Chinese American Adolescent Identity in a Children’s Choir:
An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT
This exploratory case study examined ways that participation in a children’s choir singing repertoire from both Western and Eastern countries of the world molds the cultural identity of Chinese American adolescents. The primary question guiding the inquiry was: How do Chinese American adolescents describe the experience of singing in a children’s choir on their emerging cultural identity? Data collection included 12 hours of observations over the course of 5 weeks and interviews with 5 Chinese American students, the director, and the founding director of the children’s choir. Findings suggested creating a positive Chinese American community in this choir helped build, maintain, and develop cultural identity, although in different ways unique to the individual. Aspects of this community included usage of heritage language, singing Chinese folksongs to create multigenerational connections, forming Chinese American friendships to navigate cultural identity, and having teachers as culture bearers. However, cultural identity creation was unique to the individual. Cultural identity formation was flexible and nonlinear, emphasizing caution against overgeneralizing the Chinese American youth population.

Although Asian Americans are one of the fastest growing minority groups in the United States (Colby & Ortman, 2015), little research centers specifically on their educational needs, and even less research addresses subgroups like Chinese Americans. Previous research on cultural identity in education primarily concentrated on African American and Latino students due to the “achievement gap” seen between these students and White students on standardized tests (O’Connor, Hill, & Robinson, 2009). The under-representation of Asian Americans in education research was highlighted in Ng, Lee, and Pak’s (2007) review of literature. They noted the neglect of Asian Americans in discussions of curriculum and staffing, and also within issues of identity and educational needs. These discussions revolved around minorities who were more visibly underrepresented within the curriculum than Asian Americans.

The lack of research may be due to the model minority myth, which falsely labels all Asian Americans as high achievers who do well in school due to hard work and family attitudes toward education (Qin, Way, & Mukherjee, 2008). Non-Asians can resent
Asian Americans for the model minority stereotype. Rosenbloom and Way (2004) examined racial relations among Asian American, Latinos, and African Americans over a 2-year period in a New York City high school. They interviewed the same 60 students comprising of equal numbers of each racial group twice over 2 years. The findings suggested that the teacher showed favoritism toward the Asian American students, which caused their non-Asian counterparts to physically and verbally harass the Asian American students. Additionally, Wing (2007) studied 3,000 students at an ethnically diverse high school, detailing how the model minority myth caused racial tension between minority groups, placing Asian Americans in a vulnerable position.

The model minority myth label complicates cultural identity formation (Oyserman & Sakamoto, 1997). Oyserman and Sakamoto (1997) asked a sample of 162 Asian American university students to complete a 30- to 60-minute questionnaire about their identity as Asian Americans and the role of stereotyping in their exploration of identity. They found that students who closely identified with their cultural label liked the label more than those striving for individualism, although collectivism outweighed individualism in most participants.

Cultural identity derives from history but is never complete and perpetually changes due to the “continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power” (Hall, 1990, p. 225). Yeh and Huang (1996) criticized current theories of ethnic identity for oversimplifying the developmental process and failing to realize the malleability of identity. They analyzed data from 87 Asian American undergraduates about ethnic identity creation and found relationships and external forces influenced Asian Americans more than internal processes.

These relationships that influence cultural identity can, in part, be made through the use of heritage language among cultural communities (Shankar, 2011). After observing two Korean American community groups in Northern California, Kang (2003) noted how the use of Korean among Korean Americans established social status and fostered relationships. In *The Other Side of the Model Minority: The Familial and Peer Challenges Faced by Chinese American Adolescents*, Qin et al. (2008) looked at 120 first- and second-generation Chinese American students from two qualitative studies. They found that many participants had distant relationships between themselves and their parents due to language and cultural barriers, causing feelings of alienation.

While education can play a role in cultural identity creation, it is important to not simplify youths’ cultures. Such simplification could lead to generalizations on how to teach certain demographics of students (Allsup, 2016; Shaw, 2012). Shaw (2016) explored how Hispanic choral students perceived their teacher's attempt at providing a culturally sustaining pedagogy. Shaw found adolescents perceived that this pedagogical style honored their cultural background and also added to their cultural and intellectual knowledge, suggesting the important role education can have in cultural identity creation.
In contrast, Liu (2017) recommended that educators focus on how to teach each individual student as opposed to what to teach to prevent generalizations of immigrant youth. She researched 10 middle-school-aged immigrant Asian youth in New York City’s Chinatown to see how musical experiences played into their lives as both an individual and in social settings. She also observed how music interacted with the participant’s race, gender, language, class, and ethnicity and noted the complexity of the findings, leading her to restate the importance of not overgeneralizing a population. Jorgensen (1998) contemplated the difficulties of teaching music from a multitude of countries given the breadth of information expected of a teacher to accurately teach so many styles. Similar to Liu, Jorgensen discussed the complexity of musical identity noting Western musicians are not always identifying only with the classical traditions of Europe. Some identify with rock, jazz, or other styles. Because of this, music that is “ours” versus “theirs” is harder to identify when selecting repertoire. However, Morrison and Yeh (1999) examined musical preference among undergraduate students from the United States, China, and Hong Kong. They compared musical preference among the participants in the area of jazz, Western classical, and Chinese classical. The participants from the United States and China strongly preferred the music from their country, whereas the participants from Hong Kong showed no conclusive preference.

I was curious to see how, if at all, ethnicity played into identity development in a children’s choir. Mills (2008) and Bartolome (2010) both analyzed children’s choirs and found the choirs positively affected the participants both musically and socially in the prospective settings, yet neither looked at cultural identity. Mills studied the effects of participation in a children’s choir and the participants’ identities. She examined personal identity, music identity, and the ways other people influence the creation of personal identity. She studied six adolescents between the ages of 12 and 14. The findings suggested that participation in a children’s choir enhanced personal and musical self-esteem and self-efficacy and created a family-like collective identity with the group. Bartolome explored the culture and social system of a girls’ choir over the course of a year to better understand modern music making. The girl-centered culture of this choir fostered young women musically, personally, and socially while positively contributing to the musical fabric of the local, national, and international communities.

This exploratory case study examined ways that participation in a children’s choir singing repertoire from both Western and Eastern countries of the world molds the cultural identity of Chinese American adolescents. The primary question was: How do Chinese American adolescents describe the experience of singing in a children’s choir on their emerging identity? Subquestions included the following: How do Chinese American youth in a children’s choir create or describe their identity? How does social interaction with fellow choir members affect their identity development? What is the impact of singing Chinese folksongs on the development of their identity? How might the findings apply to other music education settings?
METHOD
A benefit of exploratory design is that it is useful when there is no clear, single set of outcomes allowing the researcher to observe an overview of an event or phenomena (Yin, 2014). Unfortunately, there was no previous research about cultural identity among Chinese American adolescents in the choral setting. Therefore, I decided to make this an exploratory case study, which is used when little previous research on a subject exists and a broad view of a situation is appropriate (Yin, 2014). Exploratory research cannot make causal statements (Yin, 2014), and so it is my hope that this research can lay the groundwork for further inquiry. The study lasted 5 weeks, incorporating approximately 12 hours of field research. I used surveys, questionnaires, interviews, observations, audio recordings, and field notes to explore the choir and the insights of the individuals involved. The primary focus was the five Chinese American students interviewed; however, I also interviewed and consulted with the choir directors.

Setting and Participants
The study focused on the experiences of students in the Crystal Children’s Choir (CCC), a large children’s choir located in the California Bay Area, an affluent and ethnically diverse area. The choir had seven ability levels, incorporating 27 choirs from first grade to high school. Students auditioned to advance levels, and the audition involved both sight singing and singing repertoire where their tone was analyzed. The ability levels correlated with age, where first and second graders were in the beginning levels and high schoolers were in upper levels, Levels 6 through 9. I focused on one of the Level 5 choirs, comprised of 83 children mostly between the ages of 11 to 14. These students traveled a short distance to rehearsals where they met once a week on Saturday evenings at a local church for 2 1/2 half hours. The directors informally believed about 90% of the students identified as Chinese American. Out of the 43 responses to a prescreening questionnaire, 38 responded as identifying as Chinese American, one as both Chinese American and Taiwanese American, one as both Chinese American and Vietnamese American, one as Taiwanese American, one as Indian American, and one as White. Additionally, all of the educators identified as Chinese American. Most of the students were in CCC for 5 to 8 years, with two respondents in their first, one in his second, one in her ninth, and one outlier in his 11th.

Context. The mission of the organization was “to strive for choral music excellence by providing choral music education to children and blending the best of Eastern and Western musical traditions” (“Crystal Children’s Choir,” 2009–2011). The organization aspired to be a cultural ambassador of children’s choral music, especially in the field of Chinese folksongs. In the 2017 spring concert, six choirs performed songs from all over the world. Three of the 28 songs were traditional, non-Westernized Chinese folksongs. The Level 5 choir sang one song in Bahasa (language from Indonesia), three songs in English, one song in Japanese, and one song in Czech. When I asked where the teachers
bought the music, they said from all kinds of sources, but some of their non-Western music was purchased in a music shop in Hong Kong.

Interviewed participants. All the interviewed participants identified as Chinese American. I interviewed:

1. Kelly, who was 14 years old, social with other students in her alto section, started CCC in first grade, and planned on staying until she graduated;
2. Patricia, who was 11, started CCC in first grade, loved to sing, and valued community;
3. Megan, who was 13 years old, started CCC in first grade, loved playing basketball, and ran cross-country;
4. Betsy, who was 13 years old, started CCC in second grade, was friends with Megan, giggled as she entered the room for her interview, and told me, as she smiled from ear to ear, she was worried she would not know the answers or give the “right” answer; and
5. Philip, who did not meet my criteria due to being 17 but provided an interesting perspective as an eleventh grader who started CCC in first grade.

Philip was in this choir due to scheduling conflicts with CCC’s advanced high school choir. The participants originally joined because their parents signed them up. Kelly added that at the time, her friends all had planned activities on the weekend, and she did not so her mom enrolled her because Kelly sang a lot. Betsy joined because the choir relaxed her after a “long day of academics,” was fun, and helped her with her violin.

The directors. Mr. Karl Chang founded CCC in 1994, and by 2004 he left his job as an industrial engineer to work full time at CCC. As president and founder of CCC, he not only oversaw and implemented the logistics, he also directed the most advanced singers. He believed most of the students in this 84-student choir joined in first grade. Ms. Helen Leung directed six levels of choir including Level 5 and had worked at CCC since 1998. Both directors were born and raised in Taiwan.

Researcher’s lens. I am a middle school choir teacher in San Francisco at a school where the majority of the students identify as Chinese American. I identify as White, and throughout my teacher training, had heard about making the classroom culturally relevant to minority students. When I first saw CCC perform, I became interested in how musical experiences affected the cultural identity among the Chinese American participants particularly since this private organization attracted many Chinese American youth. After discovering a lack of research on this demographic, it was my hope to learn more. As far as I know, I have never had a student participate in this group nor do I have any personal connection to the organization.

Data Collection and Analysis
Following Creswell’s (2009) data analysis procedure, I collected the raw data through observations, detailed field notes, audio recordings of rehearsals, surveys, and inter-
views. This gave me a sense of how cultural identity was created and formed in the choir.

The first form of data came from an Institutional Review Board-approved permission slip that included a prescreening questionnaire. Out of the entire class of 83, 49 students returned completed permission slips consenting to participate; 43 of the 49 completed the included prescreening questionnaire that asked name, age, racial identification, and years in the ensemble.

The next form of data was through observing choir rehearsals. I took field notes and audio recordings of the rehearsals. I observed 12 hours over the course of 5 weeks, which allowed me the chance to get an overview of the emerging concepts of the study.

After the first week of collecting permission slips and observing, 16 students met the criteria of both identifying as Chinese American and being in the ensemble for multiple years. In an effort to further narrow down whom I would interview, I decided to move to the next form of data collection through surveying 10 students. Out of the 16 students, I asked Ms. Leung to choose 10. I never asked why she chose who she chose. These 10 students completed the survey in a separate room during rehearsal. The survey asked simple questions including how they joined the choir, if there was parental involvement in the decision to join, what the perceived benefits of the group were, and what cultural benefits they noticed. I purposefully sampled the students, looking for participants who identified as Chinese American, articulated their ideas well, and were involved in the group for multiple years. After reviewing the surveys, I chose six students who seemed to have a lot to say.

The interviews were to take place during rehearsal, so I asked the director which five I could interview. Out of the six, Ms. Leung identified five, four girls and one boy. Prior to each interview, I read the same verbal assent script. The 10–15 minute interviews were in a private room, held during rehearsal and audio recorded. The interview questions asked participants about both positive and negative experiences in the choir, why they joined, descriptions of the community from their perspective, and how they believed the group affected their cultural identity.

Throughout the prescreening questionnaire, survey, and interviewing process, I continued to observe rehearsals and take field notes. I interviewed the directors toward the end of my observations to provide additional background into the groups such as the goals of each choir level, performance venues and typical audience, and job description. I also asked about their perception of the choir community’s challenges and benefits and why they believed the organization attracted such a large Chinese American population.

After collecting the raw data, I transcribed all the interviews and my personal thoughts. Next I read all the data, including the field notes, audio recordings, surveys, and transcriptions. I coded the data by hand. Many of these codes related to my research questions or provided further insight into identity creation in the choir. This process was followed by analyzing the data for themes as recommended for case study and eth-
I did this by looking for commonalities within the research so I could write detailed descriptions of the participants’ experiences.

I established trustworthiness for my study through triangulation, peer review and debriefing, and member checking as suggested by Glesne (2006). For data source triangulation, I compared field notes and interviews to confirm emerging themes. Additionally, a committee of professors provided external reflection and input. I shared drafts of the research with the directors to verify I accurately represented their ideas. They did not question anything I sent them.

**FINDINGS**

Findings suggested creating a positive Chinese American community in this choir helped build, maintain, and develop cultural identity, although in different ways unique to the individual. Data analysis revealed three themes contributing to cultural identity: fostering community connections, navigating Chinese and American identities, and the role of the teacher on identity formation.

**Fostering Community Connections**

Participation in the choir led to relationships within the Chinese American community, thereby affecting cultural identity. When discussing the benefits of the choir community, Kelly stated that because you know everyone in the choir it “automatically transfers to your outer life because you know a lot more Asian people in the Asian community.”

The use of heritage language impacted the Chinese American students’ cultural identity by creating a sense of pride and belonging while isolating those who did not identify as Chinese American. The second time I observed the choir, it happened to be “spirit day” at CCC. Most of the students wore a T-shirt that read, “I ♥ 晶晶” [I love Crystal]. At each rehearsal I observed, at least one or two students wore this shirt even though it was no longer spirit day.

Although the students primarily spoke in English with each other, the broader community used Mandarin frequently. Parents spoke with the directors in Mandarin. The directors also used Mandarin during rehearsal, although sparingly. During the second observation, when one of the students changed seats rather slowly, Ms. Leung exclaimed, “Hurry!” and then followed in Mandarin. The student quickly moved to her new seat. I asked Ms. Leung how she knew which students could speak and/or understand Mandarin.

**MS. LEUNG:** Yeah. I just know it. And sometimes—it’s very interesting for some students—they don’t speak Mandarin, and some, they can say, “Teacher,” in Chinese [Mandarin], “Lăoshi,” because they hear their friend talk about this word.
Not only did students become more familiar with Mandarin through the choir, but also the perception of speaking the language was positive. During an interview, Kelly described how she and her friends laughed at the inaccuracies of online transcriptions of Mandarin. All the students I interviewed were fluent in English and Mandarin, and knowing both languages seemed to aid the students in a feeling of belonging.

Although the choral students primarily identified as Chinese American, those who did not, at times, were alienated. Philip mentioned many teachers spoke Mandarin for half of the rehearsals and that he “felt bad for the one Indian and one White kid” in class. He added that in another class, one White girl was taking Mandarin on the side so she could “enjoy the class more.” Kelly “felt bad” for the Indian American boy who could not read Mandarin. He read the English translation, but Kelly said it always had errors so he never knew what he was singing about even though she tried to help. Although both students “felt bad,” both also implied identifying as Chinese American benefitted them in this organization. Socially, these exclusions were not overt.

Choir friends. All interviewed participants stated they had friends in choir, and four of five interviewees stated they socialized with these friends both in and out of rehearsals. Observing the group, it appeared that race was not a factor for membership in different social circles.

As I look around at all these groups during rehearsals, I notice that race does not seem to play into the social schema. A White girl hangs out with Chinese American twins that dress identically. An Indian American girl is warmly greeted by her friends every rehearsal. Biracial students are included just the same as everyone else. (C. Lindl, field notes, October 11, 2014)

Through singing together, students created a unique bond only found among those who participated in the choir. Betsy discussed the benefits of the choir community.

BETSY: You get to learn to collaborate with others and work with them to, like, make music. And you kind of grow up with them, so they're kind of your, like, friends and family.

Betsy also discussed how singing songs from China impacted her and her friends. She talked about how all her friends in choir identified as Chinese American and through singing songs from China “we kind of get to understand our history, kind of, a little bit better.”

Multigenerational connection. Connections made through history and music selection helped to forge deeper relationships with previous generations. The directors chose popular Chinese folksongs they believed the native Chinese parents and grandparents knew well. Ms. Leung said it was easy to pick music since she grew up singing Chinese folksongs. A few students referred to feeling connected to their parents when singing songs in Mandarin.

MEGAN: Yeah. I think I like it because it like reminds me of Chinese culture and like the style that my parents like to listen to and stuff like that . . . so then I feel like I can relate to my parents more that way.
Betsy stated, “Well, my parents always listen to Chinese songs, so I kind of get the feeling of how they experience it.”

Kelly told me of a story about her visit to Taiwan. While waiting for a bus with her mother, she started singing a Taiwanese song to herself she learned in CCC. She said a local old man next to her started singing along.

Navigating Chinese and American Identities

Creation of cultural identity was not always linear. The students’ perceived impact of their cultural identity exposed the duality and complexity of cultural identity. During the interview I specifically stated, “In your questionnaire you stated you were Chinese American. Is that true?” Before positively responding, each respondent paused due to the term Chinese American. Throughout the interviews, students did not use this term to discuss the community. They simply said “Chinese” or “Asian” even though the prescreening questionnaire identified the members as “Chinese American.” This relation to verbally identifying only as “Chinese” did not take away from the American culture that was apparent in their lives. There was a blend between Chinese and American cultures. Megan mentioned that at home she listened to American pop music, similar to most American teenagers, yet was familiar with Chinese music, since her parents listened to it. I asked if students felt differently singing songs from China.

MEGAN: Well, maybe a little because I can experience Chinese songs and usually like at home I don’t really listen to Chinese stuff, so this stimulates my Chinesey side.

Philip discussed that he felt singing songs from other countries did not impact his ethnic identity:

PHILIP: Well, I don’t really—I don’t feel like any different like, oh, when I sing like [a] Chinese song, it’s like, oh, this is my country song you know. It’s like all the same. They’re just like foreign songs, so then it doesn’t really affect me in particular—more like one way than another.

In a choir where most students identified as Chinese American and part of the mission was to sing and learn about Chinese folksongs, it was natural that some students gained or maintained a sense of Chinese pride. I never witnessed the teachers make an observable effort to discuss Chinese culture, yet the influence of Chinese culture existed through repertoire choices and the dominant participation by Chinese Americans.

Although there was a noticeable influence of China seen, in part, by language use, the choir sang non-Western songs with a typical Western children’s choir sound. You can hear this on YouTube when CCC performed, “Si Pi Heng Na” at the 2010 American Choral Directors Association Western Division Conference (Wen, 2015). The interviewed students were proud of the choral sound. Patricia mentioned how much fun she had on the New York trip, explaining, “We won a lot of awards, like the sweepstake awards, and I think it was the overall best choir.”
Role of the Teacher on Identity Formation

The teachers shaped the sound of the choir and therefore made the artistic decisions. CCC employed a staff that mirrored the demographics of its students. All of the teachers were fluent in Mandarin and belonged in the Chinese American community. These teachers were parental figures and also culture bearers.

The teacher as parental figure. The interviewed students spoke highly of their director as both an educator and a parental figure. For example, Kelly indicated feelings of closeness to Ms. Leung and the female accompanist, stating, “They’re like your second moms.” Patricia agreed, calling the directors the “parents in the choir as a family” and Ms. Leung the “mom” directing everyone “in a nice way.”

PHILIP: When you need help you can definitely go to them and they will try to be like [an] adult, that isn’t your parent, that can help you.

Kelly described that the directors help you out in times of need. She told a story about how a director took care of her friend all night when her friend became ill at choir camp and that was “so nice” of the director.

The teacher as culture bearer. Because all the directors at CCC were part of the Chinese American community, they were comfortable selecting popular Chinese folksongs. Ms. Leung could easily translate for the students and help them with pronunciation. It is natural that teachers who were raised in non-Western countries could easily navigate non-Western music. In music education, Goetze (2000) recommended enlisting a culture bearer, defined as someone who verified that non-Western music is performed in a manner representative of the culture where the music originated. Unlike Goetze’s (2000) recommendation, the teachers did not ensure the music was performed in a traditional Chinese style, but rather focused on pronunciation and meaning.

Today the students have a guest conductor, Ms. Wong, who is teaching them a song that encompasses both Taiwanese and Japanese. The teacher asks the students if they know what the song means. The kids yell, “No!” The teacher starts to explain word by word. Kids call out the meaning if they know it. The next time the students sing, the director is miming the meaning, which makes the students laugh, particularly since this is a song about someone shooting a shotgun in the mountains. (C. Lindl, field notes, October 11, 2014)

In summary, CCC influenced the development of Chinese American identity through fostering community among Chinese Americans. Language was a major driver in creating ethnic pride, yet each student individually navigated how to be both “Chinese” and “American” in their own way, and that cannot be generalized. Being in a community that helped to create friendships among Chinese American youth allowed students to navigate their cultural identity with other Chinese Americans. The directors also influenced identity formation as parental figures and culture bearers.
DISCUSSION

This study suggested that CCC created an environment that shaped, created, and maintained cultural identity among the Chinese American youth through use of heritage language and creating connections in the Chinese American community. The “I ❤️ 晶” T-shirts and the use of Mandarin during rehearsals among parents, directors, and students were examples of the power of language use. Even students who did not speak Mandarin used the Mandarin word for “teacher.” This sense of belonging to the community due to heritage language is consistent with Shankar (2011) and Kang (2003). However, CCC was a self-selecting group with a shared cultural background. The students mentioned that they pitied the few nonnative speakers. Since all the students I interviewed spoke fluently, I wondered if students who identified as Chinese American and were not fluent in Mandarin selected to leave the group at a younger age. Perhaps if students were not fluent, they could actually feel like an outcast from their fellow Chinese American peers.

Mills (2008) and Bartolome (2010) discussed the positive influence of children’s choirs on identity yet did not look at cultural identity. CCC seemed to foster both. Betsy spoke of getting to collaborate and work with other Chinese American students where they could learn about their history together, demonstrating not only the positive influence of teamwork but also the positive influence of teamwork within the cultural identity context of a shared history. Kelly spoke of the positive experience of connecting to others through song but doing so in a manner that relied on accessing a different language allowing music to bridge the gap between Kelly and the Taiwanese man with whom she was connecting. In these ways, CCC’s family-like community allowed the Chinese American participants to experience the positive influences of singing in a children’s choir but in a way that also navigated cultural identity through learning about their shared culture.

Qin et al. (2008) found that many of their study participants felt a distance between themselves and their parents due to language and cultural barriers. CCC worked with the students to try to bridge these gaps through music. The teachers specifically chose music with the intent to connect students with their parents and grandparents. Both Betsy and Megan felt a connection to their parents through singing Chinese folksongs. Thus, CCC appeared to close the distance between parents and participants observed in Qin et al.’s findings by connecting music heard in the home with music sung outside of the home. CCC’s mission, which includes singing Chinese folksongs, may have influenced this outcome by attracting participants within the community that desired this outcome from the organization.

After observing and interviewing members of CCC, it seemed the students in the choir valued the role the directors filled as parental figures with a shared culture. That role appeared distinct from Goetze’s (2000) limited definition of a culture bearer, which focused on musical performance and excluded the more complex benefits of having
someone from a culture in a position of power as an educator and role model. CCC’s culture bearers refrained from working within Goetze’s definition of ensuring the choir had a traditional non-Western singing tone when singing non-Western songs. Instead, the participants enjoyed the Western sound, and CCC’s directors seemed to acknowledge this by allowing for a Western tone and instead focusing on things like pronunciation and meaning. This finding comports with studies suggesting music preference is correlated with individual culture (Morrison & Yeh, 1999) and demonstrating cultural identity is not firm within one culture or another but individuals pick and choose what they like to fit their needs.

“*They’re Just Like Foreign Songs*”

Some students’ comments muddied the idea of what might be the cultural identity needs of Chinese American students in a choral education setting. This duality connected to Jorgensen’s (1998) discussion of how the globalization of music might be changing these needs (i.e., the blurring of the distinction between ours vs. their music). Philip described how singing Chinese folksongs felt foreign. Megan listened to American pop music at home. However, other participants felt singing Chinese folksongs affected their cultural identity through learning about shared history and feeling connected to previous generations. In this context, the choir was a way for participants to continue their experiences and perhaps bring students closer in touch with a culture they felt they could claim. The abstraction of cultural exploration in this setting allowed individualized and malleable identity formation.

**Suggestions for Teaching Practice**

This research is exploratory in nature and intended to be used as groundwork for further study on Chinese American adolescents in the choral setting. Within this setting, participation in this organization aided some Chinese American students in shaping, building, and maintaining their cultural identity. Participants formed community among fellow Chinese Americans. There were mixed findings on whether singing Chinese folksongs aided in cultural identity development. An educator cannot assume that because someone identifies as Chinese American that singing a token folksong from China will aid in cultural identity growth. On the contrary, in CCC, cultural identity formation was created in individualized ways including but not limited to singing Chinese folksongs and also was fostered by an entire choir-based community.

This study suggested that performing songs from the Chinese American students’ heritage culture, depending on the individual, may or may not aid in cultural identity development. This ambiguity should not deter educators from performing non-Western music. Educators may find performing songs from students’ native cultures, particularly if they enlist help from someone from the culture, enhance the educational experience.
Suggestions for Future Research

The study’s primary limitation was the length of time, yet it exposed a number of possibilities for further research. These may include focusing on Chinese American cultural identity development in relation to home language; focusing on a non-self-selecting group, as seen in this private setting; exploring a setting where no culture bearer was present; looking at the effects of singing Chinese folksongs on first generation Chinese Americans versus second or third generation Chinese Americans; and conducting similar studies with other subsets of Asian Americans including Japanese Americans and Filipino Americans.

This research is necessary considering Asian Americans are one of the fastest growing minority groups in the United States (Colby & Ortman, 2015). The lack of research may be due to the “model minority” myth, but hopefully this study spurs more research of Chinese Americans in choral education. Although cultural identity development is fluid, this complex topic is worthwhile for this growing population.

AUTHOR’S NOTE

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NOTE

1. Pseudonyms used for participants. Anglo pseudonyms purposely used to reflect participants’ Anglo names.

REFERENCES


