize a person and give the person a sense of who they are in a group
- ✚ American-born-Chinese/Chinese American/American Chinese: American students (in terms of nationality) who are of Chinese descent
- ✚ Values: Beliefs or ideas that are important to the people who hold them; values express beliefs concerning how things should be
- ✚ Norms: socially acceptable ways of behaving when playing a particular role

- ✚ Identity crisis: a period of uncertainty and confusion or intense exploration of a person's identity
- ✚ Ethnicity: state of belonging to a social group with common cultural traditions in areas including religion, family structures, beliefs, values and norms.
- ✚ Cross-cultural adaptation: The process people experience when they move from one culture to a different culture, learning the rules, norms, values, customs and language of.

BACKGROUND

Asian Americans are the *"highest-income, best-educated and fastest-growing racial group in the U.S., with Asians now making up the largest share of recent immigrants."* Among the 18 million Asian Americans in the United States, 23% are Chinese Americans. Many studies have been published and articles written on the supposed success of Asian Americans, including the impact of their identity on their psychological well-being. After all, having been perceived as the "model minority" for their success in various fields, it's perhaps unsurprising that Asian American students have been burdened with high expectations in American society and pressures at home.

In his paper "The model minority student: Asian American Students and the relationships between acculturation to Western Values, family pressures, and mental health concerns," Nathan Divino Panelo finds that first or second-generation Asian American students close to their traditional values can "find transitioning into college due to discrimination toward their culture and lack of social support." He also explores how parental pressures and acculturation to Western values may leave many Asian American students "depressed and emotionally unstable." Indeed, despite how Kim and Omizo (2005) discovered that Asian American students integrate both Western and Asian cultures into their daily life on campus and give an outward appearance of "content conformity," Panelo writes that what's shown on the outside does not match with what Asian American students are experiencing on the inside. He cites Cress and Iked'a study (2003), which found that more Asian American students reported feeling depressed than their peers, including White students and those of color. This is due to both feelings of hostility and discrimination on campus and the instilment of traditional values into their mindsets by their parents.

While such identity crises and mental concerns may apply to first or second-generation Asian American college students in America, what about Chinese American students who have grown up in America and later moved to China for middle and high school? Despite the extensive research conducted on Asian Americans residing in the United States, little in comparison is known of Chinese Americans or Asian Americans in general residing in Asia. According to the NBC news article "Not Chinese enough in China? Chinese-Americans caught between 2 worlds," there are 3.8 million Chinese-Americans in mainland China studying or working, and that for many of them, "race and nationality intersect in interesting, sometimes confusing, ways." Cases mentioned involve Chinese Americans describing themselves as feeling "even less Chinese" in China and perhaps even feeling more American. Jason Chu, a 25-year-old Delaware native, for example, remarked that, "In many ways, being in China has caused me to have a strong appreciation for just how American I am" and the experience "has helped me come to terms or embrace the positive aspects of being distinctly Asian-American."

From my own experience, having been born in the US but raised in China since 2009, I find myself agreeing with Chu, considering the identity-related struggles I have experienced and the personal importance of my cultural identity. This research, therefore, is aimed towards understanding the certain identity realizations or

crises Chinese American students in China may experience as opposed to those in America, including their cultural experiences in China, and the effects of such experiences on their social identities and perceptions of the future.

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METHODOLOGY

Mixed methodology:

- Questionnaire (quantitative data)
- Semi-structured interview (qualitative data)

SAMPLE

- **Questionnaire:** 24 respondents from high school and college students studying in both the US and China
- **Semi-structured interview:** 5 respondents
 - 3 participants are high-school students currently studying in China, and have for more than 6 years (all continuous)
 - 2 participants are high-school students currently studying in the United States, and have for more than 6 years (1 continuous; 1 non-continuous)

**Continuous: having studied in the particular country continuously, with no interruption*

DATA

Quantitative data: percentages and graphs from the online questionnaires

Qualitative data: explanations and descriptions from participants during interviews

METHOD 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire was created online using Google Forms for it to be easily accessible to both ABC students in China and ABC students presently residing in the United States. It was titled “The experiences and social identities of Chinese American students,” and included the following introduction:

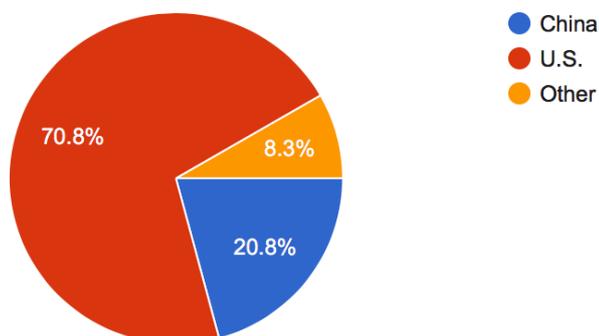
“This questionnaire is part of a sociological research aiming to explore the social identities of Chinese American students currently studying in China and America. The questions are mostly based on the survey conducted by the Pew Research Centre, titled “The Rise of Asian Americans.” All results are confidential and for research purposes only. Thank you for your participation!”

The aim of the questionnaire was to compare the opinions of ABC students in China to those of ABC students in the USA and Asian Americans who participated in the survey conducted by the Pew Research Centre. The questions covered a range of topics, including the importance of family, perceptions of success, identity, and group relationships.

STRENGTHS OF QUESTIONNAIRES

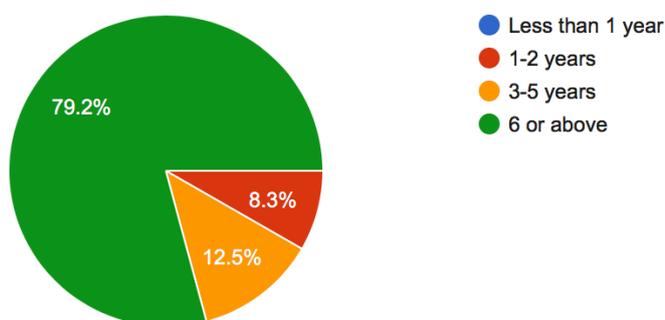
- ✓ **Reliability:** Questionnaires produce quantitative data that is arguably more reliable than qualitative data as each individual respondent answers the exact same questions in the same order. Thus in theory, any difference in response should reflect real differences between respondents. This also makes the questionnaires replicable and comparable to other questionnaires. One key aim of using questionnaires was so the data collected could be compared to results from the Pew Research Centre.
- ✓ **Quantitative Data:** Quantitative data is easily quantified and can be analyzed quickly and efficiently with the aid of a computer.
- ✓ **Objective:** The questionnaire was distributed by sending the link on various social media platforms and involved relatively little personal involvement, danger or sacrifice on the researcher’s part. While the I did directly contact and explain the questionnaire to 5 respondents, the remaining 19 respondents and I are complete strangers. Therefore there is very limited researcher effect and less risk of biased answers.
- ✓ **Validity:** Positivists argue that questionnaires are more valid because they are an objective form of research where the researcher has little involvement with the respondents (see above).
- ✓ **Representativeness:** Questionnaires tend to allow large quantities to be collected over a short period of time. There were 24 responses in total for this questionnaire, with 70.8% currently studying in the US, 20.8% in China, and 8.3% in a different country. The respondents were of different genders, age groups, and places of birth:
 - Gender: 62.5% females and 37.5% males
 - Age: 62.5% either 16 or 17 years old; 13.3% 18 or above; 4.2% 12-15
 - Place of birth: 70.8% were born in the US and 29.2% were foreign-born

Where are you currently studying? (24 responses)



How long have you been in your current country of residence (continuously)?

(24 responses)



WEAKNESSES OF QUESTIONNAIRES

- **Low population validity**
 - Generalizations: All respondents who are currently in China are from Guangdong province while most respondents in the States are from California. This may make the results applicable only to ABC students in those areas.
 - Representativeness: The sample is not necessarily representative as some 70.8% of respondents are currently in the US and only 20.8% are in China. This makes comparing the answers of the two groups somewhat difficult. As the questionnaires were only distributed through people I know, a very limited group of Chinese Americans participated in this research. Also, 24 responses is a relatively small number.
- **Lack of depth:** The questionnaire did not produce any qualitative data, making it hard to achieve the results of “verstehen”; no explanations were provided to offer better insight into the data. Validity is thus affected.
- **Researcher imposition:** As the researcher, I picked the questions and chose what I considered to be important. So despite how objective the approach may seem, I have already interfered with the

results by basing the questions on my own values and experiences. This also means I will not receive unanticipated phenomena and that there is no opportunity for mistakes to be amended.

METHOD 2: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

5 interviews were conducted in total. For the three participants presently in China, 2 were face-to-face interviews, while the other was conducted online through voice messages. For the two participants presently in the United States, they were all carried out online through voice calls. On average, the interviews conducted face-to-face and through voice calls lasted 15-30 minutes.

Name	Gender	Age	Native/foreign born	Current country of residence: US/China	Years in current country of residence:	Interview
Grace	Female	16	Native	China	Above 6 years	Face-to-face
Emily	Female	16	Native	China	Above 6 years	Face-to-face
Debby	Female	16	Native	USA	3 years continuously until now + above 6 years previously	Online voice call
Brian	Male	18	Native	China	Above 6 years	Texting + voice messages
Andy	Male	17	Foreign (China)	USA	Above 6 years	Online voice call

Note. Pseudonyms were used to in order to protect the identity of participants.

STRENGTHS OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

- ✓ **Validity:** Participants were encouraged to develop their own ideas and provide in-depth explanations, resulting in data-rich information being collected. As the researcher I also guided respondents and clarified potential misinterpretations, which also improves the validity of the data.
- ✓ **Reliability:** Many questions were planned beforehand, allowing for answers to the same questions being collected from the interviews to draw a comparison; potential reliability issues were also resolved as I could correct any misunderstandings or chances of participants not answering.
- ✓ **Flexibility:** In addition to answering the planned questions, I also asked different interviewees different questions depending on the answers they had given. Thus semi-structured interviews are rather flexible and allow for a wider range of data collected when compared to structured interviews or questionnaires.
- ✓ **“Unanticipated phenomena”:** Due to this flexibility, the researcher can potentially encounter certain “unanticipated phenomena” to further enhance my understanding of the topic.

WEAKNESSES OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

- **Time-consuming:** Most of the interviews lasted 20-30 minutes and it takes a considerable amount of time to transcribe the interviews into a written format for the information to be analyzed. Also, because Brian and I were unable to find a suitable time to do a face-to-face interview or voice call, we had to resort to texting and voice messages.

- **Validity:** Preparing questions beforehand involves prejudgments about the interviewees and may contain unintentionally biased questions. This may reduce the validity of the data.
- **Reliability:** There's the possibility of interviewees having responded with answers they think will please the researcher or make them appear good, especially since I am close friends or acquaintances with them. On the other hand, the researcher may also misinterpret the interviewees' responses, despite having recorded the conversations.
- Also, different methods of research were used, making the data less consistent and reliable. During voice calls, for instance, there were often times when the connection was poor, making it difficult to the interviewees to hear the questions I asked. Since there's less direct contact involved during voice calls, the information those interviewees provided may have been more reliable. However, gestures and facial expressions can be seen from face-to-face interviews, making it harder for them to lie or deceive the researcher. The use of voice messages and texting may have given Brian more time to consider his answers, which could have either made them more valid and reliable or given him the opportunity to alter and withhold certain information.
- **Generalization:** The lack of standardization in the questions (as interviewees didn't necessarily receive the exact same questions in the same order) may affect the reliability of the data and make it harder to be generalized to other ABC students.
- **Skills:** Certain skills are required of the researcher to be able to carry out effective semi-structured interviews, especially ones face-to-face. I've had very limited experience in carrying out such interviews and may therefore have missed out on opportunities to discover potentially significant information.
- **Qualitative data:** Unlike quantitative data, the qualitative data produced from interviews are much harder to analyze.

KEY FINDINGS

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS FROM QUESTIONNAIRES

THE QUESTIONS:

1. *What is your gender?*
2. *What is your age?*
3. *Were you born in the U.S.?*
4. *Where are you currently studying?*
5. *How long have you been in your current country of residence (continuously)?*
6. *Can you carry on a conversation in your native language well?*
7. *Can you speak English very well?*
8. *Is having a successful marriage one of the most important things in your lives?*
9. *Is being a good parent one of the most important things in your lives?*
10. *You are most likely going to marry someone: Chinese/Non-Chinese Asian/Non-Asian*
11. *Do you believe that most people who want to get ahead can make it as long as they work hard enough?*
12. *Do you believe that Asian Americans are very hardworking?*
13. *Do you believe that Americans (including all ethnic and racial groups) are very hardworking?*
14. *Are you religious?*

15. *Does being Asian American affect your admission into schools and colleges (in the U.S.)? (helps/makes no difference/hurts)*
16. *Does being Asian American affect your job opportunities (in the U.S.)? (helps/makes no difference/hurts)*
17. *How well do you get along with White Americans? (Very well/pretty well/not so well)*
18. *How well do you get along with other U.S. Asian groups? (Very well/pretty well/not so well)*
19. *How well do you get along with Americans of other ethnic and racial groups? (Very well/pretty well/not so well)*
20. *You most often describe yourself as: Chinese American/Asian American/American/Chinese*
21. *Compared with other racial and ethnic minority groups in the U.S., how successful are Asian Americans? (more/equally/less)*
22. *What is your party identification? (Republican/Democrat/other)*

RESULTS AND COMPARISONS:

LANGUAGE

While 44% of US-born Chinese who participated in the Pew Research Centre's (PRC) survey claimed to be able to carry on a conversation in their native language well, 87.5% of the 24 respondents from the questionnaire said they could speak Chinese fluently. In terms of English-speaking abilities, while 39% of immigrants 18 or above speak English very well, some 95.8% of respondents from the questionnaire claim to be able to do so. The comparison is not necessarily fair of course considering 30% of respondents have lived in and still are in China, and that 67% of participants are below the age of 18.

For those respondents currently studying in China, all state that they can speak both English and Chinese like locals. For the respondents currently in America, only 2 admitted not being able to carry on a conversation in Chinese well.

FAMILY VALUES

Two questions were asked to assess the respondents' family values:

- *Is having a successful marriage one of the most important things in your lives?*
- *Is being a good parent one of the most important things in your lives?*

44% of Chinese Americans from the PRC survey agreed to the first question, while 57% agreed to the latter. Similarly, from the questionnaire, 58.3% respondents expressed consent with the first question and 66.7% did in the latter. Thus in both cases, around half of Chinese Americans see family as one of the most significant aspects in their lives.

80% of respondents in China concurred to both statements, while for those in the U.S., roughly half did for both, with more agreeing to the second.

It was also asked in the questionnaire who they were most likely going to marry in the future. 54.2% replied Chinese, 29.2% said someone non-Chinese Asian and 16.7% went for non-Asian. It's perhaps worth noting that 80% of the respondents in China went for Chinese, while there were mixed replies from those in the States.

WORK ETHIC

91.7% of questionnaire participants believe that Asian Americans are very hardworking. The figure drops to 66.7% when asked of Americans in general. This trend is also shown in the PRC survey, where 93% agreed to Americans from their country of origin being very hard-working and only 57% agreeing to the country as a whole being very hard-working.

Similarly, when asked if they agreed to most people being able to get ahead if they're willing to work hard, 69% of Asian Americans from the PRC expressed consent, compared to 54.2% from the questionnaire.

PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS

In terms of admissions to schools and colleges in the U.S., 50% participants from the questionnaire claimed their chances of hurt because of being Asian American, which is significantly higher than the 12% from the PRC survey. However, in terms of job opportunities in the U.S., the majority of both groups responded that it makes no difference (70.8% from questionnaire and 62% from PRC survey). Similar trends can be shown from the respondents currently in China, as 80% claimed their cultural identity would hurt their admissions into colleges and only 20% said it would hurt job opportunities.

IDENTITY

In terms describing who they are the most often, the participants are rather equally distributed into the four categories-- Chinese American, Asian American, American and Chinese--with slightly more asserting that they describe themselves as Asian Americans. Out of the 5 respondents currently in China (all of whom were born in the U.S.) and who have lived in China for more than 6 years, none chose "American". 2 went for "Asian American," 2 "Chinese" and 1 "Chinese American." 62% of PRC survey respondents reporting most often claiming themselves to be "country of origin/American", although the survey only provided 3 options—country of origin/American, Asian American or American.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

91% of PRC survey respondents either get along very well or pretty well with White Americans, while 83.3% of questionnaire respondents do. For relationships with other American Asian groups, only 11% of PRC survey participants don't get along with them, compared to 8.3% questionnaire participants. All respondents in China claimed to get along either very well or pretty well with both groups. Interestingly, while more participants from the PRC survey reported not being able to get along so well with Hispanics and Blacks (19% and 28%), less questionnaire respondents have a similar claim—4.2%.

PARTY IDENTIFICATION

62.5% of the 24 respondents from the questionnaire identify themselves as Democrats, which is slightly more than the 49% of Chinese Americans who participated in the PRC survey. All participants presently in China replied being either a Democrat or other.

SUMMARY

The results from the questionnaire are mostly similar to the results from survey conducted by the Pew Research Centre in 2012. However, considering the differences in the size and representativeness of the samples and the sampling technique, there are quite a few dissimilarities. A significantly higher percentage of respondents from the questionnaire are able to speak both English and Chinese fluently, which may be because of their school environments, having moved to their current country of residence after learning the local language, and family influences. Despite this increase however, in terms of admissions to schools and

colleges in the US., there's also been a rise in the proportion of respondents claiming that their cultural identity hurts their chances. This may be due to the background and age of most respondents to the questionnaire (around 70% are below 18 and yet to apply to college), increased competition from Asians, and more widespread awareness of colleges looking for diversity on campus.

It seems rather odd that only 4.2% respondent from the questionnaire claimed to not get along with Americans of other ethnic and racial minorities—a figure lower in comparison to group relationships with White Americans and other Asian Americans. Also, if given the option, perhaps some PRC survey participants will prefer to identify themselves as “Chinese” as some 20.8% questionnaire participants did.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS FROM SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

QUESTIONS PREPARED BEFOREHAND FOR FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEWS:

1. *How would you describe your social identity? (E.G. Chinese, American, Chinese American); how much does being Chinese American affect who you are? Do you have more Eastern/Western values towards family, gender roles, school expectations etc.?*
2. *How much has your experience in China/America shaped your social identity? Have other factors shaped it as well? (e.g. family)*
3. *Do you find your values to be different to Chinese/American students? If so, how? What effects do they have on your relationships with them?*
4. *What are your views of the future? Does the fact that you are ABC affect any of your future prospects?*
5. *How do you feel towards your exposure to both the Eastern/Western values?*
6. *What are your views on the perceived problems that seem to be facing Asian American students today? (model minority label; mental concerns; absence at the top of the hierarchy)*

QUESTIONS SENT TO BRIAN THROUGH TEXTING ON WECHAT:

1. *How would you describe your social identity? (e.g. would you describe yourself as Chinese/American/Chinese American). How much does being Chinese American affect who you are?*
2. *How would you describe your values? (e.g. more Western/Eastern or a mixture of both etc.) Have you ever felt caught in between the two cultures or values before?*
3. *How have your experiences in China affected your values or shaped your identity? Have other factors shaped it as well (e.g. family)?*
4. *How are schools in America different to schools in China? (e.g. attitude towards grades, sports, socializing). Did the difference affect you when you first came back?*
5. *How do your values and identity affect your social relationships? (if they have)*
6. *How do you feel about your exposure to both cultures and values? Would you say that being in China for so long has actually strengthened your sense of self as an American?*
7. *How do you feel about the current problems that seem to be facing Asian Americans today? (e.g. model minority label) Do you think they'll affect you in the future?*
8. *Is America better than China in terms of opportunities to get ahead, treatment of the poor, free to practice religion, moral values of society, and strength of family ties?*

FINDINGS

IDENTITY

All interviewees prefer to call themselves either Chinese American, American Chinese or American.

For the three interviewees currently in China, all three tended to lean towards their “American” identity. Emily, for example, stated that, *“I would like amazingly, still call myself American.”* She mentioned it was because she holds an American passport, which is her “evidence,” and the fact that she had lived in the States for 8 years first before coming to China, which has given her an American identity. Therefore she feels like *“an American that’s stayed in China for a few years, well not a few, like nine.”* Brian, who spent 9 years in the U.S. before moving to China, explicitly asserted that he would describe himself as *“American Chinese instead of Chinese American”* but also explained that both cultures “combine” to give him his social identity. He went on to say that that being Chinese American both affects how other people view him and himself, as he thinks he’s *“neither Chinese nor American kind of like that identity crisis sort of thing.”* Knowing both languages and cultures on both sides, however, does make him feel *“special in a way.”* Perhaps Emily shares a similar view in terms of how this dual identity may actually be an advantage to who they are, as she interestingly said that *“it feels like I’m more like diverse than people who’s like lived in America their whole lives because I’ve been exposed to like different cultures, especially in like an international school where there’s not just kids from china and America.”* For Grace, who back after 5 years in the U.S., also mentioned how it sometimes *“depends on where I am, like I’m here (China) I say I’m America because a lot of people here don’t know what an American born Chinese is”* and *“in America they ask me where I’m from and I say China or sometimes New Jersey because that’s where I’m from.”*

Debby and Andy are currently in the United States. While Debby was born in the U.S., however, Andy was born in China and immigrated to America in 2010. Both of them identify themselves as “Chinese American,” but Andy elaborated by saying *“someone who was born in China, but living a normal life in America, fitting into American society.”*

VALUES

The interviewees’ values link closely to what they consider to be their social identities and their backgrounds. Both Emily and Grace explicitly stated having more “western” values, while Brian and Debby have more of a mix of both, and Andy has more “traditional” values.

By exploring what they value they hold, the interviewees also outlined the differences they saw in the two cultures. It seems to be general consensus that there’s more individuality, expression of self, and socialization in Western culture, compared to more Eastern or Chinese culture, where group harmony, education and family are considered more important. Andy, for example, says that *“I value like education, family... my values are still similar to what you see in traditional Chinese, Chinese (people).”* Brian describes how on *“the Chinese side you have the traditional, ‘work hard,’ ‘study hard,’ ‘get good grades’ and then high expectations, things like that”* while on *“the American side you have the more, I don’t know, easy-going, fun, social side.”* He also describes how going back to America within the past year, his memory of the country had been “refreshed,” and he noticed how more outgoing and extroverted the people he met there were, continued to most Chinese students he’s interacted with.

When asked about how their families have influenced their values and identity, the interviewees in China all had 1 parent with a relatively more traditional mindset and 1 who is more open-minded, but all claimed that they weren’t enforcing very traditional values on them to the extent where it may have heavily influenced their values. This is may be due to the fact that their parents had spent a considerable amount of time in the

U.S. themselves before returning to China with their children. As Emily puts it, although her father *“has more like traditional values sometimes,” “but because he’s been in America for so long, he like gets it, being American and whatever.”* Yet for the two interviewees currently in the U.S., their parents are comparatively more traditional, as Debby refers to the fact that *“both my parents are Chinese”* and so the traditions she follows are *“kind of like Eastern in a sense,”* and Andy, when asked the reason behind is more traditional values, voluntarily brings up his parents and says how his mother, who lives in the U.S. with him, keeps telling him everyday *“to value school, value education.”*

In terms of how their experiences have affected their values, if at all, both Emily and Grace, who identify with more Western values, mentioned how being in China for so long has allowed them to understand and respect the local culture; both also agreed that their American identity has been strengthened in China. Emily, in addition, claims that her time in a Chinese public school may have highlighted the differences in values compared to those of local Chinese students’ and that even today, she still finds some Chinese values to be *“weird”* and gets *“really offended when people say something bad about Americans.”* Andy believes that what values he identifies with is his choice and that he doesn’t get pressurized from his surroundings; he sticks more to his traditional value, and during times of conflict between the two, like when choosing between *“education or socialization,”* he says *“at the end, I go back to my Chinese values.”* For Brian and Debby, who have a fair mixture of both values, they see their experiences or exposure to Chinese culture as very important in shaping who they are. Brian, for example, states that his time in middle school is *“one of the most influential”* periods in his life so far. However, while Debby is more secure and calm about her acceptance of both cultures, Brian mentioned having *“identity crises”* sometimes, where he would be torn in between two norms of the two, distinct cultures. This is likely to be linked with how even Debby felt *“out of place”* during her time in China as she was born in America and therefore felt she belonged more in America.

What’s worth noting is that all interviewees say being in China and/or their families have influenced them to value studying or education in general more. Grace admits that *“the peer pressure around me about getting good studies has also motivated me because I remember before I didn’t care about studies and I just wanted to have fun.”* Similarly, Emily claims that comparing to her friends back in the U.S., who don’t care about their grades as much, she considers studying to be quite important. Brian affirms that his time in a public middle school shaped his work ethic; Debby knows that her parents do have academic expectations for her, which has *“motivated”* her.

ACADEMIC AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

All interviewees agree on the main differences between the two educational systems, with it being in the U.S., that you have this *“fun, easygoing attitude towards school, like having a good combination of extra-curriculars and academic grades (Brian,”* whereas in China it’s *“literally just studying” (Emily).* They all tend to favor the American system more, especially in terms of doing more than just studying and pursuing their own interests also. Grace relates to the fact that exams are coming up in her school and how students are *“shutting off,”* like *“taking their phones away... and studying all the time,”* which is *“definitely not something”* she would do. Emily refers to how she considers school to be a *“place to make friends, develop your own community.”* Interestingly, while most interviewees focused on the differences in students’ attitudes towards school, Debby talked about the different attitudes towards teachers. She says that *“in*

China, they focus a lot on about respecting teachers” while in America “they don’t emphasize it as much and like sometimes students are extremely rude to teachers.” This may be because “teachers are like in a sense less strict than the ones in China” and it’s important how the teachers in America “care more about students as a whole rather than just their academic success.” This is reflected in coaches of sports as well, since Debby—having been in middle school track teams in both China and America—emphasizes that she’s felt considerably less sore from practices in America, and that coaches there “*are really understanding with your academic situations because they care about you more as a whole and not just as an athlete.*” In terms of students’ attitudes towards sports, interviewees note that Chinese students don’t care about PE or games as much, which Emily believes is to do with the differences in culture, since American parents like to watch games and encourage their children to do supports while studying is more of a priority in China. Moreover, Debby contrasted the attitudes towards sports with the fact that there were around 10 people in her middle school in China as opposed to *the “200 or 300 people on the track team”* in America, due to how coaches selected members in China but not in the U.S., where joining the track team is voluntary. This highlights a fundamental difference in the meaning of sports: in China, the results of the sporting competitions are more important and it’s more focused on individual performance, whereas in the U.S., team spirit and sportsmanship are highly respected values.

To a large extent, the academic experiences of the interviews have also influenced what subjects they take in school and therefore potential careers in the future. While both Andy and Debby (who are currently in the US), have subjects that lean more towards the sciences, with Andy hoping to become a doctor in the future, the students in China have a greater proportion of their subjects being related to the social sciences or humanities. Emily, for example, said that she is more “Wen Ke” (of a social sciences student) now but thinks that if she were in America, it’s highly likely that like her Asian friends who she grew up with, she might be “doing something with numbers” because of the Asian stereotype or chances of her being potentially better at the sciences. Therefore she believes being in China has also affected her job-wise, since she is considering doing something in international relations or the UN, especially after realizing the importance of “international cooperation” and “how culture affects everyone.”

When the interviewees first moved to the countries they are currently in, most of them did not encounter many problems. For Emily and Brian, for instance, both mention how home-schooling at first allowed a smoother transition into the Chinese lifestyle and the fact that they were only 8 and 9 made learning the local language and culture relatively easy. Grace had never attended a Chinese public school before, and remembers having “hated it” when she first came back to China. The only interviewee who had serious obstacles adjusting was Andy, who had both language and cultural barriers when he first moved to the United States. Those were resolved, however, with time, as he recalls “slowly starting to fit into society.”

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

The values and identities have in most cases, affected the interviewees’ relationships with their peers. Grace, for example, having found that her values are very different to Chinese students, suggests that it gives her “less to talk to others about” because sometimes they’ve “never even thought of that.” Therefore she finds it “kind of hard” to “talk to them about anything other than universities and grades.” This does not necessarily mean, however, that the interviewees cannot form close relationships with the local students.

Emily offers a different perspective by saying that with a close friend she had in middle school, she helped broaden her friend's mindset and change a lot of stereotypes for her, including that painting your nails doesn't mean you aren't studious. Also for Brian, he notes that being American may have helped him fit into school in China since "it's not everyday you see an American person attend a public middle school." Not only was he popular with his English teacher, he was popular with his peers, allowing him to have a "good time" in middle school, with a lot of friends. Also referring back to his recent visit to America, he remarked on the fact that he wasn't "defined" by his experiences or choices his parents made, and that the US is "much more accepting in terms of having a very diverse or unusual cultural identity." This leads him to the conclusion that "social relationships in China are much more easily affected by these things (background and experiences) than social relationships in the US." This statement may be corroborated by the fact that both ABC students in America reported on there being very little difficulty interacting with their peers in school, regardless of their cultural identity. In the words of Andy, American students are "really open-minded and accept who you are kid of, like 'You're from China, that's cool' 'You speak Chinese, that's cool' 'Different values, that's cool' 'We still like you as a person, as a friend.'" This he says, really helped in encouraging him to loosen up his fears and adapt. Debby, similarly, has both Asian and Caucasian friends in the States. During her time in China, she also interacted with both Chinese and international students. Interestingly, however, she mentions this "rivalry" between the Chinese and international students. She believed this was because the "international students think that the Chinese students only know how to like learn, do academic stuff in a sense" and the "Chinese students thought that the international students were just a bunch of filthy rich kids in a way." Yet despite this conflict, Debby got along with both groups, which she said was easier due to being on the track team, where so interacted with more Chinese students. Having both values, therefore, has perhaps allowed her to be accepting of both cultures and get along with both groups of students with contrasting mindsets.

DISCRIMINATION & COMMENTS ON THE "MODEL MINORITY STEREOTYPE"

From the questionnaire, a high percentage of respondents reported that being Asian American actually hurts their admissions into colleges and schools in the U.S. From the interviews, it was evident that many interviewees reported concerns also. Almost all interviewees raised the issue of colleges looking for diversity in their students and that with many Asian Americans being top-notch students and applying to similar colleges, the competition for them is pretty intensive. Grace says that "after reading about like how it's been harder for Chinese Americans especially," she's been "putting in extra work and like wanting to stand out and stuff." Emily, however, as mentioned previously, commented on how her experiences might be seen as an advantage, especially compared to all the Asian Americans who've lived in American all their lives, because of her broadened perspective and understanding of both cultures.

In terms of discrimination, both respondents in the USA find their communities to be very open-minded and supportive, which has allowed Andy, for instance, to retain his traditional values and not feel pressurized into adapting many Western values that would perhaps conflict with his Asian ones. He also believes in the American dream, and that "everyone has the same opportunities." Similarly, Debby remarks that there is a no-discrimination policy and even talked about a meeting coming up where she has been chosen to represent the Asian Americans and offer their opinions to the school's faculty. Nonetheless, the interviewees

do acknowledge that such attitudes will depend heavily on where they are in the United States. The situation Debby and Andy find themselves in, for example, may not be the same as in a very conservative state in the Deep South.

All interviewees, when asked where they would favor settling in after college, replied America. In the cases of Grace and Emily, who favor more Western values, both explicitly stated that they don't want to come back to China, while for Debby and Andy (in the U.S.), both said it's likely for them to stay as they've grown used to the American way of life and prefer it also. Andy remarked that only if there is a potentially promising business opportunity will he consider working in China for a while.

FEELINGS TOWARDS THE EXPOSURE TO BOTH VALUES

Their experiences and exposure to both cultures have had an impact on the identity and future of all interviewees. In response to how they felt overall about this exposure, the interviewees consider it to be both significant and beneficial, especially for those who are currently studying in China. Grace, who was initially reluctant to live in China and considered herself different to the locals, says her experiences have "widened her horizon on seeing different people" and "really opened up her views," allowing her to "see their values" and "respect" them. Likewise for Emily, she says "it's definitely made it easier for me to like accept different values, accept different cultures." These include understanding certain stereotypes as well; she mentioned that being in China has allowed her to know that not all Chinese people eat bugs or guts and that not every city is as polluted as Western media sources portray them to be. For Brian, having spent an equal amount of time in both countries, he remarks that while he will "never forget that I am American in a way," the fact that he is about to leave China for college has actually allowed him to be "more connected with the Chinese side" of his identity. So overall, he has "quite a strong sense of belonging on both sides."

Generally, their futures have been shaped by their experiences and identity. As said earlier, Emily looks forward to working in international relations in the future because of her understanding of different cultures, and it's worth noting that both Debby and Andy want to "help people" with their jobs in the future. While Debby isn't exactly sure of what she wants to do in the future, Andy has his eyes set on becoming a doctor.

USA vs. CHINA

When comparing the U.S. to China in terms of opportunities to get ahead, the four interviewees who were asked this question gave rather uncertain and mixed responses. Andy thinks America "might have a little bit more" compared to China; Brian believes there are more in China because being Asian American is "something you see everyday in the US" so in China where there's actually less ABCs, "there are actually more opportunities to be prioritized"; Emily and Debby are both uncertain, but acknowledge that America isn't necessarily the "land of opportunities anymore." Hence overall, it seems that the interviewees are growing more cynical of the "American Dream" ideal.

For treatment of the poor and community service, the interviewees generally agree that America definitely reaches out to the poor and needy and that students are expected of community service, but most of them

are uncertain of the situation in China, making a comparison rather difficult. Both Debby and Emily refer to the fact that community service is often required in high schools for the students to graduate and that students in the U.S. tend to be more willing to do community service. Emily believes that “social responsibility is a big thing in America” and that she doesn’t think they do any community service in Chinese high schools as it’s not as important as studying. Personally, both Emily and Debby like the emphasis placed on community service in American schools because they feel it’s something everyone should be doing.

In reference to the freedom to practice religion and freedom of speech, all agree that America is much more liberal than China and accepting of new ideas or traditions. As a Christian herself, Emily notes the difference in attitudes towards religion in China and America. Whereas there are Churches in America and friends are like “oh okay” when she says she’s going to Church, Emily said she has to go to this “like apartment place who no one can know about” with her family every Sunday and her Chinese friends will be like “what’s Church?” when she says she’s going to Church. The degree of the liberalism and freedom of speech in the U.S., however, is not necessarily a good thing in some of the interviewees’ opinions. Brian, for example, states that he “kind of appreciates the relatively more traditional viewpoints that Chinese people have towards certain things” and that “being too liberal in the US has gotten to a point where it’s kind of strange” or “too far”, as “there are still certain things that you should have an actual opinion on and not just be like you know ‘I can say whatever I want’ and ‘I can do whatever I want.’” Likewise, Andy thinks that in America, “there are a lot more people who like doesn’t really care about what’s right, what’s right and what’s wrong”, resulting in there being “a lot of shootings in America, a lot of rape, lots of crimes in America.”

Finally in terms of family ties, 2 interviewees claim that family bonds are stronger in China, while 1 voiced that the pressure Chinese parents place on their children might actually distance them from each other. Brian said, “ever since first grade I’ve had like classmates whose parents were divorced and everything” and that family is really “embedded into the culture” and “a big part of life” in China. Interestingly, although both Brian and Emily mention Thanksgivings and Christmas, Brian uses it simply to acknowledge cases of American families gathering together while Emily uses them to emphasize the closeness of American families. She also says that her family often goes on road trips, which is not so common in China as her friends are like “wow, you guys go on road trips?” So there are mixed attitudes when concerning family ties, especially interpretations of parental pressure and how important family is to Chinese culture.

CONCLUSIONS

From the interviews and questionnaires, it can be concluded that the experiences of America-born-Chinese students have had in both China and America have had considerable impacts on their social identities and their futures. A lot of the discoveries, especially from the interviews, are based on the general reasoning that Americans are much more open-minded when it comes to diverse or unusual cultural backgrounds in comparison to China, where most people find it hard to understand the idea of having an “Asian body but American mind.” Although the questionnaires seem to reflect that the ABC students in China have more traditional values, with 80% of respondents placing a successful marriage and being a good parent as one of the most important things in their lives compared to the 58-67% in general, from the interview, it is found that the ABC students who have spent 6 or more years in China have in fact had their American identities

strengthened. This is largely due to the fact that Asian Americans are not a common sight in China at all, and that seeing different Chinese values have highlighted the difference in their values compared to the locals'. While it was easy for them to adapt to the local culture, it did take a while for them to come to accept and respect the Chinese culture. In addition, local Chinese students see the ABC students to be different, which may either make the ABC more popular in a sense or result in some sort of rivalry.

Backgrounds and where the students spent their childhoods are equally crucial factors in forming ABC students' social identities. All three respondents currently in China noted their sense of belonging to America, where they were all born in and have spent at least 5 years in before moving, with one still preferring to call herself an "American" rather than "Chinese American." And in the case of Andy's, where he moved to the U.S. at the age of 10, he still holds many of his traditional values from China, due to both parental influences and perhaps his childhood experiences in China.

The values and identities and these ABC students and how they are perceived by the locals go on to influencing their social relationships with both Chinese and Caucasian students. While it may be easy for ABC students to get along with both groups of students', it may be harder for ABC students to discuss deeper and more personal topics with Chinese students, or differences in values may often be a topic of discussion. For ABC students currently in the U.S., however, the American students' open-mindedness suggests that their cultural backgrounds don't affect their social relationships in school as much. Indeed, social relationships are much more easily affected by cultural identifies than social relationships in America.

In consideration of this exposure to both Western and Eastern values, the ABC students interviewed generally see their experiences as significant and beneficial. They have described their times in Chinese public schools as one of the "most influential periods" in their lives and revealed how encountering people of different cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds has truly broadened their perspectives, and perhaps made them more special in comparison to Asian Americans who have grown up in the U.S.

Such dynamics between their experiences in both countries and attitudes of locals towards them have also shaped the future of the ABC students. It seems that ABCs are more likely to choose science-related subjects if they were in the U.S. than if they were studying in China, because of the stereotypes and expectations in the U.S., and comparatively better English skills they have in China. These differences in subjects and exposure to cultures potentially lead to different career options in the U.S., as well. Nonetheless, a strong sense of social responsibility can be seen from all respondents, which they attribute to the American side of their identities. Indeed, all five interviewees wish to settle in the U.S. after college, despite acknowledgements that China might have better opportunities for them in the future or that the "American Dream" isn't necessarily true anymore. Perhaps this is because they find their core values to be more similar to people in the U.S., rather than China, and because of reduced emphasis being placed on their cultural backgrounds.

OVERALL EVALUATION

There were numerous practical difficulties in carrying out both the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. For the questionnaires, they were first made on a Chinese site but because of "politically sensitive" information, the questionnaire got deleted. Another one was made using the same account with certain information deleted, but the questionnaire still had to be verified with a Chinese ID. A final attempt on the site was made after a new account was created to make the questionnaire, but unfortunately after

less than 24 hours, the questionnaire was still deleted. It seemed futile to continue trying and the use of questionnaires was almost abandoned, until a respondent for the interview recommended using Google Forums instead. Thankfully the questionnaire created on Google worked and the link was sent to various ABCs in China and America just in time for the results to be analyzed. Nonetheless, the questionnaire was not very representative and cannot be easily generalized to other ABCs, especially those in China because only 5 of the respondents have lived in China for more than 6 years and still are, meaning most of the respondents were in America. Also the questionnaire was only made available to my acquaintances and my friends' acquaintances, meaning it was limited to certain regions and people. As an improvement, the questionnaire could have included some open-ended questions for those 24 respondents to write and included more questions of my own (most were based on the Pew Research Centre survey) that could have been useful also, since the questionnaire did reach over 5 times as many people as the interview.

The interviews, furthermore, were very time-consuming and required finding a suitable times for both the interviewer and the interviewee. The fact that 2 participants were across the globe in the United States meant that face-to-face interviews were impossible. The differences in the means of conducting the interviews, with 2 being face-to-face, 2 as voice-calls, and 1 through voice messages and texting reduces the reliability and validity of the data. However, the effects of the differences in medium may be rather minimal as the information collected were of similar depth and the length of the interviews were similar as well. Researcher bias and interviewer bias are other aspects to consider. With the topic being very personal to me, the researcher, the questions I asked in the interviews were perhaps often unintentionally biased and involve prejudgments, making it bigger of a challenge for interviewees to go against the sentiment or statement implied in those questions. The fact that I already knew all the interviewees made it easy to establish rapport and get straight to the topic, but this acquaintance might have also hindered the interviewees from giving completely truthful answers as they have incentive to "look good", considering we will remain in contact and are in shared social circles.

The findings of the questionnaire weren't necessarily useful, moreover. They provided a general overview of the values and behaviors of ABCs but it's hard to draw concrete conclusions from them, considering this topic involves a lot of the respondents' feelings, experiences and interpretations.

Nonetheless, the semi-structured interviews certainly provided useful and data-rich information which provided real insight into understanding the identities and experiences of the participants. "Unexpected phenomena" was also seen, with interviewees approaching even the planned questions differently, offering various perspectives and explanations on an issue.

This research may be repeated and extended in the future as the interviewees will soon embark on the next stage in their lives in college, where they will meet and interact with many more groups of people from different cultural backgrounds. Similar questions can thus be asked say 5 years later to see whether college experiences have shaped their identities or vice versa.