Bicultural Overtones:
College, Music, Education and Mental Health
Experiences of Second-Generation Chinese-Americans

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION
Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to illuminate and analyze second-generation Chinese-American childhood experiences and young-adult perspectives negotiating biculturalism, education, and well-being. The context of music education is utilized as a culturally saturated space for study where Chinese-American values, norms, and practices are thrown into relief. The resulting research will address a research lacuna, as the experiences of second-generation Chinese-American young adults synthesized through experiences of biculturalism, music education, and mental health are under-examined in academic literature.

This research will examine whether there are distinct "Chinese-American Dreams" that are formed by some immigrant Chinese-American parents regarding their children. What success, excellence, and work mean in Chinese-American culture is not the same as what it means in American culture. Chinese immigrant parents bring these cultural beliefs with them into an American context, where their second-generation children must negotiate what these conflicting systems of beliefs mean unto themselves. Due to the stereotyped appearance of these second-generation children as "model minorities," their distinctive experiences are often overlooked. This research will challenge these monolithic and reductivist assumptions by engaging in a culturally-nuanced analysis and interpretation of Chinese-American experiences.

The arena of childhood music education is a rich microcosm where patterns of Chinese-American experiences and site-specific cultural phenomena are manifested and articulated. Due to high participation and engagement, Chinese-American parents and children have made musical instrument education an institution for enacting bicultural ideals, beliefs, and participation in American life. Inquiry into the space of childhood music education offers an opportunity to understand generational dynamics, bicultural interactions, and the ways in which broader macro-issues and topics are conceptualized by students, parents, and music teachers.

Second-generation Chinese-Americans face a distinct set of experiences due to their bicultural identity, interethnic context, minority status, and generational status. Such experiences and conflicting roles often engender mental health risks due to social stress, generational trauma, stigma, exclusion/belonging, and familial strife or tension. The distinct challenges, vulnerabilities, and mental health disparities these Chinese-American young adults face are neglected in the academic literature.

Research Questions

1. How do Chinese and American culture influence the lives of second-generation Chinese-American young adults, their bicultural identity formation and expression, and life experiences?
2. What constitutes "Chinese-American Dreams" of success for Chinese-Americans? How does this shape parent-child relationships?
3. Why are Chinese-American parents drawn to the realm of musical instrument instruction/education? How are Chinese-American values and norms being manifested in these institutional spaces and forums?
4. What is the nature of the mental health disparities experienced by Chinese-American young adults? Are there any distinct forms of suffering unique to Chinese-Americans? Are these forms of suffering related to music education?

Definitions

Chinese-American refers to the cultural identity of individuals who lived in China or whose parents once lived there. Because of cultural similarities, this definition includes Chinese-Taiwanese-American individuals and their children as well.

Asian-American refers to the cultural identity of individuals who lived in Asia or whose parents once lived there. As used by members of this group and my informants, Asian-American is a common self-identity used in lieu of a more specific cultural identity label like "Chinese-American."

Bicultural individuals include those who fall on the spectrum of belonging to two distinct cultures. Some bicultural individuals may identify as being "more" Chinese than American, more American than Chinese, or equally Chinese and American. In this study, bicultural identities refer to the cultural identification of first-generation and second-generation Chinese-Americans.

First-generation individuals were born in another country but immigrated to the United States and have American citizenship or permanent residency.

Second-generation individuals were born in America, but their parents were not.

Young-adults are individuals between 18 and 26 years of age.

Research Methods

The primary research methodology is qualitative with a focus on in-depth, open-ended interviews and select autoethnographic insights and experiences. More specifically, I utilized a

grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2006) approach to this qualitative research. Through the stories, experiences, and perspectives shared during interviews, themes and narratives arose to form the backbone of this polyvocal research.

The primary data for this research was collected during these qualitative interviews. Interviews were individual and semi-structured through the use of an interview guide and clarifying follow-up questions that arose during interviews. I used personal network sampling and snowball sampling to acquire my data set. As a musician and Chinese-American, I was able to access participants through my social contacts of personal acquaintances and their respective personal contacts. Potential participants were initially contacted via email or text-messaging.

Interviews lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and were conducted either in-person in a private environment or remotely through Zoom or phone calls. Ten of the thirteen interviews were remotely conducted due to informants living in different states than my own. Both virtual and in-person interviews were recorded with audio-only and transcribed after the interview was completed. All interviews were conducted in English.

My informants included ten second-generation Chinese-American young adults aged 18 to 26 and three music teachers who have had experience teaching Chinese-Americans. The young adult participants self-identified as second-generation Chinese-Americans and primarily grew up in the Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas area. Pseudonyms are used for all informants in this research to protect their privacy.

As a member of the population, I am centering my research around my role as a researcher is defined by the meanings and themes put forth by my informants. However, my positionality offers me the advantage of hearing and understanding the nuances of what my informants communicate and relating my own when relevant. Additionally, this personal connection and common ground with my informants allowed me to discuss sensitive topics without conversational barriers. The lived experiences of my informants are the primary lens through which I conducted this research rather than a prioritization of my own.

Summary

Chapter 1 consists of my "Literature Review" of academic literature and anthropological research relating to the central themes and areas I set forth to investigate through my initial research questions. This includes bicultural identity, intergenerational dynamics, music education, and mental health, with a concentration on the sparse literature related to Asian and Chinese-Americans. The following chapter highlights a central topic of conversation that arose in my interviews: college education. I conceptualize college as part of "Chinese-American

Dreams" that are a primary factor in the lived and bicultural experiences many Chinese-Americans have for their children. Chapter 3 focuses on broader Chinese-American cultural norms, values, and practices, community influences, and acculturation experiences. Many of these practices were marked by my participants as "It's just a cultural thing." The following chapter, "Why are there so many Asians in music?" seeks to answer this controversial but relevant question and other intersections of biculturalism and music-education that arose during interviews. The final chapter explores the mental health risks, experiences, and phenomena that arise in a bicultural, Chinese-American context.

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Bicultural Identity Formation and Negotiation

Identity, culture, and cultural identity are cornerstone concepts and areas of inquiry in anthropological literature. Though definitions are varied and have shifted, identity generally refers to how an individual or collective self categorizes oneself in relation to others (Finke and Sokefeld 2018). A component of one's identity is cultural identity, or the larger group with certain shared beliefs, norms, worldviews, knowledge, and meanings the individual identifies with. The existence of bicultural and multicultural identities complicate monolithic notions and provide further insight into the complex and plural ways identities are formed, changed, negotiated, and re-negotiated. Bicultural identities refer to individuals who speak the languages and endorse the cultural practice of two cultures, often descendants of migrants who were born and socialized in the host country of their parents (Liu 2020, 2).

Anthropologists approach identity as being socially and culturally constructed, fluid, and contextually dependent. The study of collective identity formation and dynamics leads to the study of patterns of experience, such as privilege and suffering. Anthropologists recognize that identities are not innate and stable but an area of tension, contradiction, and changeability as a result of globalization, diaspora, and transnationalism (Griffiths 2018). Since the 1990s, anthropologists have expanded spaces for inquiry due to the recognition of layered and plural processes that constitute identity relative to individual and collective experiences in society (Dressler and Babidge 2010). The conceptualization of identities as being migrant identities or hybrid, bicultural identities have emerged. Research on "migrant identities" takes into account transnational and transcultural mobility, recognizes conscious choices, resistance imposed by others, institutions and states, processes of mobility, and other local subjectivities (Brettell and Sargent 2006). The bicultural aspects of migrant identities embody the current anthropological research on cultural identity negotiation.

Anthropological research on identity references concepts such as classification or personhood. Further, literature on hybrid and bicultural identities are studied alongside and framed in terms of belonging, acculturation, and assimilation (e.g. Hoonl and Sahrifulhafix 2021; Portes, Aparicio, and Haller 2016; Toyota 2009; Bosher 1997). Biculturalism was originally derived from acculturation literature (Berry 1997; Schwartz and Unger 2010). There are different types of acculturation, such as assimilation, integration, and marginalization. In literature extending beyond the relationship of bicultural identities and belonging, scholars agree a strong sense of belonging manifests high cultural identification (Liu, Maher, and Sheer

2019). Such varied concepts that color the change between and within cultural interactions are ways in which the nature and dynamics of biculturalism are analyzed, realized, and contested.

The bicultural identities of Chinese-Americans have been studied in anthropology (Hsu 1971), but there are few that jointly spotlight the generational layer of "second generation" and its implications on identity. As an exception, Kibria (2003) offers a large contribution to the understanding of second-generation Chinese-Americans, along with Korean-Americans. Synthesizing the lived experiences of interviewees, Kibria asserts that second generation Chinese-Americans face distinct dilemmas between racial, ethnic, and ethnonational identity and identification that must be constantly negotiated and re-negotiated to gain control over the dynamics of their identity. As a dimension of identity, Kibria considers "Asian American" as an identity label that is not simply reductive but revealing of a process of "ethnicization" (4-5). Identification labels remain a common area of interest within biculturalism literature. There is a distinction made between hyphenated identities, where the two identities are separate and shifting depending on context, and blended, hybrid identities (Liu 2015). Liu (2015) finds that bicultural identities for his Chinese-Australian subjects tended to mean the addition of a new identity from the receiving culture to that of the ethnic culture. In anthropological literature, the collective bicultural identities of certain ethnic groups still need to be further investigated to deepen understanding on the dynamics and tensions of identity production.

Other bodies of literature that do acknowledge second-generation experiences may group together Asian-American experiences. In the past, this was essential for moving past traditional majority-minority paradigms of analyzing bicultural experiences and creating a space for Asian-American biculturality discussions. Much of this literature focuses on success, achievement, and model minority status (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Lee and Zhou 2015). Although these are relevant experiences to Asian-Americans and their identity formations, individual cultures may color the experiences differently. The focus on pan-Asian identity is reductive and eclipses intra and inter-cultural variance (Canniff 1999).

Mental Health

Suicide is the leading cause of death for young adult Asian Americans (aged 16-24) and are notably the only ethnic group suffering from this degree of such harm in this age group (CDC 2017). Asian Americans are least likely to seek out mental health services and help than any other group (Shahid 2021; American Psychiatric Association 2020; Kim 2020; Cheng 2016). Despite these statistics, Asian American mental health needs are still overlooked (Kim 2020). As a result of these mental health disparities, research primarily in the realm of psychology has

been concentrating on what these mental health risk factors for suicide might be and why treatment is not sought out. However, there has been little anthropological work on this subject that focuses on specific "Asian" cultures.

What patterns of Asian-American experiences elevate occurrences of suicide and mental health disparities? Scholars agree suicide is driven by sociocultural factors in addition to biological and psychological factors (Zaheer 2018). Kim (2020) posits Asian Americans face culture-specific mental health risk factors that include stigma and mental health taboos, emotional suppression that originates from Confucian teachings, and a lack of recognition of mental illness symptoms. Additionally, parental experiences of discrimination and "foreigner stress" as a result of migration lead to greater intergenerational stress in Chinese-American families (Benner, Kim, and Murry 2009). The racialized model minority stereotype also creates unreasonable pressures to meet expectations and pressures that can result in poor well-being and stress (APA 2020).

Cultural identity and how individuals interact with the cultures in which they are enmeshed is central to mental health outcomes and stressors. As Mezzich et al. (2009) and Li et al. (2023) put forth, a sense of belonging and cultural identification are related to well-being for bicultural groups. Additionally, cultural consonance (Dressler et al. 2005) is also related to how an individual relates to their cultural context and its implications on mental health. Cultural consonance is the degree to which individuals, in their own beliefs and behaviors, approximate the prototypes for beliefs and behaviors shared in cultural models (Dressler 2007, 2018). Dressler (2007) studied depression in urban Brazil and found that lower cultural consonance meant worse health outcomes and psychological distress. An individual with low cultural consonance is not achieving the normative expectations and goals in the broader cultural models and is as a result more stressed and at higher risk for poor health outcomes (Dressler 2018b).

The Social Determinants of Health (SDH) framework can also be applied to further investigate the factors that enhance understanding of mental health outcomes for Asian and Chinese Americans. The Commission on Social Determinants of Health states social determinants of health are conditions in environments where people are born, live, learn, and age that affect their overall health outcomes, status, and risks (CSDH 2008). Looking into SDH factors of specific minorities in the United States can inform the nature of their health disparities. Kim et al. (2012) studied and analyzed structural determinants such as ethnicity, generational status, and socioeconomic status and individual-level intermediary determinants such as discrimination, insurance status, and English proficiency of Asian Americans. Results

show that these structural and intermediary determinants are significantly associated with chronic health conditions such as cardiovascular or respiratory conditions, mental health disorders, self-rated physical health, and self-rated mental health.

In addition to what may cause or shape mental health outcomes, literature on the subject of Asian-Americans and mental health seek to answer why mental health services are underutilized. Culture is at the core of why there is an underutilization of mental health care or mental illness identification. Yang et al. (2012) finds that among Chinese immigrants and their relatives, casual cultural beliefs shape the identification of mental illness or distress, which then influences whether or not treatment is sought out. Additionally, the key Asian-American value of emotional self-control predicts less positive attitudes to seek help (Shahid et al. 2021). Kim (2020) has investigated how the model minority stereotype is a barrier to treatment and masks unmet mental health needs.

For second-generation Chinese-Americans, the Chinese cultural values of their parents are a primary influence on how mental health and illness are understood, reinterpreted, or inherited. The stigma of mental illness is especially severe and a barrier to diagnosis and treatment in Chinese culture (Hsu et al. 2008; Yang et al. 2007; Lee et al. 2005). Sociologist Erving Goffman defined stigma as a deeply discrediting attribute that reduces a person "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Goffman 1963, 3). The research of Yang et al. (2007) on mental illness in China presents stigma as a psychocultural process and moral issue. As a moral issue, stigmatized conditions threaten what is important for sufferers in a local world, such as reputation and family honor (Yang et al. 2007). Stigma can also move from the affected individual to their family, resulting in a kind of social death (Yang et al. 2007) and shame or burden on communities (APA 2020). In a later study that focuses on cases of schizophrenia and AIDS in China, Yang and Kleinman (2008) find stigma jeopardizes accessibility to resources. The pervasive gravity of mental health stigma in Chinese culture is thus a barrier to treatment (APA 2020). This stigma is a "culture-specific threat" in an American context for Chinese-Americans (Yang 2013). In a comparison between Chinese-Americans and Caucasian-Americans, prevailing research indicates the stigma of depression is more severe in Chinese Americans (Hsu et al. 2008).

Family and Intergenerational Dynamics

Family dynamics lie at the core of second generation Chinese-American experiences. Filial piety is the foundation of parent-child and family relationships in traditional Chinese culture (Yu 1984). Also known as familism, it is a system of meaning that prioritizes the family

as the primary narrative for providing values, offering belonging, constructing identity, and guiding relationships (Kim et. al 2019). Studies about Chinese-American family-life often mention filial piety and how it shapes the social formation of such families and individuals in a transnational context. Sociologists Kim et al. (2019) found that the hybridized and magnified Chinese-American form of familism helps to fulfill the values, rituals, and meanings that often arise from religions in other cultural contexts. Parental immigration is framed as a paradoxical act of sacrifice, whereby children must adhere to familism and repay the hard work and sacrifice of their parents with their own hard work (Kim et al. 2019). Family is said to offer identity and the deepest source of belonging (Kim et al. 2019). Meanwhile, Yu (1984) illustrates how Chinese-American experiences of stress are related to familism, which include pressures to fulfill filial duties, parental expectations, parent-child conflicts, and the anxiety of pushing back against parental wishes. Primary factors such as the loss of group identities and a "double rejection" from not being American enough or Chinese enough, condition comparably higher psychological stress for the acculturated American-born Chinese (Yu 1984).

Despite the beliefs of familism in offering family ties and group cohesion, alienation often occurs in Chinese-American families (Qin 2006). Intergenerational relations in immigrant families are shaped by powerful cultural conflicts (Kibria 2002, 40). Alienation is a process where children and parents emotionally grow apart due to a lack of communication and meaningful interactions (Qin 2006). Due to dissonant acculturation (Portes and Rumbaut 2001), children and parents view the same world from different cultural vantage points and develop dissonant, parallel frames of reference (Qin 2006, 174). For instance, Chinese parents will compare their own children with those in China, but their children compare their parents to those of their peers and parents from media (Qin 2006, 174). Dissonant acculturation leads to difficulties communicating and increased emotional distance (Qin 2006, 174).

Achievement is a commonly discussed and researched area of Chinese-American experiences. The factors that lead to Chinese-American achievement are varied in academic literature. Kim et al. (2019) frames achievement as a repayment of sacrifice strengthened by a shared value in familism. Kibria (2002, 62) demonstrates how parents instill the idea that academic success can compensate for disadvantages of racial identity. In Chinese-American contexts, achievement is a way in which familism is achieved (Kim et al. 2019). More broadly, the influence of Confucian teachings that emphasizes self-perfection, hard work over innate abilities, education, family honor, discipline, and respect is credited as a major factor in Asian American achievement (Zhou and Kim 2006; Fung 2016). In contrast, sociologists Lee and Zhou (2015) and Lee and Sheng (2023) assert that the "hyper-selectivity" of contemporary U.S.

immigration law to select highly educated and skilled Asian immigrants are what lead to their children's high achievement—not Asian cultural values and beliefs. Similarly, Louie (2004) found that although "over-achievement" is an ethnic phenomenon, previous socioeconomic statuses and class largely contribute to how these parental expectations, pressures, and decisions are experienced. Along with popular terms such as "tiger mother" (Chua 2011) and model minority, the realm of Chinese-American achievement and success is one of great variety and scholarly intrigue. "Tiger mother" was initially coined by Amy Chua (2011) in a single narrative of Chinese parenting. However, it has evolved into a widely used stereotype of abusive, achievement-oriented parenting that yields "math whizzes and music prodigies" (Chua 2011, back cover).

Music Education

The realm of childhood music education is a locus for examining Chinese-American values, bicultural interactions and tensions, parent-child dynamics, and overlooked complexities of the migration experience. Asian-Americans are often stereotyped as being innately musically talented. The "Ling Ling" stereotype refers to a child of East Asian descent who is a piano, violin, or math prodigy. With the prevalence of Asian Americans participating in music, this stereotype has flourished. At leading music schools, Asian Americans constitute 30 to 50 percent of the student population and even more at the pre-collegiate level (Wang 2009). While the numbers show that many Asian-Americans and Chinese-Americans do participate in music education, culture is what motivates involvement and not genetic predispositions for musicality. Traditional Confucian Chinese values emphasize the importance of learning and excellence in personal, academic, and professional realms (Fung 2016). Confucianism frames the learning of music as deeply moral and integral to a child's personal cultivation and formation, which is why it is common for parents to seek music education (Yu 2014). Music education is a medium through which filial piety and Confucian values are shared and upheld between parents and children (Fung 2016). Yet, despite the widespread emphasis on a serious music education, Asian-American parents tend to emphasize music as a vehicle for expression and development rather than as a professional career (Weatherly 2023).

Given the importance of music in Chinese culture, parents hold high expectations for musical success (Yu 2014). The means by which this success and "musical giftedness" is achieved is through hard work, parental sacrifices, and investment (Weatherly 2023). Pressures to learn musical instruments may be accompanied by highly supervised home environments with authoritative, self-sacrificing, competitive parents that can normalize abuse and emotional

deprivation in pursuit of the generationally transmitted cultural mandate of excellence (Fung 2016). While music education could be a possibly negative experience due to these pressures, music participation and musical play is beneficial for bicultural children in resolving issues with social integration, identity construction, culture stress, and expressions of multiple cultures (Marsh 2017). Cayari (2021) finds that with youth ensembles, these "Asian spaces" were safe places for these minorities to feel a sense of belonging and empowerment among other Asian children. Naturally, however, excess competition and stress could arise in these settings.

Despite the prominence of Asian and Chinese-Americans in music education, this specific subject is under-researched. Wang (2009) and Yu (2014) examine the relationship of culture and music education interplay in the United States. Yu (2014) found four salient themes that shape Chinese-American music education experiences: the *guan* parenting style, a high value of education, the functions of music in Chinese culture, and music education as moral cultivation. For first-generation Chinese-American parents, these themes are often at odds with values of American early childhood music education and present acculturation difficulties. For instance, the role of parents to *guan* is a particularly important concept that means to both govern and care for in the Chinese language, but the independence valued in American culture complicates parent-child relations. Asian-American parents in music education may be referred to as "music moms," or the often racialized Asian mothers involved with the classical music training of their children. "Music moms" are active architects of their children's musicianship and development (Wang 2009), similar to the "tiger mother" stereotype. Wang (2009) found that Asian parents reframe learning classical music in America as an "Asian" cultural practice in a self-positioning of superiority over Americans. This is underpinned and mobilized by race and class anxieties, and parental insertion into this field of high culture generates the greatest degree of cultural capital for their children (Wang 2009). Even more specifically, a desire to acculturate to American culture can lead parents to have their Asian-American children learn certain instruments (Cayari 2021). There are specific Asian-American reasons for involvement in music that are not explained by Confucian values but appear to be conditioned by a bicultural context. Ethnic and racial identities are influenced and constructed by musical endeavors (Cayari 2021). Music education is a particularly rich area in which culture, identities, generational relations, stereotypes collide for Asian-Americans and Chinese-Americans.

CHAPTER TWO: LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF COLLEGE

When I was seven years old and in the second grade, I brought home my report card for my mother to sign. Speaking loudly and rather ferociously, she explained how an 87 would not be enough for me to be accepted into the "Talented and Gifted" middle school my older sister was attending. From there, she said, this meant I would not be accepted into the other magnet high school in my city. Therefore, my chances at getting into a good college were nearly impossible if I kept getting Bs. I did not know much beyond midday snacks and dodgeball then, as supported by my 87 report card grade, and I certainly did not know what college was. What I did know was the level of terror my mother instilled in me that day was enough to know that what was important to her was important to me. Although it seemed my mother was upset I got an 87 as a grade, she was really more fearful that academics might have been a difficulty for me. If academics were challenging and my grades did not reflect advanced competency, these marks could cumulatively diminish my chances of getting into a "good college" in the future. For me, what I did in school every day and on every assignment factored into my final grades would determine whether or not my mother was disappointed in me—and whether or not I went to college. My experience here is the first of many interactions with my parents that affirmed their collegiate expectations.

The American Council of Education (2017) reports Asian-Americans have the highest levels of educational attainment when compared to all other racial ethnic groups. 55.4 percent of Asian-Americans possess a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 38 percent of White Americans and an overall 34.2 percent of all racial and ethnic groups (ACE 2017). All of my informants involved in this research are either in college or have completed college with a bachelor's degree or higher. Many have attended prestigious universities, received full-ride scholarships, and majored in subjects ranging from computer science to business to the arts. The pursuit of a college education plays a central role in the lives of second-generation Chinese-Americans. Throughout their lives until the college acceptances roll in, the pursuit of higher education shapes and frames the context in which they experience their identity, family, and cultures (Louie 2004; Qin 2006; Yu 2014). A college degree is a common ideal for many families and young adults, but what does it mean to Chinese-Americans?

For Chinese-Americans, college is an institution that increasingly takes form as a child gets older and structures how their young adult lives are experienced. Specific bicultural rules, norms, and taboos arise in the pursuit of a college education that originates in immigrant experiences of Chinese-American parents and are shaped from their local Chinese-American communities. To focus on the pursuit of a college education is to encounter how Chinese-

Americans conceptualize success, excellence, and achievement. Stereotypes of Asian-Americans as model minorities and their "tiger parents" diminish the complexities of diverse, idiomatic, bicultural experiences (Bempechat, Cheung, and Li 2022). The motivations and desires that drive how Chinese-American identities are formed, negotiated, and lived are paradoxical (Lee and Zhou 2015) and challenge conventional "either/or," "East or West" dichotomies. An analysis of what college means to this group illuminates layered systems of meaning behind ideas and ideals often overlooked in favor of simplistic and preconceived notions. College is not just a natural fate of all Asian-Americans, as stereotypes might assume. Rather, college education functions as a form of cultural capital and a rite of passage in the context of "Chinese-American Dreams." For these young adults, rather than discussing college in the context of one's life, life thus far is best framed in the context of college.

The Chinese-American Dream "Starter Pack"

How the term "American Dream" has changed in definition embodies the diversity that lies at the core of the human experience, regardless of nationality, citizenship status, home ownership, or financial situation. As the center of the American ethos, the American Dream offers the promise of a better life in the land of opportunity for those who work hard (Wolak and Peterson 2020, 969). Yet, given the pervasiveness of social inequality, this term is met with questions of its applicability and achievability in the 21st-century (Riggio 202, 2). The American Dream today tends to be dreamt of in terms of economic and material prosperity rather than quality of life (High 2015, 1). Reflecting the consumerist and materialistic tendencies of American society, it seems as if the constellation of American Dreams tends to be more associated with exclusion, the unattainable, and disparities.

The American Dream is fixed along a singular cultural plane and disregards the dynamic and multiculturality of America today. What of the dreams, aspirations, and goals of immigrants who frame their identities in terms of cultural belonging and membership instead of nationality? To pay respect to the multicultural vibrancy that colors and diversifies the meaning of a singular "American" individual, perhaps a hyphenated American Dream more precisely describes its origins and meanings. Chinese-Americans have seemingly constructed a form of the American Dream that pays respect to the bicultural influences on transcultural aspirations and ideals. For Chinese-Americans, distinct "Chinese-American Dreams" often focus on second-generation children attaining a college education. An "accommodationist approach" of working within the system and dominant situation rather than challenging or separating from it in order to achieve an American Dream frames the Chinese-American emphasis on education (Kibria 2003, 56).

They have restructured these "Dreams" to be highly specific in an effort to make it more attainable. Along with this specificity are embedded cultural values that emphasize a structured process and clearly defined path to achievement. The Chinese-American Dream of a college education is a bicultural and transgenerational effort initiated by parents and channeled through the medium of a second-generation child:

> "Their American dream is a college degree. I guess they always wanted me to get into a good college."
> > -Jacob, 23 year-old male Chinese-American student

> "Their ultimate goal was simply just to get into a good college by their reckoning…but beyond getting into a good college, there were no kinds of future expectations."
> > -Jason, 25 year-old male Chinese-American

The pursuit of this college education is structured, institutionally implemented, realized, and quantifiable for the benefit of the many dream catchers and chasers. As articulated by all of my Chinese-American informants, participation and adherence to a Chinese-American "template" help to pave the way for a successful college admission. The template is composed of three sectors of college readiness that include academics, music, and sports. Institutions such as schools and programs, music teachers and their associations that put on festivals or competitions, and sport teams or clubs respectively support all three sectors. This adds gravity and legitimacy to participation. Ethan, a 26 year-old Taiwanese-American male student, described the high participation of Chinese-Americans in all three sectors simultaneously as an "effort to open as many doors as possibly to try and stack up their CV for college submissions" that comes from a "general philosophy of opportunity." These sectors tend to highlight the individual and their efforts. All ten of my informants played piano, a solo instrument, at some point in their childhood. Six informants participated in swimming, a sport which also highlights the individual, unlike a team sport such as soccer.

The three sectors allow for the measurability and quantification of participation through grades, awards, scores, and competitions. When an individual was successful, the measurability of these pursuits transferred well to resumes, an essential component of the college application process. Yet, my informants reported there were no explicit expectations for winning and absolute perfection. Expectations were often described as parentally implied for one to "just take part and do well." Participation was equated with achieving a certain level of success, though not necessarily the highest. As Kibria (2003) ascertained in her research on second-generation

Chinese and Korean-Americans, "doing well in school was an expression of cultural tradition (56)." Though winning was welcome and celebrated, the parental focus was more on high levels of participation across all sectors and meeting a general benchmark of excellent grades. Still, all but one of my informants achieved high grades in school, and several graduated top of their class in high school. As will be discussed later, the implied expectation to excel encouraged children to chase perfection and climb to the top. None of my informants recalled the parental request for one to be the very best or to aim for absolute perfection. As Ethan articulates:

> "Even the quality of work for Asian-Americans is not necessarily the things they are looking for. It's much more about this is everything my child can offer, and so here is a whole list of their accomplishments."
>   -Ethan

Thus, the nexus of the three sectors of college readiness predicted overall collegiate success more than measurable success within each sector.

"I guess my whole life was like, 'Oh, do this and this, and then you go to a good college,'" said Bella, a female, 19 year-old Chinese-American student. Among Chinese-American parents, there is a formula of steps to a "good life" that is centered around one's college education. The pursuit of college is the first step in the ultimate goal of living a "good life." Parents ultimately wished for their children to have a "better future" where they could care for themselves, which could be achieved through an adherence to a formulaic life plan. "Their views came from the general view that if you go to college, you're guaranteed to get a good job, and then continue on having a good life" (Pearce, 22 year-old male Chinese-American student). Instead of an idyllic and vague American Dream, this focused dream centers on the practical and defined means by which the less-defined future can be achieved. First-generation Chinese-Americans define college as achievable and likely if one "does well" and participates in the three sectors of college readiness. Though there are individual variances in how success is defined in terms of participation and measurability, the three areas for collegiate readiness and pipeline for the achievement of a "good life" are built upon a Chinese-American response to the American Dream. The structure and formula for achieving a college education is a result of shared Chinese-American bicultural knowledge and ambitions.

The existence of the dream of college as shared bicultural knowledge and the pipeline to achievement are bicultural norms and not just general aspirations and coincidental patterns. The stigma associated with breaking these norms reinforces their cultural centrality. My

informant, Ethan, elaborated on how his parents were ostracized from the Chinese-American community when they strayed from the set norms in this ethnic niche:

> "I think my mom's decision to homeschool me was seen and viewed very negatively within the Asian community. I know she got a lot of flack. I wouldn't say that she was made fun of, but there was a lot of talk behind her back ... there were a lot of people that came up to my mom and openly doubted her decision to do so ... I think in the moment just there was a different value system, a sort of breaking of the status quo that was happening with what my mom was doing"
> -Ethan

When Ethan's mother took him out of the public school system and into home-schooling, she broke away from the institution local Chinese-Americans had culturally agreed upon as an arena to achieve their common dreams. Her actions were seen as taboo, despite her rationale being aligned with the shared wish for her child's successful future. She was met with such hostility because she was defying a bicultural norm that defined acceptable behaviors in this niche. Similarly, Jacob describes his parents as being rare, "hands off and very, very atypical" to the point where "all my mom's friends kind of scolded her for being so hands off." Jacob's parents prioritized education but loosened the strict and impermeable sectors of college readiness to better fit his individuality. Jade was also parented in this "counter-culture manner," which was met with other members of the community telling her mother that if she had been stricter, her kids would be more successful. The perception of these non-mainstream parental behaviors and decisions perceived as culturally deviant highlight how the college readiness template and dream of college are markers of a distinct bicultural ethnic value.

College Education as Cultural Capital

Not only does the attainment of a college education fulfill Chinese-American Dreams, but it serves as a form of cultural capital for both parents and their children. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) theorized there were three forms of capital that included economic, cultural, and social capital. Economic capital can be institutionalized and converted into money; cultural capital is convertible into economic capital through institutional qualifications like that of an education, and social capital is made of convertible connections that may also be converted into economic capital (Bourdieu 1986, 243). All forms are a type of currency for accessing mobility in a stratified society. A college education embodies a culturally recognized form of cultural capital in both a general American and Chinese-American context. College is seen as so legitimate that its status of cultural capital is elevated to that of symbolic capital, a fourth form

that the various species of capital assume when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate (Bourdieu 1986). "Selecting, gaining access to, and attending college (or university) in the United States involve markers of legitimacy and prestige as understood through symbolic capital" (Posecznick 2003, 1). Within Chinese-American cultural knowledge, college is seen as the central, key component in achieving an ideal life.

The cultural capital of a college education functions in this bicultural space as fulfilling dual roles transculturally and transgenerationally. In a society where racial exclusions and barriers may be present, Chinese-Americans emphasize education as a racial strategy to overcome these obstacles and "make it" (Kibria 2003, 54). American culture presents and structures college as a form of cultural capital for achieving general opportunity, while Chinese-American parents specifically reinforce it as a pathway to belonging and culturally approved life options. They prioritize, facilitate, and guide their children to a better future through stepping stones of hard work. The steps of pre-collegiate success, to college acceptance, to a good job, to a good life illustrates the Chinese-American agreement of college as cultural capital. As a local piano teacher with many Asian-American students elucidated, "Parents really do set the culture" with a "high prioritization of education. It's just what you d[o]." For second-generation young adults, Chinese-American culture is largely experienced through parental values focused on college achievement.

College as a Rite of Passage

In the eyes of their parents, college is a rite of passage for second-generation Chinese-Americans to become full-adults who can exercise their agency and individuality. Simultaneously, parents also go through their own respective rite of passage when their child is accepted into college. As first described by Arnold Van Gennep (1909) in classic work *The Rites of Passage and* built upon by Victor Turner, a rite of passage is an event that marks passage from one life stage, status, or group to another in most cultures. Rites of passage consist of three phases: separation, liminality/transition, and incorporation. In today's American society, the rites of passage into adulthood are ambiguous due to the lack of formal lines (Blumenkrantz and Goldstein 2014, 85). Blumenkrantz and Goldstein (2014) frame college as a possible rite of passage with the child's leaving of home as the first stage of separation and college graduation as the final stage of incorporation and initiation into adulthood. However, for second-generation Chinese-Americans, their entry into adulthood starts when they reach college and perhaps as early as their college acceptances are received. As Jade puts it:

"College was so much more socially focused. Like when I was young it was more of like focus on school, getting into college, and then once I got in it's kind of like all right let's have fun." For individuals like Jade, being accepted into college is framed by parents as a landmark that requires an adherence and participation in the regimented three sectors of college readiness.

-Jade, female 26 year-old Chinese-American pilot

Jason, agreed:

"I think going up to college was kind of an inflection point. Before then, the dynamic was very much like they basically planned my life within some limits...they set my priorities. But after that, it was kind of like I had freedom to set my own priorities."

-Jason

As Jason suggests, college allows for children to become a full individual with their own freedoms to exercise agency. Their parents then trust them to completely set their own path and move away from the standard track towards college they had worked on as life-long applicants. The dual pursuit of college forges a bond between parent and child and is severed when a child completes this rite of passage and dream. The child is then deemed ready to separate from their parents and become full persons who are not reliant or connected to their parents through a mutual pursuit. With the fulfillment of this rite of passage, they have the autonomy to finally explore their identities and ideas of how they should live their lives. They experienced "thwarted individuation" (Gaines 1992; Wyatt 2015) in order to accomplish all the time-consuming and draining activities necessary to fulfill the sectors of college readiness. Alice, a female 26 year old Chinese-American editor, is an individual whose sectors of college readiness were especially laden and intense. Her experiences show how the Chinese-American pursuit of college prioritizes the "applicant" version of oneself over the individual self: "My entire life was sort of just thinking about how I can please my parents, but I just felt like internally I was resisting my own like actual self in a way." In order to become the ideal Chinese-American applicant, a degree of thwarted individuation is needed to remain obedient to these parentally and biculturally enforced expectations.

With the fulfillment of the parents' Chinese American Dreams of college, perhaps parents, too, undergo a rite of passage when their child is accepted into college. Most of my informants mentioned their parents as being immigrants who came to the United States in search of greater opportunity for both themselves and their families. Given the fixation on the college pipeline to a good life for their children, a college acceptance and degree legitimizes parental efforts as immigrants. A college degree is an institutionally recognized form of

belonging, much like a passport or green card. Since parents played a dual-role in the pursuit of college, this rewards them as they fulfill the ultimate step in gaining social acceptance and legitimacy as Chinese-Americans.

Additionally, a college acceptance may be compared to the Chinese "National Higher Entrance Examination" or *Gaokao*. For parents, a college acceptance may take the place of the *Gaokao* as a measurable, institutionalized measure of achievement and entryway into adulthood. As Howlett (2022) posits, the *Gaokao* is a rite of passage. One informant related his parents' emphasis on educational attainment and success to his parents' experiences with education in China:

> "They grew up in China, where China has thousands of years of civil service examinations and formal education was the system. That's why they value education so much. And in the beginning, they very heavily relied on the public education system because that's what they do in China…So I think for my Dad, his parenting style is very much influenced by his realization at some point that he cannot depend on the public education system as he could in China. So he was very active to find extra materials for us, like even to the point of printing books and doing [math] problems with us. And so in that sense, you know, he wanted it to be a sort of team project like we were on a mission together."
>> -Jason

His parents were not originally as involved in his education because Chinese culture encouraged a reliance on and obedience to their more rigorous system of education. However, when the education in America proved to be insufficient, that is what motivated his father to play such a dominant role in his educational development. Perhaps, Asian-American parental public high school academic involvement is shaped by perceived lacks in the American public school system.

Given how college emerges as a distinct dream and rite of passage, it is clear that college is a salient part of bicultural Chinese-American identity. College is not just a standard ambition for Chinese-Americans. In the spectrum of reality and dreams, Chinese-American Dreams fall more closely to a reality which parents and children can come together to create and realize.

CHAPTER THREE: "IT'S JUST A CULTURAL THING"

Acculturation

In interviews with my informants, a specific phrase frequently emerged: "It's just a cultural thing." My informants employed this phrase in relation to a description of the local Chinese-American community's influences, parent and child relations, life trajectory expectations, and childhood music education. In interpreting what my informants say, a phrase such as "it's just a cultural thing" amplifies where cultural lines are drawn from my informants' perspectives. The spaces and patterns described as "just cultural things" are discussed here in terms of emic meaning and understanding. Unpacking these cultural demarcations facilitates understanding of internalized acculturation.

Acculturation describes phenomena that arise when individuals of different cultures come into continuous contact and either or both cultures experience changes in their original cultural patterns (Redfield, Linton, and Herkovitz 1935, 229; Herskovitz 1937). As Kroeber (1948) and Winthrop (1991) elucidate about acculturation, it is gradual and a process of change. In literature on second-generation interfamilial dynamics, a form of acculturation called "dissonant acculturation" is of particular relevance. This occurs when children learn and adopt American culture faster than their parents do while creating their own meaning systems as a result of not fully grasping that of their parents' culture (Kim, Feung, and Jeung 2019; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). This causes parents and children to develop parallel dual frames of reference in which the same world is viewed from different cultural vantage points (Qin 2006, 174). There are also "consonant" and "selective" forms of acculturation, where learning of culture happens at the same transgenerational pace and the transgenerational cultural shift is slowed by a diverse inter-ethnic community, respectively (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 53-54). Acculturation is primarily defined by two different cultures, one being more dominant, coming into contact. In this process, differences are thrown into relief and made apparent. It is in these situations that one's perception of their culture is realized. The boundaries between one's own culture and that of the "other" are more tangibly perceived when context is changed or unfixed.

The phrase "it's just a cultural thing" effectively illustrates what occurs in the process of acculturation of second-generation Chinese-Americans. By pointing to key aspects of culture as "cultural things," it shows how one has begun to perceive parts of their Chinese culture from a distanced vantage point instead of naturalizing it as part of their inborn human experience. This is a shift to an adoption of American culture's perception of Chinese culture, a subtle form of acculturation. As influenced by the dominant American culture, the non-American culture is diminished because of its minority status and the difficulties of having to explain the nuances of

their culture to ethnocentric or unreceptive ears. Phrases such as "just cultural things" arise in an effort to minimize the expression and individuality of other cultures. This colloquialism is an instrument and product of acculturation.

What exactly are "just cultural things?" The five instances in which my informants mentioned this phrase were in reference to aspects of two main topics: the local Chinese-American community in relation to their parents and the childhood study of music. Understanding why certain experiences are marked as "just cultural things" provides insight and suggests further inquiry into what second-generation Chinese-Americans categorize as originating from Chinese culture in the context of a bicultural upbringing.

The Chinese-American Community

The childhood experiences of second-generation Chinese-Americans are often discussed in terms of the influence of Chinese parents and the children's obedience to them (Hsu 1971; Yu 1984; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Qin 2006; Murphy-Shigematsu 2012). However, who and what influences Chinese parents? The obvious immigrant experiences and native Chinese culture do play a part, but an unfixed Chinese-American community play a substantial role as well. The community emerges as part of this ethnic niche that informs parents' reframed cultural beliefs, norms, and rules in a new American context.

The Chinese-American community is highly connected, and personal information is often shared and disseminated secondhand. As anthropologist Francis Hsu (1971) observed, the next level of importance outside of family and kinship are the ties to the local community (Hsu 1971, 69). Chinese-Americans maintain the collectivistic aspects of culture through friendships that mirror kinship relations and tendencies, which might appear as Chinese friends intervening and settling "private" disputes of the remote friends (Hsu 1971, 71). Although the immediate family is of the utmost priority for Chinese parents, their local communities and friends are highly networked. One of my informants, Jacob, was once on a walk with his mother, and she mentioned the relationship details of one of his close friends before he even knew. "I was like what? Like how do you know that? All I can say is that the Chinese community is so small." A sense of community is built upon what some might call "gossip," but the differentially shared knowledge of the lives of their community members is what sustains and strengthens group identity and belonging. As another of my informants puts it:

> "I think this is part of the cultural thing. If you have a community of Asian parents … they're going to talk about their kids to each other a lot. So there is an immediate understanding that everything happening within the family circle is going to be widely known to everybody."
>   -Ethan

Orally shared, everyday stories facilitate meaning making in these new, bicultural contexts. These stories bring separate families together in an extended kinship system of relations. The dynamic nature of the life situations of the individuals in this community provide a constant flow of development to sustain active community participation and engagement.

Community conversations serve a functional purpose as powerful cultural resources. My informants pointed to two primary subjects parents would collaboratively verbalize and exchange: strategies for parenting and the successes of their children. These conversations between parents are not frivolous; they are a powerful cultural resource for ethnically Chinese parents raising their children in this Chinese-American context. Several of my informants noted the high-degrees of conversation and engagement between local Asian parents:

> "As first time parents they all met up every single week…and I suspect they all chatted about like, 'how are we going to raise our first child' …they starting talking then and started hearing like their ideas of how they're going to go about raising their kids … And so you have the same ideas floating around and these parents are feeding off of each other like 'Oh, my children did this, won that award.' 'You know who is going to this class?' So then other parents are like 'Oh, shit [my children] should be doing that. I must one up all of those things.' And then they make their children do more stuff."
>   -Jade

> "Asian parents probably talk to each other right, so it's like 'Oh, my kids do this,' 'Oh, that sounds interesting, maybe my kid will do it too.'"
>   -Owen, male 27 year-old Chinese-American

> "Like you always hear like, 'Oh, my kid goes to Harvard.' 'My kid goes to Princeton.' And then your parents hear that, they go home, and they're like 'Why can't you be better?' Like that's the stories I hear. My parents never did that but I feel like comparison is pretty big with the Chinese community."
>   -Jacob

The previous success of others in the community provides a template for success, which is a primary influence on how Chinese parents then shape their children's lives. In the same way Chinese-American children maintain obedience to their parents, their own parents maintain an

obedience and adherence to the Chinese-American community's norms of adolescence and the roles of the parents in it. Parents follow in the footsteps of their community members with the intent to situate their child in a position they deem ideal.

One music teacher described this relationship between Chinese parents in the community as how "There is usually one really influential person who happened to have a talented kid, and the parent is loud, and everybody else follows them like lost sheep." Other informants framed these endeavors as a "pride and prestige thing" in which "being able to tell your friend, like 'Oh, my daughter does XYZ, my son does XYZ'" is a kind of "pride thing... they love to tell relatives and friends" (Lilian, female, 25 year-old Chinese-American PhD student). In a pursuit of a "good life" for their children, Chinese-American parents use the knowledge they gain from their community as norms to follow in their parenting.

Success is a medium for belonging not just in the broader American community, but also in this bicultural Chinese-American community. Success is a form of social capital. Once one's child experiences success, parents gain buttressed standing and social mobility in the community. They are no longer just listeners and receivers of information, but they have a voice in the larger community conversation about parenting. Their status is elevated from a follower of the success template to an actualizer and inspiration for others. The adolescent experiences of second-generation Chinese-Americans are conditioned by the underlying ambitions for parental membership standing in the local Chinese-American community. Although informants framed the subject of the local Chinese-American community as "just cultural things," there are more dynamic, bicultural influences than meet the ear.

The Collective and the Individual

A discussion of acculturation and the Chinese-American community illuminates how the experiences of Chinese-American first and second-generation individuals challenge dichotomous, "either/or" ideas of cultures as collectivistic or individualistic. As my research demonstrates, cultures do not always adhere to either being collectivistic or individualistic. The process of migration and acculturation leads to culture changes and biculturalism, which particularly blurs the lines between what can be attributed to the collectivistic or individualistic culture.

In this context, the potential clash between collectivistic and individualistic cultures are reconciled in a process by which collective tendencies are actualized and realized through individualistic actions. What results is a form of bicultural fulfillment and belonging through this collective-individual paradox. The success of the individual, the second-generation Chinese-

American child, is reframed as a collective goal that brings honor to the collective family. This paradox mirrors the bicultural status of the individual and blurs the lines drawn between collective and individualistic cultures. Due to the Chinese-American acculturation process, this paradoxical phenomenon occurs and defies preconceived expectations for culture clashes and cultural difference.

For these second-generation individuals, the most significant collective group is that of the local Asian and Chinese-American community and families that set the cultural norms in these settings. The dominant socialization norm, however, is to focus on cultivating an individual who will rise above others and eventually leave the family to pursue a college career and independent life as representatives of their collectivistic groups. The local Chinese-American community's group identity is built on common cultural heritage and the success of their children, which in an American context leads to the absorption of individualistic cultural tendencies. In Chinese culture, the importance of influencing and cultivating one's child is expected. But when this is recontextualized within an individualistic American culture, both cultures are engaged in a process where seemingly dissonant cultural priorities can coexist.

As Zahavi (2022, 393) puts forth in an echo of anthropologist Anthony Cohen (1994, 14), we should not conflate an ideology of individualistic cultures with the individual possession of personal experiences. Although this appears to offer a counterargument to my observation of the collective-individual paradox, my informants provide evidence for the validity of my argument. My informants noted how the expectations for them stopped after their college education was secured. The competing dominant cultural norms that define their two cultures must be reconciled during this transition to college. Additionally, one of the arenas in which this paradox is played out is music education, which was specifically highlighted by my informants as "just a cultural thing." They root these experiences and motivations in (Chinese) culture. Although they do not initially perceive this as bicultural, as I argue, it is clear this paradox is rooted in the interaction of plural cultural identities.

CHAPTER FOUR: "WHY ARE THERE SO MANY ASIANS IN MUSIC?"

When I asked my informants why they were put into music lessons at a young age, all but one answered with a response similar to "because everyone else was doing it." Early music learning was described as "just a cultural thing." Does this "thing" refer to just Chinese culture or their Chinese-American culture? My informants ascribe the learning of music as a "cultural thing," referring to a singular Chinese origin separate from their American culture. This response is an acculturation idiom that tends to simplify bicultural complexities to just a singular. Though it is true traditional Chinese Confucian values encourage musical learning, most of the parents of my informants were not musicians themselves and never learned a musical instrument. Other forces besides only traditional Chinese values seem to have motivated parents to enroll their children in music lessons. Childhood music participation seems to be more so a Chinese-American "bicultural thing." If not for the impacts of acculturation on language, perhaps my respondents would have elaborated past "it's just a cultural thing" or "it's just what you do." In the following section, I will delve into the bicultural factors and dynamics that shape a push for childhood music learning among Chinese-Americans.

The perceived "yellow peril" of Asian-American music students perpetuate "Ling ling" and monoracial stereotypes that root musical participation and success in race and genetics (Cayari 2021; Weatherly 2023). These stereotypes are rooted in outdated and racist assumptions that certain races are more suited to certain tasks or forms of work. Although this particular stereotype seems to celebrate the "talent" of young East-Asians, it is particularly damaging in the way it negates and diminishes hard work put towards success. Like all stereotypes, it strips away one's individuality. All Asians are then pigeonholed into a category of "Asian musicians." This invisible form of racial segregation and the stereotypes it perpetuates prevents inquiry into the motivations behind an appreciation for music in Asian cultures and Asian-American contexts. When questioned from a sociocultural perspective, there are observable patterns that can provide insight into underacknowledged bicultural experiences.

All of my informants agreed there is a prevalence of Asian-Americans and Chinese-Americans involved in music. As one of my music educator informants stated, "The majority of my business, maybe 80 percent, are second-generation [East Asian-Americans]. Usually, the parents don't have much musical background." It is estimated that at leading music conservatories, Asian-Americans make up 30 to 50 percent of students, with even higher rates at pre-collegiate levels (Wang 2009, 882). As previously discussed, music participation in the form of learning a musical instrument at a young age stems from the directives of the local Chinese-

American community. Music education is an integral part of the Chinese-American template for achievement disseminated through success stories of community members and largely adhered to due to the collectivistic tendencies of Chinese culture. The success formula plants the seed of music education in parents and their children, but what maintains involvement, shapes expectations, and motivates success adds an additional layer of cultural influences.

Bicultural Factors and Dynamics in Music

At a fundamental level, music education is a medium through which traditional values and familism are shared and upheld as a generationally transmitted cultural mandate (Fung 2016; Yu 2014). Confucius framed music as a deeply moral phenomenon and key to self-cultivation and character formation (Fung 2016; Yu 2014, 118). Additionally, Confucian values emphasize above all else, a duty to one's family and parents. When parents encourage their children to learn music, they are fulfilling their familial duty to elevate the successes of their children to achieve. In return, according to standards of filial piety, the children honor their parents and fulfill this duty with a commitment to learning an instrument. As Jason said in regards to his father's choices for him: "We kind of had this agreement of like, 'Hey, you're going to play piano right?' He felt like he was doing the bare minimum that we needed to set me up for a future."

Aside from traditional Chinese cultural influences for childhood music participation, Chinese-American factors are the primary driving force behind high levels of music education. Although my informants claimed music was a "cultural thing," referring to their Chinese heritage, most of their Chinese parents were never musicians. Rather, it seems that music participation is encouraged as a byproduct of transnational and transcultural experiences channeled through their second-generation children. Music education arises as a distinct Asian-American system and institution to support and promote high levels of musical activity and achievement. The local Asian-American communities help support this musical institution financially and with membership. Certain instruments, such as the piano, are favored in this system due to its practical and bicultural functions.

As Grace Wang (2009) synthesizes, classical music education is reframed as an "Asian" cultural practice by Asian-Americans. This is why my informants named it "a cultural thing." The parental motivations for doing so are underpinned and mobilized by a desire to be arbiters of high cultural knowledge, inhabitants of cultural and class identities of their own choosing, and broader race and class anxieties (Wang 2009, 883). Classical music is a western tradition, yet Asian-Americans are active and common participants in these spaces. This phenomenon is

shaped by both Western imperialism and efforts of East Asian governments to modernize through Western art forms (Yoshihara 2007, 14). Participation is seen as a marker of social status (Yu 2014, 123) and avenue to social mobility. These desires are brought about by biculturalism and immigrant experiences of reframing cultural values in new contexts.

Music education provides an ideal space in which parents can negotiate belonging, inclusion, and power through the participation and achievements of their children. As one of my music educators put forth, "When you are a private teacher, you answer to the students' parents. So instead of having one boss, I have 25 bosses." In musical spaces, parents hold the power over two primary actors: the teachers and the students. With music, parents can be directly involved everywhere but the stage. In athletic or academic spaces, parents are not afforded the same opportunity to be physically present at all times. In the dual pursuit of a "good life" by parent and child, these are spaces where parents have the most agency and perceived control over outcomes. They can oversee lessons, home-practice, and engage directly with teachers through in-person and remotely. Not only is classical music study seen as an "Asian" cultural practice, but it arises as an institution where the norms, beliefs, and rules of the Chinese-American and Asian-American communities are reflected in organized and tangible ways. The institution of classical music education is a byproduct of the Chinese and Asian-American communities. It supports and reflects the values instilled and promoted in these bicultural communities.

Pianos are, quite literally, instruments for success. The piano tends to be a common instrument selected for Asian and Chinese-American children to learn. All of my participants learned the piano at some point in their lives, with varying years spent playing it. However, there are practical and historical reasons for the selection of this instrument. Firstly, pianos are easy to physically handle for young students who are starting off, especially in comparison to large instruments like harps or cellos. In pursuit of Chinese-American Dreams of college and success, piano also offers a plethora of opportunities for the individual to obtain quantifiable measures of success through solo competitions and festivals. There are recognized numerical "levels" that can be ascribed to the advancement of a student's progress at the piano. There are many more competitions, opportunities, and even repertoire that can elevate the individual as a solo musician rather than as a musician within an orchestra or band. Certain local teachers also become well-known for bringing their students success, which encourages parents to also take lessons with that teacher and perpetuate instrument popularity. Additionally, pianos are symbols of western refinement and an emblem of western classical music, which help to support the efforts to establish music education as an "Asian space" (Wang 2009). Asian-American parents adapt the symbolic weight of pianos for practical and bicultural purposes. Participation

in piano is practically and biculturally agreed upon by the students who learn it, those who encourage them to learn it, and the forces that drive its usage.

Besides bicultural factors, differing generational desires fuel childhood music participation. My informant, Ethan, mentioned that musical activities could provide a break from the rigor of academics and family life. "A huge part of the inspiration for Asian kids in general learning of instruments is because they wanted to be around their friends, have an excuse to be around their friends." Cayari (2021) characterizes youth ensemble string sections as "Asian spaces," where these minorities could find belonging and empowerment in a safe space. An informant referred to the piano as "an escape, an outlet … an excuse to avoid it all for a while" (Lilian). Music participation is a beneficial space for bicultural children in resolving culture-related stress, identity construction, and expression (Marsh 2017). The varied challenges that come with being a bicultural, second-generation child can fuel music participation through the belonging and relief it provides its young participants. Unlike the practical motivations of parents, children could use music education for leisure and socializing purposes under the guise of practicality.

Hearing and Teaching Cultures: Pedagogical Perspectives

How are Asian-American music students different from Caucasian-American students? Is cultural background audible from the stage? As my music educators suggest, culture does indeed affect the relationship students have with music and how they learn and play their instruments. One teacher found that the "Western way of questioning everything" tended to be reflected in his Caucasian students. His students of East Asian descent reflected tendencies of their cultures to value harmony and hierarchy:

> "We really have to be trained in order to become the best that we can be. That means trusting people who have devoted their life to this study…and this is not intuitive to a western mindset … you study with a master and really imitate their style … and then you develop your own special approach after that."

However, the way culture affects how these students learn has tangible effects on the way they play their instruments:

> "This does have its drawbacks because I do find in my Asian students, there's a degree of literalism that I don't find in my good western students…I seldom would have to say to a good white student, there's more than one way to do this. But you know, an Asian student, and especially their parents, this can be like a

> very strange concept ... there's a consonance between the idea of follow the teacher and there's a right way ... It can be a challenge learning that open-mindedness, learning that individualization of the music, that idea that it is a profoundly personal expression ... This side of the pond, there's certain cultural strengths and certain cultural things that have to be learned."

Oftentimes East Asian musicians, particularly those who could be subject to "Ling ling" stereotypes, are stereotyped as being soulless and mechanical in interpretation with a total concentration on virtuosity and technique (Rhodes 2012; Hernandez 2021). What is important to note is that aesthetics and what qualifies as "musical playing" of an instrument is subjective. What one's native culture values can be reflected in the way people express themselves in art. A more literal performance in comparison to a more distinctly original performance can be removed from a specific context and be judged in dramatically different ways. To western ears, a literal performance of western music may not be as favorable. As a result, the Asian students who perform in this culturally conditioned and encouraged manner are discredited and lumped together. As the teacher with lots of experience teaching East Asian-American students believes, these are "cultural things" that can be learned. Rather than attributing ways of playing to one's race, this teacher makes it clear that culture is what lies behind these tendencies. While the adolescent Chinese-American students like my informants develop their bicultural identity, they do so partially through the medium of their music. Once again, music is quite literally an instrument for biculturalism.

A music teacher's role is not limited to teaching music. They also have a unique opportunity to act as cultural mediators and translators:

> "My job, partly for the sake of civility in my studio and partly for the good of the students and their parents, is to help them create a healthier vision of success. I'm not against success, but we need to understand success in a healthy way."

This teacher recognizes how success is culturally constructed and how Asian parents may have culturally rooted ideas of success that conflict with his goals as a teacher. The topic of success and excellence is a particularly relevant topic that is biculturally contested in musical arenas. This teacher noted:

> "It can be difficult for them to sometimes understand the complexity ... to realize success is fickle and that you don't have to win everything you enter to be successful ... I need them to know that beauty is not a commodity used for success ... I think that's a part of every teacher's calling."

Music educators are positioned at crucial positions for making a positive impact on the lives of their students and parents as both develop bicultural identities. At a negotiable position of power as the provider of services and trusted authority on music to parents, they occupy a flexible role in alleviating bicultural conflicts. Additionally, many teachers will teach their students for many years and see their students and parents on a weekly basis or more for that extended time. As such, music educators are key actors in the Chinese-American acculturation processes and key figures in the local Chinese-American community.

However, not all teachers are as positively impactful as the one described above. Three of my informants described how their parents had them take lessons from "tiger teachers" who would utilize physical and verbal abuse:

> "My mom would take me to like these like tiger teachers. Like I would get hate, get yelled at. I remember like, I couldn't. I didn't know what the scale was. And I was getting yelled at and I was crying. But also really, really, wanted to just punch the teacher ... She would like yell at me, scream at me, make me cry, make me feel like I was stupid. She was like, 'are you dumb? Like why can't you figure this out?' Like, I was crying and stuff like that."
> -Jacob

> "I thought, he's going to hit me again. He was very hot headed like if I didn't get something right he would just hit me."
> -Jade

A majority of my participants mentioned how their parents would utilize corporal punishment when they were younger children, ranging from light spanks on the hand to physical objects such as wooden sticks and paddles. In Chinese culture, verbal and physical disciplinary techniques are generally accepted and viewed as indications of parental love and concern (Chao 1994; Xing et al. 2017). These three teachers, who used varying degrees of physical discipline in their teaching, were of Chinese descent. These music teachers were acting within Chinese cultural norms to discipline their students. The students had experienced the same kinds of discipline at home. However, for these bicultural children, being treated in this way within the bicultural space, that is, music education, was jarring and highly unpleasant. Because these children associated physical discipline with their Chinese-culture, experiencing this in a biculturally coded space such as music education may have enhanced discomfort, frustration, and incongruence. Music can also be a space where a single culture and its values can be taught and translated. In fact, this phenomenon of maintaining and cultivating one's Chinese culture is not foreign to these students. A majority of my informants attended what is called "Chinese School," which is a weekly Sunday school where students practice Mandarin language skills and

learn more about their culture amongst other Chinese-American students. Just as music education has the potential to be a space for navigating bicultural identities, it can also be a space for instilling and maintaining just one cultural identity. Music education is a powerful space where Chinese-American parents, their children, and teachers all experience degrees of bicultural identity, negotiation, formation, and learning.

"CHAPTER FIVE: "JUST TOUGH IT OUT": MENTAL HEALTH

"Asian Americans traditionally don't believe in that [mental health] stuff right? They don't believe in stuff until they see like 'Oh, my kid's suicidal' or 'My kid's psychotic,' right? Until it reaches the big point, like they don't believe. Everything is pushed to the side like, 'Oh, what you're feeling is not real, you're just sad … My friend's mom was like, 'oh, you're sad. Like just tough it out.' Until it reached this point...'"

   -Jacob

Asian-Americans experience significant mental health issues and psychological distress but are less likely than any other ethnic group to seek professional help (Abe-Kim et al. 2007, 97; Cheng 2017; Shahid et al. 2021). According to the National Latino and Asian American Study (NLAAS), only 8.6 percent of Asian-Americans surveyed sought mental health services in contrast to the 17.9 percent of the general American population who did (Abe-Kim et al. 2007). Asian American young adults aged 18 to 24 have the highest rates of suicidal thoughts, intents, and attempts when compared to other age groups of this population (Kim 2020). This population of young adults is also the only group with suicide as the leading cause of death (CDC 2018). As these statistics and my informant Jacob elucidate, the mental health experiences of Asian-Americans are often characterized by stigma, suppression, and an underutilization of treatment services. There is a need for more research on the mental health disparities and service access for Asian American populations, especially those that manifest culturally-specific idioms of distress, culture variations in symptoms, and unique ethnically-entrenched mental health expressions (Sue et al. 2012, 537-40). More culturally sensitive approaches to Asian-American mental health are necessary (Kim 2020).

Mental health outcomes for second-generation Chinese-Americans are shaped by their bicultural identities and the shifting cultural contexts in which they are enmeshed. There are culture-specific as well as biculturally-specific mental health risk factors that condition and shape the disparities Chinese-Americans experience. For young adults, these biculturally specific factors are tied to their experiences negotiating traditional Chinese cultural values in an American context, their relationships with their parents, and stereotypes (Mezzich et al. 2009; Kim 2020; Shahid 2021). The primary culture-specific factor that influences how mental health and illness is conceptualized and experienced is stigma. As the research on mental illness in Chinese culture and my own informants' experiences support, mental illness in this particular cultural context has moral and somatic dimensions.

Culture and Biculturally-Specific Mental Health Risk Factors

The stereotype of the model minority and reality of the "pursuit of college" and subsequent life success that Chinese-Americans experience are both mental health risk factors. The perceptions of Asian Americans as high-achieving and self-reliant, as informed by model minority stereotypes, may lead to a dismissal of noteworthy mental health issues by clinicians and other social contacts (Cheng 2016, 578). These model minority myths also place unreasonable pressures and expectations on Asian Americans, which can lead to poor mental health (APA 2020). Although these stereotypes perpetuate damaging perceptions of Asian-Americans, the widespread Chinese-American pursuit of a "good life" via a college education places similar pressures and expectations on these young individuals. As mentioned previously, my informants unanimously said their parents never explicitly or verbally communicated to them what exactly these expectations were. Rather, they were said to be primarily implied. The internalization of secondhand expectations, normalization of mental health struggles, and stress of pursuing Chinese-American Dreams form significant mental health risk factors for this group.

An unquantified expectation of achievement attributed to Chinese parents and subsequent amplified actualization in their child is exemplified by my informant, Alice. She intimately links her relationship with her parents, how they parented her, and her own mental health struggles:

> "Even though I say they were helicopter parents, they never said like verbatim, 'You need to get all A's and all in high school or like college.' But it was sort of like, I don't know, like implied. I never got criticized if I didn't get an A, but I think my own internal guilt was so bad that I almost berated myself more for getting a bad grade. So, yeah, I think expectation wise, I was like 'Oh, I have to get like all A's' … basically like perfect … A lot of my art styles in high school were very precise … like it's very likely a reaction … I would make every mark as clear and definitive as possible, like leave nothing to chance and not kind of reflect my own personality, which is like I was so afraid of messing up … like I was really just living under a lot of both my parents expectations and my own … like I guess it was secondhand, like what I thought they expected of me, which was maybe even worse, it was like they were not exactly telling me when I was doing something good…so I was never actually made confident about anything. I was only like constantly being reminded that I wasn't good enough sometimes … I remember all of my poor grades more than any of my good grades … Our upbringing led us to kind of expect that of ourselves."
> -Alice

Without set definitions of what was considered adequate and inadequate, Alice became accustomed to never feeling like she measured up to expectations. Achievement became a kind of moving target that could be chased without bounds until a breaking point of exhaustion. A study on Asian-American stress narratives observed that parental norms and expectations were internalized, which wove a web of interdependency and created little room for individuation and the developing self (Murphy-Shigematsu et al. 2012, 214). In pursuit of perfection, Alice experienced thwarted individuation. In her own words, "My entire life was sort of just thinking about how I can please my parents, but like I just felt like internally I was resisting my own like actual self in a way." As previously mentioned, the pursuit of the Chinese-American Dream of collegiate success requires such self-suppression until that goal and rite of passage has been achieved. My informant, Ethan, believes his lack of disobedience and defiance towards his parents growing up was because "the expectations, especially academically … was just part of my DNA … as a product of my upbringing." The Chinese-American child internalizes the implicit goals of their parents and realizes them in explicit ways that guide how they come to view their personhood or lack-thereof. Alice described this as "secondhand expectations." The way one resists, suppresses, and persists in pursuit of achievement or in the face of adversity was conceptualized in a phrase memorably repeated by three different informants: "Just tough it out."

This repression and internalization is likely related to and shaped by the Confucian and collectivistic mindset that implicitly teaches children to repress their emotions for the good of the family (Kim 2005; Kim 2020). Six of my ten informants felt they would prefer to not reach out to their parents about their mental health issues if they were experiencing any struggles. Such is recognized in literature as a mental health risk factor for Asian-Americans (Kim 2020). This Asian-American coded value of emotional self-control and suppression is linked to less positive attitudes of seeking mental health help (Shahid et al 2021). As Ethan puts it, rather than seeking help, "I have to kind of save it for different corner of the mind and come back to it later. Compartmentalize."

Music education is a site in which biculturalism, mental health, and the pursuit of achievement interact. As a music educator with experience teaching Asian-American students said, "There's something in the discipline mindset, the respect mindset that leads to a lot of excellence, but then somehow as the edifice is being built, there can be a crumbling within." This teacher has had several experiences with students who struggled with mental health.

In the biculturally conditioned pursuits of college, success, and implicit expectations of Chinese-American experiences, normalizations of mental health struggles occur in the form of

"casual beliefs." "Casual beliefs" of mental illness, or 'general social causes' (Kleinman and Benson 2006; Yang et al. 2012), shape labeling and conceptualization processes, which then contribute to delayed help-seeking and treatment (Yang 2012). One of my informants called his elevated levels of depression and anxiety just "occupational hazards." Given the specific sectors of achievement these Chinese-American children must be involved in, these highly individual arenas may encourage and circulate casual beliefs. However, the issue arises, as one of my music educator informants puts it:

> "[Students] are not always the most forthcoming about what's going on … I have no idea what percentage of the time it's a healthy stress and what percentage of the time it becomes an unhealthy preoccupation."

There is a lack of recognition of biculturally agreed upon mental illness symptoms (Kim 2020). The combination of bicultural tendencies to internalize emotions, casualize mental health struggles, and pursue Chinese-American Dreams of success make for compounded and intersectional forms of mental health risk factors for this group.

"Facing" Mental Illness and Stigma

Stigma is an especially pervasive and severe culture-specific mental health risk factor. The Chinese word for mental illness or struggles, "jīngshénbìng," denotes serious conditions associated with violent psychosis (Kim 2020, 1002). Stigma prevents sufferers from recognizing and seeking help for their mental health struggles, as the Chinese label escalates the severity of the mental health condition and excludes some diagnoses. In a study by Hsu et al. (2008), it was found the stigma of depression is worse among Chinese-Americans than Caucasian-Americans. Stigma is not experienced in the same way in every cultural context, and studies since Erving Goffman's initial definition of stigma have expanded past the singular focus on the stigmatized individual. For Chinese and Chinese-Americans, stigma is able to "get under the skin" and encourage a somatization of mental illness.

The research of Lawrence Yang and Arthur Kleinman on stigma in China suggest there is a moral component to stigma, where stigma exerts its core effects by threatening what is at stake or what has lived value (Yang et al. 2007, 1524). What is most at stake for people with mental illness in China is how stigma can burden kinship ties due to how stigma quickly transfers from the affected individuals to his or her family in a kind of social death (Yang et al. 2007, 1529). They believe that people with mental illness are seen as not fully cultivated by Confucian standards of self-control, possess a moral defect, and are incompetent to participate in social life

(Yang and Kleinman 2008, 402). In addition to the relationship of stigma to moral experience, stigma is a psychosomatic process that can be exemplified in the Chinese experience of "face" (Yang et al. 2007, 1530; Yang and Kleinman 2008). Face reflects one's moral status in a community, which, if lost, results in humiliation, loss of status, and the literal inability to face others (Yang et al. 2007, 1530). Therefore, stigma is a reticulum of body-self-affect that spans the person, the sufferer's social network, and moral experience (Yang et al. 2007, 1530).

The gravity of stigma as multi-dimensional and contagious to family members makes it so that "toughing it out" is preferable to reaching out to a professional or admitting struggles to parents. Most of my informants said they would only reach out to their parents or seek help if it "got bad." Like Jacob's friend, the preferred route is "toughing it out" unless it gets to a breaking point. The phrase "I'll just deal with it myself" repeatedly came up in my interviews in regards to reaching out to others for mental health help. When these Chinese-Americans experience any degree of mental illness or suffering, they are presented with two culturally appropriate extremes: "toughing it out" or "losing face." Whereas the former affects the individual, the latter affects the family, cultural values, and disrupts the pursuit of success. Unfortunately, it seems my informants and many Asian-Americans choose to "tough it out." Part of the problem is that it is unclear when "things get bad." Alice defines "the point" as feeling suicidal. Other informants were pushed to seek therapy when their bodies told them to.

> "I have been diagnosed with a high anxiety disorder [...] I guess recently the reason why I started anxiety medication was actually because I just was not sleeping and it was literally insomnia. That's what ultimately caused me to seek help is when I didn't know how to self-soothe my emotional distress to the point where ...."
> -Alice

Much like the physical dimension of stigma in Chinese culture, research supports that psychological issues manifest themselves in forms of physical pain for many Asians (Kim 2005; Leong et al. 2006; Mak and Zane 2004). Medical anthropologist and psychiatrist Arthur Kleinman's research on suffering and mental illness in China showed this somatization:

> "In many parts of Chinese society, the experience of depression is physical rather than psychological. Many depressed Chinese people do not report feeling sad, but rather express boredom, discomfort, feelings of inner pressure, and symptoms of pain, dizziness, and fatigue. These culturally coded symptoms may confound diagnosis among Chinese immigrants in the United States, many of whom find

the diagnosis of depression morally unacceptable and experientially meaningless"
(Kleinman 2004, 951).

For people of Chinese heritage, psychological distress and suffering may present in physical
forms. Although these experiences are subject to being experienced in a Chinese cultural
context, such cultural meanings of stigma and mental illness may be passed on to their
American-born children.

When asked if she had ever experienced mental health struggles, Jade responded with
recounting physical symptoms instead of framing this period in terms of states of mind or
emotions:

> "I would say I was a super happy person until a few years ago...That was the
> worst thing of my life. Like I almost wanted to kill myself every day...I was having
> my arms and hand tingling constantly. So I thought, 'I'm just stressed like it's
> going to go away.' And then it didn't go away. And when I went to an annual
> check-up … all the nurses gathered around thinking I was going to die or
> something. They were like 'your blood pressure is literally through the roof right
> now.' So they were like 'what's going on.' And I was like, 'there's only one thing I
> could think of: my job right now.' And so then that's when they told me like
> whatever you're doing it needs to stop or you're going to die."
>   -Jade

Jade later implied what she experienced was depression. Rather than answering my question
with "Yes, I was diagnosed with…" Jade answered with a physical experience that she recognized
as an indicator of mental illness. Somatoform depression and its symptoms has been found to be
less stigmatizing for Chinese-Americans than Caucasian-Americans (Hsu et al. 2008; Hsu and
Folstein, 1997; Kleinman 2004). Hsu and Folstein (1997) found that Chinese-American somatize
more than Caucasian-Americans, which may be due to stigmas of mental illness that engender
sufferers to use physical complaints as a legitimized way to express distress and seek help (Hsu
and Folstein 1997). The primary complaint of Chinese-American somatizers were
cardiopulmonary and vestibular symptoms (Hsu and Folstein 1997). My informants' somatic
experiences align with such reported symptoms.

Jason answered my question about mental health struggles in a similar way to Jade.
Both spoke primarily in terms of physical symptoms, which are less stigmatized in Chinese-
American culture:

> "Yeah so I did go to one therapy session in college my senior year. I was writing a thesis at the time, and I had this thing where like if I laid down, my heart would start beating very fast, and I would kind of get warm … I think basically I boiled it down to like … I was conditioned to associate rest with not being productive … But I wouldn't say I have been in "really dark places" kind of mental health issues."
> -Jason

Like my other informants, Jason's reference point of mental illness seemed to be what he called a "really dark place" or "the point" where "things go off the rails." This may originate in the Chinese stigmas and conceptualizations of mental illness as similar to psychosis and losing face. With Alice, Jade, and Jason, their mental health was manifested physically, which is what then prompted them to seek help. A lack of language and labels in both English and Chinese to characterize this middle ground of unquantifiable struggle is a risk to the growth of suffering. These individuals found themselves somewhere between "toughing it out" and "the point," but their bodies legitimized their middle ground mental state through a somatization of suffering. The somatization of mental struggles is not widely recognized, which acts as both a shield and shard for Chinese-American sufferers.

Hsu and Folstein (1997) noted how some Chinese-Americans would deny dysphoria but later admit to it. A dissonance about one's experience with mental illness arose in my interviews. One informant in particular, said:

> "I never had like depression or anxiety. Just like normal anxiety … Only about like bad depression I ever had was when I got accused of doing something I didn't do … But I wasn't like depressed for a long time. I just kind of like, toughed it out… I'm just like tough it out, thug it out. But yeah I've never been depressed or had any mental health issues."
> -Jacob

This informant both denied and acknowledged having experienced depression. What causes such dissonance? Perhaps the dissonance comes from the same place as "toughing it out"—the severity of stigma associated with experiencing mental illness and a lack of terminology to attach to their experiences.

CONCLUSION

Growing up, a bowl of cut fruit was not just a refreshing snack. On the front lines of parent-child disputes, a bowl of cut fruit is a cease-fire. In the late nights of SAT preparation, a bowl of cut fruit is parental pride in a child's academic diligence. I, myself, have had many bowls of fruit set on my work desk throughout my adolescence. Sometimes, they were Korean shingo pears, other times, they were apples with the skin peeled off, and far too often they were navel oranges. Without a word, my mother or father would come into my room, make a comforting nudging sound as if to say, "Here you go," set the bowl on my desk, and silently close the door behind them and leave. In my interviews for this research, two of my informants mentioned how their parents would also cut fruit. One said, 'It's like the world is at peace when there is cut fruit...just a cultural thing" (Bella). My life as a second-generation Chinese American has been full of these "just cultural things," which are dynamics of experiences I have normalized. But nothing is just that simple, and a bowl of fruit is not just a bowl of fruit. In this research, the experiences shared by my informants were not always "shared experiences." It is the diversity and individuality of stories, voices, and perspectives that has brought this research to life rather than a homogenous choir of second-generation Chinese-Americans.

In this polyphonic ensemble of young adults and music educators, the ways in which Chinese and American culture interact both within individuals and outside of them, as they influence and are influenced by one another in multiplicitous ways, has yielded resilient young adults that challenge simplistic Asian-American stereotypes. The clear-cut formula for Chinese-American Dreams of college has been met with blurry lines of demarcations between seemingly conflicting cultures. A local community has emerged, loudly, but silence remains on topics of heavy cultural weight. Suffering and mental health in this context present in distinct, indirect ways with bicultural origins. Music education is not just an extracurricular, but a Chinese-American subculture for both parents, children, and their teachers.

I initially set out to investigate how bicultural identities are formed, negotiated, and expressed. Yet, when I asked about identity, most of my informants asserted that identity did not weigh heavily on their minds or cause them much conflict. Just like in music, silence can speak volumes. The song does not stop when the music does, and neither does meaning in an interview. Synthesizing and weaving together this body of research has allowed me to trace and investigate where identity sings through. Rather than focusing on components of identity that are often categorized by identity markers and labels, I have chosen to focus on broader experiences, patterns, and themes that make individuals and shape cultures. Although they do

not explicitly or loudly express thoughts on identity or other topics, second-generation Chinese-American identities implicitly emerge as overtones of experience.

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