MARRIAGEABLE US, UNDESIRABLE THEM:
REPRODUCING SOCIAL INEQUALITIES THROUGH MARITAL BOUNDARIES

by

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Abstract

Previous efforts applying a one-identity-at-work model suggest that upward mobility serves as an engine for marital assimilation. This model allows for the identification of immigrant conditions for integration. However, it does not fully explain the racial and gender asymmetry associated with intermarriage. I am applying an intersectionality approach to addressing issues concerning when and how group differences affect the construction of marriageability, defined as marital boundaries based on us/them distinctions. Drawing from interviews with 67 highly achieving, Chinese-speaking immigrants and their children residing in the San Diego area, I present evidence illustrating the interactive effects among race, ethnicity, nation, class, and gender. I found that although the immigrants from Taiwan are very similar to Chinese ones in terms of appearance, socioeconomic status, and cultural traditions, the former generally views the latter as unmarriageable them rather than marriageable us because of the group’s strong feelings and expressions of Taiwanese national identity. Yet, both groups show similar patterns in terms of redrawing their marital boundaries along race, class, and gender lines. Generally, white supremacy makes the immigrants embrace white people regardless of their class differences but disapprove darker-skin ones. Yet, one’s middle or upper-class background can make his/her undesirable racial and ethnic difference less visible. More important, the immigrants’ essentialist approach to care manifested by their evaluations of their in-law’s performance has sufficient power to undo marital boundaries, suggesting that gender trumps race and class on the family level. Finally, I found that morality serves as source of legitimacy for the immigrants’ marital preferences. I identify dynamic movement between marital and moral boundaries by showing an arbitrary relationship among perceived moral traits and group difference perceptions.
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INTRODUCTION

The correlation between years of education and occupational prestige in the US is about 0.6; the correlation of spouses’ education is about 0.6. That is, educated men are approximately as selective of wives on educational grounds as are employers with jobs with high educational qualifications. What we have to explain, then, is how a process involving as much universalism as the labor market can have as much as particularism as marriage does. (Heimer & Stinchcombe 1980: 701)

What is marriage? Conceptualizing marriage as the destiny of love in their love-letter-like essay, Carol Heimer and Arthur Stinchcombe (1980) show us that “the formation of household utility functions,” a product of protection that one cannot buy from insurance companies, is a demonstration of love’s rationality:

When discussing buying a house or making a decision about children, it is natural for people to talk about what “we” want, what “we” can afford, what “we” intend to do. How do such “we’s” come to be formed, and why should sex and love have so much to do with it? … Families and firms and armies and universities often have preference orderings which show continuity for generations. (Heimer and Stinchcombe 1980: 702)

Centering around the same topic, this research, however, is not to assess whether marriage is rational or irrational, but to explain, in the academic couple’s words, how do “we” and “preference orderings” come to be formed? If making a decision about who is marriageable us is

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1 I couldn’t complete this dissertation project without the help of my committee members. Many thanks to Joanna Dreby for her detailed comments on both earlier versions of the chapters and the final revisions of the dissertation. I learned the term “marriageability” from her feedback on my dissertation proposal in 2014. I am grateful to Nancy Denton for her careful reading of the dissertation. Her concrete suggestions saved me time and identified details I had missed in earlier revisions. I am much obliged to Beth Berman. She contributed to this dissertation in countless ways. She coined the phrases “marital asymmetries” and “marriage logic” and helped me conceptualize the marriageability field along the way. I would like to dedicate this dissertation to Johnny Yang, who brought love and laughter to me throughout the process. Thank you for your ten years of support and companionship. You will always be my family.
a matter of identity politics, is intermarriage the cure for conflicts among racial and ethnic groups? If marriage is a process involving particularism and universalism, what makes them particular and universal?

1. Jean Huang in the Promised Land

Two years after our conversation in April of 2015, I still have difficulty deciding the identity choice of Jean Huang, 87, a retired computer programmer. Jean was born in Guangdong, a southern Province of China, but “sailed in a ship for two nights to arrive in Taiwan” when she was 18 years old. During the Cold War she decided to give up a stable career in a public education institution and migrated with her husband to the United States. In the promised land she started over as an international student pursuing a master’s degree in math but made a smooth transition to the technology industry after graduation. When retired, she decided to move from the New York State to Southern California to stay closer to her son.

Having stayed in the promised land for over six decades, Jean switched her chosen identity multiple times during our two-hour conversation. At the beginning she identified with Taiwan, where she earned a college degree and made her living as a high school teacher:

I feel I am from Taiwan, because I am doubtlessly against the Communist Party in terms of its ideology. It confiscated the whole property of my home, so how else should I feel? I identified with Taiwanese from the very beginning. At that time, there was no difference between Taiwanese and Chinese because Taiwan was still part of China. It was Taiwan Province. The President of Taiwan was called the President of the Province. Therefore, I don’t have such thoughts of separating Taiwan from China. I identify with Chiang Kai-shek. Chiang Kai-shek is my President and Sun Yat-sen is my Father. I identify with the Republic of China, and the Republic of China is in Taiwan!
But in the middle of our conversation she emphasized a need to take on an Asian American identity because it was “what we are identified as” in the U.S. She gave her reason while talking about what motivated her to help establish an ethnic organization:

Asian, we are all Asians when out [of our countries]. I organized an association, Chinese American Association. There were two kinds of Chinese in the United States. One was pro-Communist, the other was pro-Kuomingtang. I liked neither. Kennedy was running the presidency at that time. He was in a debate about whether the United States should protect Jingmen and Matsu, because the Seventh Fleet was protecting Taiwan. But those two islands are very close to the Mainland, they were afraid that the protection would violate the Mainland’s sovereignty and cause a war … Many senators and congressmen called and asked each other, “Where are Jingmen and Matsu?” No one knew. They couldn’t call any groups for help, because they were all Chinese. So at that time I thought we needed to founded a Chinese American organization. It could answer every question about China, and it represented the rights of all Chinese Americans.

Jean and her organization represented a third kind of Chinese that was neither Communist nor nationalist. But the organization’s name was quickly changed to “Asian” because of funding considerations:

We wanted to apply for government funds for our association. It was legal because we were non-profit. But the American government said, “We don’t want to give funding to organizations like small countries.” It didn’t want one that was Chinese, one American. They said, “We will give you money when you become an Asian Association.” We changed our association’s name to Asian. When it was Asian, you had to include Filipinos and Indians.

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2 Kuomingtang, also known as KMT, is the Mandarin pronunciation of Nationalist Party. It is a political party whose history can be dated to 1849, when it was established to overthrow the Qing Dynasty of China. The party was retreated to Taiwan after it lost the Chinese Civil War to the Communist Party of China in 1949. Currently it is the main opposition party in Taiwan.
Although Jean understood that she was officially categorized as Asian in the U.S., she identified with Chinese in her mind, as seen in the following excerpt:

Legally, we are Asian. But in fact, Chinese—not to mention Taiwanese—Chinese are always Chinese no matter where you go in the world. They can't change. They can't be assimilated with others.

*What makes you think that way?*

I don't know. Because you are in the United States. When an Italian immigrates to the United States, he becomes an American immediately.

*Why is that?*

I don't know. When they come here they give up everything to become American. They assimilate, and no one knows they are Italians. Sometimes when we see a person, white or black, whatever, we ask, “Where were your ancestors from?” He might say from Italy or Spain or Portugal. People from many countries become Americans, only Chinese are always Chinese. I have no idea about the cultural thing. You are like them when you work outside, but when you go home and close your door, you are Chinese.

Although Jean’s English is fluent, she speaks Mandarin Chinese at home: " if I spoke English at home I would feel I was still at work." Her two children did not become bilingual, though:

Their native language is English. When we just got here, I tried to teach them three hundred Chinese characters during the summer. They remembered none when the next year’s summer came. I gave up after three years of trying. They begged me to stop, “I rather wash dishes or mop the floor. Please stop teaching me Chinese!” Learning that language was too difficult for them.

If we conclude that Jean identifies simultaneously with Taiwanese Americans, Chinese Americans, and Asian Americans, what identity option should she check on a form? What
makes for “contradictions” in her identity claims? If categorical identities are not mutually exclusive to Jean and other immigrants, how does identity formation impact their ideas about who is and isn’t marriageable? These questions are at the center of this research.

My data are from in-depth interviews with highly achieving Chinese-speaking immigrants and second-generation members with at least one Chinese-speaking immigrant parent. Chinese speakers are one of the fastest-growing immigrant populations in the U.S., with Mandarin, Cantonese, the Taiwanese language, and other provincial dialects collectively considered the second most spoken non-English language in the country, after Spanish. The latest data estimate that 2.9 million people in the U.S. speak some form of Chinese at home (Logan and Zhang 2013).

Previous studies have shown that Chinese-speaking immigrants and their children are so successful in their integration that they have become “white” (Alba and Nee 2003; Bean and Stevens 2003; Kasinitz et al. 2008; Lee 2005). But conventional wisdom still finds it hard to predict marriage patterns among these high-achieving immigrants. Past models suggest that upward mobility serves as an engine for marital assimilation. If true, these immigrants should show evidence of birds of different feathers flocking together. If a segmented assimilation hypothesis is more valid, they should be more inclined to perceive all people who look like us to be equally marriageable. Some researchers who emphasize the role of opportunity argue that group size is an important factor (Kalmijn 1998). Following this logic, we should see less intermarriage among Chinese-speaking immigrants due to their growing population. Yet neither increased opportunity nor upward mobility necessarily translate into a greater likelihood of coethnic marriage or intermarriage. If the immigrant group has collectively achieved upward assimilation, why do intermarried Chinese females tend to have a white husband whereas their male counterparts tend to have an Asian wife? If group size matters on a national level, why does the intermarried Chinese population continue growing?
More recently, scholars have started tackling the assumption of the coupling among immigrant integration and spousal choice in immigration literature, pointing to a possible solution for the puzzle of racial and gender asymmetries in intermarriage. Song (2009) points out that intermarriage is an imperfect measure of immigrant integration because group trends in intermarriage are different from the attitudes that people express about the subject, indicating that relationships between beliefs and practices is more complex than previous studies have suggested.

In conjunction with this “deconstructive” turn, I apply an intersectionality approach to tackling identity politics of immigrant marriage. More specifically, I discuss when and how group differences involving race, class, and gender affect the construction of marriageability. I offer two conceptual frameworks (one analytical and one descriptive)— the marriageability field and marital boundary— to argue that marital asymmetries in intermarriage involving Chinese Americans are a result of the workings of multidimensionality of marriageability, i.e., the making and unmaking of marital boundaries along racial, ethnic, and gender lines. Marital boundary is defined as a symbolic line drawn based on us/them distinctions; the marriageability field is a figurative representation of marriage logic. The logic includes the following elements:

1) the moralization of race, class, and gender differences;
2) the equation of the moral with the marriageable;
3) the overlapping between race and class;
4) the gendered pairings between household positions and racial differences.

I found that although Chinese-speaking immigrants did draw their marital boundaries along ethnic lines, they define “marriageable us” in a different way. Although the immigrants from the mainland China often embrace Taiwanese people— including first generation and second generation Taiwanese Americans— as examples of “authentic us,” the immigrants from Taiwan, especially holo-speaking ones, tend to put Chinese people at the bottom of their preference
hierarchies. Yet both groups show similarities in the remaking and unmaking of their respective marital boundaries—for instance, they both give evidences indicating their belief in white supremacy and black exceptionalism. But comparable class background sometimes makes undesirable racial and ethnic differences less visible. Further, filial piety ideology paired with a gender-biased approach to providing care for the elderly has sufficient power to affect marital boundaries. Lastly, I also show how perceived moral traits serve as sources of legitimacy for the immigrants’ preferences. I found that the immigrants arbitrarily attached moral traits (polite, ill-mannered, civilized, and so on) to racial, class, and gender differences when they were deciding which groups are more marriageable than others.

By revealing the dynamic movement between marital, moral, and group boundaries, the intersectionality approach applied in this study represents a specific contribution to the literature on immigrant marriage and the scholarship of intermarriage in general. Whereas previous researchers have identified alternative paths to Asian American marital assimilation, my findings show how multidimensionality of marriageability functions, suggesting a weak association between upward mobility and cross racial relationship formation.

2. Explaining Group Differences in Intermarriage

Non-white immigrants and their children are changing the racial landscape of the United States (Foner and Fredrickson 2004; Alba and Nee 2003; Bean and Stevens 2003). In 2008, Asians and Latinos made up 5 and 15 percent of the country’s population, respectively (Ruggles et al. 2009). It is estimated that these percentages will approximately double in the first half of the twenty-first century. The population of intermarried Americans is growing concurrently, with the number growing more than twenty-fold between 1960 and 2000; in 2008, about 7 percent of all
American marriages were interracial (Jacoby 2001; Lee and Edmonston 2005; Ruggles et al. 2009).

Among non-white immigrants, the role of Asian immigrants is growing in importance due to their increasing numbers and high rates of intermarriage. According to the Pew Research Center (2012, 2017), the number of Asian-origin Americans surpassed Latinos in 2012, and in 2015 three in ten Asian marriages involved non-Asians or Asians from other countries or cultures.

Significant variation in immigrant marital outcomes has been reported. While some researchers use the premise of “birds of a feather flock together” to examine factors that influence immigrants to marry along narrow ethnic boundaries (Foner et al. 2009; Kibria 1998, 2000, 2002; Lee 2004; Rumbaut 1996), a number of intermarriage scholars are clearly more interested in explaining how and why birds of different feathers flock together, i.e., what leads to the formation of cross-racial relationships. Several studies have suggested that Asian Americans have been more successful in terms of assimilation because of their higher rates of intermarriage with native whites compared to other racial groups (see, for example, Lee and Bean 2010; Lichter and Qian 2007). A significant number of researchers have expressed support for assimilation theories that associate intermarriage with social mobility, and that treat marriages between immigrants and majority natives as evidence of upward mobility and examples of marital assimilation proxies (Gordon 1964; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Lee and Bean 2010; Lee and Fernandez 1998; Lichter and Qian 2007).

However, insufficient attention has been given to the question of how individuals who are usually considered “one of us” become less marriageable. Mobility is not the only factor determining marriageability for Asian-origin immigrants living in the U.S. Scholars using global and transnational approaches have identified several non-assimilation factors that explain the high rate of intermarriage between Asian Americans and ethnic whites, including colonialism.
(Roth 2009; Roth and Kim 2013; Ocampo 2016), global image (Kibria 2012), and the globalization of racial attitudes (Gold 2004). Culture matters, but despite efforts to understand the effects of culture on a marriageability construct (Moran 2001; Lee and Bean 2010), the concept is somewhat misleading because it is frequently used interchangeably with race and ethnicity.

By identifying race and ethnicity as sources of group differences in intermarriage, research in this area suffers from racial and ethnocentric perspectives. Andreas Wimmer (2015: 2190-2191) has described some of its disadvantages:

Race-centric authors diverge in how they deal with the possibility of non-racial mechanisms that might (re)produce racial inequality. The first is to conceive of research into these mechanisms as elements of “color-blind racism.” The second is to call all mechanisms that produce or reproduce racial inequality “racist.” Both therefore operate through a similar rhetorical move – by extending the meaning of the term “racism.” The third way is to acknowledge the existence of these other processes but to minimize their possible consequences by insisting on the autonomy of racial processes.

This criticism of race-centric research is not new. In 1917, W.E.B. Du Bois created the concept of “double consciousness” to challenge assumed exclusivity among categorical identities. But more broadly, race-centric research belongs to what Craig Calhoun (1979: 18) calls the “singular identity model,” one that tends to overlook the contested and overlapping nature of categorical identities:

[It] has been the tacit assumption of modern social and cultural thought that people are normally members of one and only one nation, that they are members of one and only one race, one gender, and one sexual orientation, and that each of these memberships describes neatly and concretely some aspect of their being. It has been assumed that people naturally live in one world at a time, that they inhabit one way of life, that they speak
one language, and that they themselves, as individuals, are singular, integral beings. All these assumptions came clearly into focus by the late nineteenth century, and all seem problematic (p. 18).

The singular identity model is a product of reductionist thinking involving isolated criteria and diversity in specific populations, plus claims that certain essential factors are unavoidable or “given by nature” (Calhoun 1997: 19). Calhoun concluded that researchers should apply the idea of relational or network identity to overcome reductionist tendencies in studies involving national identity or class formation.

Thus, in this dissertation I use an intersectionality approach to overcome reductionist assumptions that are inherent to the singular identity model. I do this while acknowledging that after three decades of development, intersectionality has been challenged.

Intersectionality was originally proposed by Creshaw (1989) in her pathbreaking article to illuminate multiple oppressions facing African American females who were “marginalized in the interface between antidiscrimination law and race and gender hierarchies” (p. 151). By looking into court documents about Black women plaintiffs, she pointed out the contradiction in analyses applying the single axis framework: sometimes the framework assumed that Black women's experiences should not be different from white women’s but sometimes it expected to see a difference between Black women and White women, or between Black women and Black men. According to Creshaw, this contradiction was generated by an “unidirectional exclusion” assumption that failed to recognize that:

Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars travelling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them” (p.149). Believing in that “intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism…. But it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply
indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver
caused the harm. (Creshaw 1989:140)

To thoroughly understand the multidimensionality of Black women’s experience and
fundamentally unrooted discrimination, Creshaw concluded that both Black liberationists and
feminists “must distance themselves from earlier approaches in which experiences are relevant
only when they are related to certain clearly identifiable causes (for example, the oppression of
Blacks is significant when based on race, of women when based on gender). The praxis of both
should be centered on the life chances and life situations of people who should be cared about
without regard to the sources of their difficulties” (Creshaw 1989: 167).

After three decades of development, however, intersectionality now refers to more than what
Crenshaw originally proposed. Ferree (2014: 428) describes intersectionality studies as either
locational or relational. While researchers in the former view intersectionality as bound by and
usually involving disadvantaged groups, those in the latter frame it in terms of social relations
that unfold according to processes and interactions involving all individuals.

Instead of asking “what is intersectionality?” McCall (2005) is more interested in the question
of how, i.e., the ways scholars “understand and use analytical categories to explore the
complexity of intersectionality in social life” (p. 1773). For McCall—who defines intersectionality
as “relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject
formations” (p. 1771)—intersectionality has methodologically been operationalized as anti-
categorical, inter-categorical, and intra-categorical. While members of the first group reject all
categorical identities, those who support inter- and intra-categorical approaches believe in the
usefulness of identity categories as units of analysis. Through the anti-categorical lens: “Social
life is considered too irreducibly complex—overflowing with multiple and fluid determinations of
both subjects and structures—to make fixed categories anything but simplifying social fictions
that produce inequalities in the process of producing differences” (p. 1773). The inter-
categorical perspective, in contrast, “requires that scholars provisionally adopt existing analytical categories to document relationships of inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions” (p. 1773).

The last one upon which this research is based on is intra-categorical approach. With a “focus on particular social groups at neglected points of intersection” (p.1774), this approach “falls conceptually in the middle of the continuum” between anti-categorical and inter-categorical complexities, “interrogates the boundary-making and boundary-defining process itself,” and “acknowledges the stable and even durable relationships that social categories represent at any given point in time” (p. 1773). More important, the intra-categorical approach recognizes the necessity of revealing in-group heterogeneity:

Traditional categories are used initially to name previously unstudied groups at various points of intersection, but the researcher is equally interested in revealing—and indeed cannot avoid—the range of diversity and difference within the group. Although broad racial, national, class, and gender structures of inequality have an impact and must be discussed, they do not determine the complex texture of day-to-day life for individual members of the social group under study, no matter how detailed the level of disaggregation. (McCall 2005: 1782; emphasis original)

This research also employs Rogers Brubaker’s (2004, 2009, 2015) approach to defining intersectionality as “a single integrated family of forms of cultural understanding, social organization, and political contestation” (2009: 21) to avoid falling into the trap of groupism. Brubaker has defined groupness involving ethnicity, race, and nationhood as “a variable, not a constant”, as “perspectives on the world [rather than] things in the world” emphasis original), and as “ways of making sense of the world … templates for representation and organizing social knowledge, frames for articulating social comparisons and explanations, and filters that govern what is noticed or unnoticed” (p. 32, 34). In addition, the goal of the Brubaker’s approach
is to research “the way ethnicity, race, and nation work in social, cultural, and political life without treating ethnic groups, races, or nations as substantial entities, or even taking such groups as units of analysis at all” (Brubaker 2009: 21). Not taking racial, ethnic, and national groups as units of analysis is not to say that these concepts are not important or that these groups do not exist. Instead, this approach is to advocate a cognitive turn that highlights the similar workings of race, ethnicity, and nationalism given that they are not sharply different, empirically and historically.

What cognitive perspectives suggest, in short, is that race, ethnicity, and nation are ways of making sense of the world. They are ways of understanding and identifying oneself, interpreting one’s problems and predicaments, and identifying one’s interests. There are ways—both institutionalized and informal—of recognizing, identifying, and classifying other people, of construing sameness and difference, and of “coding” and making sense of their actions. They are templates for representing and organizing social knowledge, frames for articulating social comparisons and explanations, and filters that govern what is noticed or unnoticed. Race, ethnicity, and nationality exist and are reproduced from day to day in and through such perceptions, interpretations, representations, classifications, categorizations, and identifications. (Brubaker 2009: 34)

In this way, rather than view contradictions in narratives as lies, this perceptual approach views them as manifestations of conflicts and interactions among different logics of perceptions. In this manner, occurrences of discursive contradiction are not hazards required for minimalizing purposes, but tips of icebergs requiring revitalization.

Lastly, I redefine Brubaker’s cultural understanding of groupness in terms of perceived moral values to restrict my analytical categories to race, class, and gender. My argument is that even though it is possible to categorize individuals in limitless ways, race, class, and gender are considered fundamental when dealing with perceptions of morality across different groups. Here
morality is broadly defined as moral judgments about good/bad and right/wrong. When people contemplate marriageability, they make decisions based on beliefs regarding the moral traits of different groups: polite, thoughtful, cultivated, organized, neat, kind, better personal hygiene, etc. versus ill-mannered, bad, low qualities, and so on. These binary decisions are strongly but randomly associated with race, class, and gender.

3. The Elements of Marriage Logic

One goal of this project is to clarify the logic of marriageability—that is, to look at the details of “the moral = the marriageable” equation. Marriageability is defined as a social process in which marital boundaries are drawn along moral lines based on us/them distinctions derived from perceptions about multiple identity categories that are perceived as outcomes to be explained rather than self-evident variables. Although identity categories are limitless, this research focuses on race, class, and gender, based on the belief that they represent basic structures for moral understanding.

The above-described definitions suggest that identity claims and partner choices are two sides of the same coin in that they are moral judgments revealing who we are and are not. Accordingly, one may conclude that ethnic and marital boundaries overlap, but, not all of us are marriageable and not all qualities are desirable, and marriageability construction represents a historical process in which meanings of identity categories change and intersect. Since historical causes can explain different interpretations of the same identity category, a key research task is to identify when, how, and which group differences are at play in the construction, reconstruction, and deconstruction of marriageability.

*The Marriageability Field*
Marriageability can be analyzed as a cognitive representation illustrating how and why people marry up/down and in/out—two dichotomies that respectively represent perceptions of between- and within-group differences, and that yield the four marriageability quadrants shown as Figure 1. The vertical marrying up/down axis emphasizes class differences that are broadly defined in terms of individuals viewed as being above/below others. The horizontal in/out axis (with “marrying in” located at the intersection of the two axes) emphasizes perceptions of differences between racial and ethnic groups.

The marriageability field can work objectively and subjectively. The field in which objectivity serves as an ideal type clarifies how between-group and within-group differences should work, but it is the subjective field that truly represents how people think and talk about marriageability. Combined, the objective and subjective forms of the marriageability field offer a baseline for comparisons of various marital formations and indicate the degree to which perceptions are accurate portrayals of reality.

Put differently, consider the marriageability field as a notion of area, a cognitive plane displaying a surface of the (un)marriageable for a group of people bounded by racial/ethnic groupness. This two-dimensional plane consists of four spaces (Quadrant I, II, III, and IV) by two lines (marrying up/down and marrying in/out). The marriageable area covers Quadrant I, II, and IV, suggesting that, cognitively, marital formations yielded by the combination of marrying in/out and marrying up/down are more inclusive than exclusive.
To “calculate” the space of the marriageable area, one needs no formulas but a capture of subjective definitions for critical “locations” from the studied group of people to decide the meanings of marrying up, marrying down, marrying in, and marrying out. Quadrant II represents marriageability in terms of marrying up and out—for example, a Chinese college graduate marrying a white doctor. Quadrant I is paired with Quadrant III, which represents undesirable down/out marital unions (e.g., a Chinese college graduate marrying a black spouse with a high school diploma). Quadrants II and IV represent marriageable variations, with quadrant II denoting situations in which individuals “marry out by marrying up” (e.g., a Chinese college graduate marrying a black doctor). This area reflects the mitigating effects of class on racial and ethnic differences. In contrast, quadrant IV emphasizes race—that is, the ways that perceptions of white supremacy mask class differences when individuals “marry up by marrying out” (e.g., a Chinese college graduate marrying a white with a high school diploma).
Using class differences as an example, the marriageability area for a Chinese doctor is much narrower than that for a Chinese high school graduate because their marrying-up baselines are different. The former is likely limited to individuals from middle or upper-class backgrounds, while the latter is free to marry working class individuals. More importantly, subjectivity is conditioned by temporal, spatial, historical, and institutional aspects of marriageability construction. Historicity—which plays a central role in deciding who are the most marriageable and unmarriageable—is generally determined by the cohort effect in terms of shared collective memory. Institutional contexts determine how and why certain intermarriage formations are normalized and more acceptable. They also shed light on the impacts of “culture” in perceptions of race, class, and gender differences, suggesting potential compatibility between marrying in/out and up/down, as well as perceptions of in-group and out-group differences.

**Marital Boundaries**

To clarify the changing nature of marriageability construction, I created a conceptual tool that I call *marital boundary*, broadly defined as a symbolic line based on distinctions between “us” and “them.” As a descriptive framework complementing the marriageability field, marital boundaries emphasize the cognitive dimension and make perceptions of group differences tangible. Put differently, marital boundaries serve as a subtype of symbolic boundaries, which Lamont and Molnar (2002) describe as conceptual distinctions for categorizing “objects, people, practices, and even time and space” (p. 168). More important, following Brubaker’s (2009) approach, this research conceptualizes boundaries as a social organization displaying multiple dimensions of group differences. Therefore, a key question for boundary research is: “Is the category associated with a significant boundary, in Barth’s sense…; that is, does it channel patterns of interaction in consequential ways?” (p. 26-27).

In this dissertation, the marital boundary concept is operationalized as an extension of moral boundaries, based on its utility for classifying individuals as good or bad and for making
decisions to act on, relate to, or maintain distance from certain individuals. Decisions regarding morality can immediately transform an “other” into “one of us,” and vice versa.

Although marital boundaries are symbolic, their cognitive dimension has an objective basis. The changing nature of marital boundaries suggests that they can be made, remade, and unmade according to different temporal and institutional contexts. However, boundaries cannot be subjectively crossed if they are not objectively “out there.” The subjective and objective bases of marital boundaries are like what Wimmer (2008) calls “categorical and behavioral elements.” The first element refers to “acts of social classification and collective representation” or cognitive schemes representing “ways of seeing” that divide the social world into us and them. The second refers to “everyday relationship networks resulting from individual acts of connecting and distancing—a cognitive scheme that offers scripts of action” (p. 975). Further, their combined subjective-objective nature makes marital boundaries malleable. Wimmer (2008) specifies the strategies that people use to “play” their ethnic boundaries: they either create new ethnic boundaries or blur existing ones via extension, reduction, inversion, or repositioning strategies.

Immigration research confirms the ever-changing nature of group boundaries. A number of studies have shown that immigrants can exercise their agency to cross, redo, and unmake their ethnic boundaries (Waters 1990; Alba 2006; Cornell and Hartmann 2006; Kasinitz et al. 2008; Telles and Sue 2009; Jimenez 2010), and intermarriage has also been shown to facilitate boundary-crossing (Telles and Sue 2009; Bailey 2008, 2009; Bean and Lee 2004; Lee and Bean 2010). Note that even though they are based on us/them distinctions, marital boundaries do not necessarily overlap with ethnic boundaries—the two are frequently decoupled. An individual’s marital boundaries present a range of possibilities due to the contested meaning of “us” that often results in gaps between “us” and co-ethnics. A second-generation Chinese American may believe that only other Chinese Americans are marriageable, thereby creating
interethnic and interracial boundaries requiring negotiation and coping strategies. In contrast, other second-generation Chinese may view both Chinese Americans and Asian Americans as marriageable—an example of marital boundaries drawn along panethnic lines. Less common are situations in which second-generation individuals exclude co-ethics from their marriageable categories in favor of panethnics (e.g., a second-generation Chinese who views Asian Americans but not Chinese Americans as “us”). Still another group consists of individuals who prefer interracial marriages (e.g., a second-generation Chinese limiting potential spouses to whites). The last two examples, both of which exist logically but rarely occur, consist of second-generation individuals who perceive all people as either “we” or “other.”

Although marital boundaries are symbolic, their effects are real, and therefore they can be strategically played. For instance, marital boundary-making processes based on family can perpetuate social inequalities by pairing race, class, and gender identity categories with family positions such as sons, daughters, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, and so on. Consequently, there is the potential for crossing boundaries to maintain them. As Fredrik Barth (1969) has observed, boundaries can persist despite their crossing by individuals.

The marital boundary conceptual tool raises several analytical questions regarding marriageability construction by immigrants. How do immigrants draw their marital boundaries along ethnic lines? What are the historical origins of distinctions made by immigrants between “us” and “them”? How do their perceptions of race, class, and gender impact how they make boundaries? Finally, what are the consequences of their marital boundary-making practices?

4. The Question and Arguments

According to my analysis, there is a significant role for perceived moral values in the making, remaking, and unmaking of marital boundaries, suggesting associations among morality,
identity, and marriageability. I therefore argue that the interactive effects of race, class, and
gender shape the transformation process through which marital boundaries are “moralized” in a
manner that confirms or refutes immigrant preferences regarding marriageability. I offer three
supporting arguments:

1. Nationalist feelings for one’s homeland are important. Immigrant identity claims with
populist roots affect boundaries between “us” and “other,” which in turn determines who is and
isn’t marriageable. Although the pre-emigration educations that many Chinese immigrants
receive generally facilitate the inclusion of Taiwanese as huaren (a “one of us” category), a
certain segment of Chinese-speaking Taiwanese immigrants—especially so-called “islanders”
who retain collective memories of violence involving mainland Chinese—often applies the “one-
drop” rule when defining mainland Chinese as immoral others.

2. The effect of homeland nationalism is frequently weakened by class considerations when
decisions about the marriageability of certain racial groups are made. However, the effects of
class are unique—for many Chinese-speaking immigrants, class trumps race in discussions
about the marriageable statuses of people of color, indicating potential for overcoming black
exceptionalism. Regardless, race generally trumps class among immigrants who embrace all
white people, including working-class whites.

3. Gender strongly affects marital boundaries on a family level. When Chinese-speaking
immigrants evaluate potential children-in-law, they frequently change the ways they attach
moral values to marriageability. Essentialist ideas about filial duties often influence immigrants
to make gendered interpretations of what makes for good children-in-law. When a daughter-in-
law’s performance does not match the expectations of traditional gendered norms, their
previous marriageable statuses may be challenged, and their racial, ethnic, and/or class
differences may be re-evaluated. In comparison, a good son-in-law is one whose performance
challenges gender stereotypes regardless of racial, ethnic, or class differences. According to
this finding, the perpetuation of gender inequality is an unintended consequence of marital boundary-making.

In terms of theory, this dissertation offers an alternative way of thinking about immigrant integration, with my analysis showing that a sole focus on immigrant identity is insufficient for capturing the bigger picture of how identity meshes with marriageability. My approach has disadvantages, one being that its measure of immigrant partner preferences is a proxy. Given that most immigrants marry before emigrating, gathering direct data on their original ideas about marriageability is not possible. However, I believe that the proxy measure used in this project—immigrant attitudes toward interracial and interethnic in-laws—is strongly correlated with marital preference outcomes, since the addition of a new family member is commonly accepted as an indicator of group social distance. This approach assumes that explanations regarding racial, class, and gender differences in immigrant intermarriages can tell us something about identity politics, as well as about how and why immigrants choose to identify with certain identity categories but not others. Further, it does not consider the factor of life course, which has been shown to be a significant condition for the formation of interracial and interethnic relationships.

One of this project's main contributions is its analysis of the interactive effects of race, class, and gender on the enduring power of homeland nationalism, suggesting a complex web of group and contextual factors. It offers a new explanation for in-group racial and ethnic differences in intermarriage that occur within an immigrant group, plus insights to the interaction between race and class, as well as the reproduction of gender inequalities on the family level. This research shows how perception is reality—or more specifically, how thought precedes action—by offering a marriageability conceptual framework.

To reduce the potential for misunderstandings, I will make two points. First, this research is a middle-ground analysis of group-level factors and their effect on the institution of marriage. One of my main interests is learning how ideas about distinctions between “we” and “other” are
collectively perceived and reproduced. In other words, the findings presented in this dissertation should not be misinterpreted as evidence refuting the personal spousal choices of individuals. Second, the purpose for examining the role of morality in marital and ethnic boundary formation is not to reproduce group difference stereotypes, but to reveal the arbitrary and changing nature of relationships among morality, identity, and marriageability. On the surface, any discussion of perceived group differences in terms of morality runs the risk of stereotyping. Yet once we accept that the different ways moral traits are attached to identity categories are not rational but arbitrary, the deeper logic of marriageability can be revealed. Further, the historical dimension of immigrant identity decisions shows how evolving identity categories are associated with moral traits. The key goal is to understand how immigrant identity choices and marital preferences work as moral judgments, and as Abend (2014) suggests, to recognize the moral backgrounds underlying these judgments.

5. The Dissertation

In this dissertation I will show how the marital boundaries of a group of Chinese-speaking immigrants are intertwined with moral beliefs based on racial, ethnic, class, and gender differences. The task begins in Chapter 1 with a review of past immigrant marriage studies based on the mobility model. Also, in that chapter I will start the construction of my argument that researchers have tended to focus on immigrant mobility as a source of racial and ethnic differences in marriage. To complement and clarify this model, it is necessary to add human conditions that shed light on the effects of class and gender on in-group differences in marriageability constructs.

Chapter 2 is divided into two sections. The first focuses on 1978 as a turning point in contemporary Chinese-speaking immigration to show how changes in international immigration
policies led to increased group heterogeneity. One result was the large number of Chinese-speaking immigrants who were officially identified as Chinese, but who did not identify with Chinese. The second section focuses on this study’s research method and its advantages and disadvantages, with a detailed discussion of data collection.

Chapter 3 examines the identity context of marital boundary-making, setting the stage for discussions in subsequent chapters. This chapter focuses on how immigrant identity works instead of what it is. After defining immigrant identity as the ways immigrants interpret their Chinese ethnicity of origin, it is possible to discuss the three strategies—symbolic, political, and cosmopolitan—that immigrants use to define what it means to be hyphenated Americans. By tracing the historical origins of immigrant identity claims, it is possible to analyze them as moral judgments involving identity options originating from both sending and receiving countries.

The next three chapters contain empirical analyses of the interactive effects of intersectionality on marital boundary formation, with Chapter 4 specifically examining the effect of immigrant identity. In Chapter 4 I discuss my observations of in-group differences in the ways immigrants interpret “us” and “marriageable us.” Chinese immigrants generally use a symbolic approach to homeland ethnicity that allows them to embrace Taiwanese as “us.” I found that many of my Chinese informants put Taiwanese at the tops of their preference hierarchies—an unintended consequence of the Cultural Revolution. In contrast, the Taiwanese immigrants I spoke with who had strong political views regarding homeland ethnicity tended to assign Chinese to their unmarriageable groups. This tendency has roots in an ethnic conflict between Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese natives that occurred in 1947, suggesting a colonial dimension to immigrant marriage decisions. Even though Japanese are perceived as immoral “others” in China and moral “us” in Taiwan, both Chinese and Taiwanese interviewees expressed preferences for Japanese over other Asian nationalities, suggesting limitations to the effects of nationalism and race/ethnicity. Both Chinese and Taiwanese interviewees gave
evidence of linking Japanese with positive moral traits, thus underscoring the perceived marriageability of Japanese, and suggesting an overlap of marital and moral boundaries.

Chapter 5 further discusses the interactive effects of race and class. To the highly achieving immigrants in the study sample, whites tend to be unconditionally marriageable regardless of their class status. In contrast, blacks are usually the least preferred unless they have achieved middle and upper-class status. The respondents’ different attitudes toward racial groups suggest a perpetuation of perceived white preference and the changeable nature of black exceptionalism. Even though the relatively cosmopolitan immigrants I interviewed played down the role of race, they still drew marital boundaries along moral lines, confirming the centrality of perceived morality in classifying groups of people.

Chapter 6 illustrates how gender trumps both race and class on the family level by looking at the ways immigrants evaluate the performance of children-in-law. I found that filial piety works in terms of institutionalizing the pairing of gender and family position differences. As a result, “good” daughters-in-law are those who follow traditional gender norms, and the “best” sons-in-laws are the ones who break them. In this manner, gender inequality is perpetuated in immigrant families. Gendered perceptions of family position differences also provide an alternative explanation for the intermarriage gender gap that I observed among the interviewees, with Chinese females more likely than males to participate in interracial marriages, but not because of their social or racial mobility achievements. Instead, their marriages are more the result of their family positions being less tied to racial and ethnic differences.

The concluding chapter considers immigrant conditions by discussing the missing pieces of the story given in this Introduction from a mobility model perspective. Several suggestions are offered for future research topics, including the relationship between mobility and visa type, marital boundary-making among second-generation individuals, and more detailed examinations of marriageability through the theoretical lens of morality.
Chapter 1  Studying Immigrant Marriage

1.1 Panunzio’s Prediction

In 1942, Italian-born sociologist Constantine Panunzio published an article that was perhaps the earliest effort to studying Chinese immigrants’ intermarriage through a comparative lens. Drawing from marriage licenses of 3,572 Chinese residing in the Los Angeles County in the 1920s and the 1930s, he (1942: 697-698) observed three marriage trends from the registered 97 Chinese marriages. First, marrying in was more popular than marrying out (“74 were marriages between Chinese and 23 were intermarriages”). Second, more Chinese men than women were intermarried (“All the intermarriages but one was between Chinese males and non-Chinese females”). Third, intra-Asian marriage was more common than interracial one (“14 Chinese married Japanese, 5 Negroes, one a native-born white, and 2 other yellow-browns. The one Chinese female married a Filipino”). Attributing the popularity of Chinese/Japanese marriage to cultural similarity, Panunzio predicted that the gender gap in Chinese intermarriage would disappear, and that those who intermarried were more likely to have an Asian spouse.

Yet, history has told a different story. About a half of century later, Morrison Wong (1989: 90-96) made a similar attempt, and he found continuities as well as changes in Chinese immigrants’ marriage trends between the 1930s and the 1980s. Like Panunzio, he found that “marrying to our own people” was the norm. Yet different from Panunzio’s prediction, he found that the intermarried Chinese immigrants tended to have a white spouse rather than an Asian one. In addition, the gender gap was not reduced but reversed. Consisting of 64% of interracial marriages with whites and 73% with blacks, Chinese females were twice more likely than their male counterparts to marry out. Wong also had new findings. First, class matters. According to him (1989: 100-102), working-class Chinese immigrants with income less than $20,000 were
more likely than their middle and upper-class counterparts to marry out. Second, length of stay in the U.S. and intermarriage were negatively related. In addition, interethnic marriages tend to be far less popular for U.S.-born Chinese Americans compared to other second-generation Asian Americans (Shingawa and Pang 1996). In short, Chinese immigrants’ marriage has been developed asymmetrically along racial, class, and gender lines over sixty years.

1.2 Marital Asymmetries

The characteristic of racial, class, and gender asymmetries in intermarriage is seen not only among Chinese immigrants but also among Asians in general. According to a recent survey (Livingston 2017), Asian Americans had become a group with the highest intermarried rate; three in ten Asian newlyweds married out in 2015. The intermarried Asians tended to have a white husband, suggesting racial asymmetry and gender gap in Asian intermarriage. Although class asymmetry existed, too, it was in a reversed direction. Asian college graduates’ intermarriage rate increased 4% between 1980 and 2015, but that of those with only a high school diploma declined 10% in the same period.

On the surface, one may claim that the rise of intermarriage is new in the United States. Yet, looking back, cross-racial relationships not only long existed but showed a U-shaped development. Its first peak occurred during the colonial slavery period when interracial sex between black and white servants was very common (Desmond and Emirbayer 2009: 455). Interracial relationships did not become a taboo and illegal until the early 1940s, suggesting a colonial dimension in intermarriage. Intermarriage patterns did turn upward since the 1970s due to the influx of “third world” immigrants from Asian countries and Latin Americas. This dramatic increase in intermarriage, which was described as an unintended consequence of the passage

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3 The only exception is Asian Indians.
of 1965 Immigration Act (Keely 1997), did not change the racial asymmetry of intermarriage among immigrants, but the ways this empirical phenomenon was analyzed.

1.3 Gordon’s Legacy

In 1964, Gordon’s *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* was published. It was a groundbreaking book that established the foundations of contemporary immigration theories. In 1965, the next year Gordon’s classic was in print, the Hart-Celler Immigration Act passed. It abolished a national origin-based quota system in place for a half of a century and radically changed the nature of immigration to the U.S. by promoting family reunification. It also allowed many more applicants from Asia and central and south America. This new chapter of the U.S. immigration history has directly affected the ways scholars imagine immigrants of color and produce knowledge about assimilation. But to some degree these efforts are responses to, reflections on, or returns to Gordon’s work.

On his book’s title page, there is a puzzling excerpt from *Alice in Wonderland*:

“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?” asked Alice.

“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.

What did Gordon want to tell us? It is obvious that here Alice was a metaphor for immigrants, thus the fundamental question of his book was where and how immigrants achieve at the destination of their migration journey. The answer provided by Gordon was marital assimilation. Following Park and Burgess’s (1921) usage, Gordon defined assimilation as: “a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life” (Park and Burgess 1921, cited from Gordon 1964: 62). In the chapter three of the book, “The Nature of Assimilation”, he (1964: 60-83)
discussed in detail on the seven “stages” of assimilation: “cultural, structural, marital, identificational, attitude receptional, behavior receptional, and civic.” The relationship among them was rather correlational than causal, as he interchangeably used “stages” with “ideal types,” “variables,” “subprocesses,” or “a set of conceptual categories.” He further differentiated assimilation from acculturation. While acculturation reveals out-group differences in “cultural behavior”, assimilation uncovers “social relationships” between the two groups; the former suggests “one factor or dimension in the meeting peoples,” the latter involves “the degree or nature of “structural” intermingling…the question of group self-identification, or any possible variable” (Gordon 1964: 62). In short, to Gordon, assimilation is about identification.

In addition to identity assimilation, Gordon also put an emphasis on structural one. He set clear causality among the correlation of structural, identity, marital assimilations. By structural assimilation, he meant: “large-scale entrance into cliques, clubs, and institutions of host society, on primary group level;” and he defined marital assimilation as “large-scale intermarriage” and as identity assimilation as “development of sense of peoplehood based exclusively on host country” (p. 71). Among the stages, structural assimilation was an engine for identity and marital assimilation, a necessary condition of immigrant integration:

If marital assimilation, an inevitable by-product of structural assimilation, takes place fully, the minority group loses its ethnic identity in the larger lost or core society, and identificational assimilation takes place….Once structural assimilation has occurred, either simultaneously with or subsequent to acculturation, all other the other types of assimilation will naturally follow….Structural assimilation, then, rather than acculturation, is seen to be the keystone of the arch of assimilation. (p. 80-81, emphasis original)

Gordon specified many strong assumptions for this causal relationship to exist, which tended to be ignored by later researchers. (1) The receiving country is a society characterizing cultural homogeneity but class divisions: the society “is made up of a population all members of
which are of the same race, religion, and previous national extraction. Cultural behavior is relatively uniform except for social class divisions. Similarly, the groups and institutions...are divided and differentiated only on a social class basis” (p. 69).(2)Middle-class, Anglo-Saxon origin Protestants represents the core group of the United States as a host society: “If there is anything in American life which can be described as an over-all American culture which serves as a reference point for immigrants and their children, it can be described...as the middle-class cultural patterns of, largely, white Protestant, Anglo-Saxon origins” (p.72). (3)Native-born children of immigrant generation members achieve complete assimilation by default: “this population....now composed largely of the second generation....has taken on completely the cultural patterns....thrown off any sense of peoplehood....has entered and been hospitably accepted...at various class levels....has intermarried freely and frequently...encounters no prejudice or discrimination....Such a situation would represent the ultimate form of assimilation” (p. 69); “While this (acculturation) process is only partially completed in the immigrant generation itself, with the second and succeeding generations, exposed to the American public school systems and speaking English as their native tongue, the impact of the American acculturation process has been overwhelming; the rest becomes a matter of social class mobility and the kind of acculturation that such mobility demands” (p. 79). (4) Extrinsic cultural traits of a sending country play a more important role than intrinsic ones to determine the acculturation process of an immigrant generation. Intrinsic cultural traits refer to “its religious beliefs and practices, its ethnical values, its musical tastes, folk recreational patterns, literature, historical language, and sense of a common past” (p.79). Extrinsic cultural traits are “Others, such as dress, manner, patterns of emotional expression, and minor oddities in pronouncing and inflecting English.... tend to be products of the historical vicissitudes of a group’s adjustment to its local environment...external to the core of the group’s ethnic cultural heritage” (p.79).
In short, in Gordon’s prediction, the first challenge facing contemporary immigrants of color is how to overcome cultural barriers hindering upward mobility to achieve identity and structural assimilation. To him, this is a long-term process that may take two or more generations of an immigrant group to accomplish marital assimilation. In other words, the most important two immigrant conditions to consider are mobility and identity options.

1.4 Immigrant Conditions

In 1965, the passage of the Hart-Celler Act marks the new page of the U.S. immigration history by shifting national origins of immigrants from Europe to Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean (Zhou and Lee 2007; Waldinger and Lee 2001). Yet studies on immigrant marriage still generally follow Gordon’s mobility model to explaining why immigrants marry along or across ethnic boundaries. The studies have generally adopted “birds of a feather” approach, falling into one of two categories.

Why Birds of Different Feathers Flock Together

Researchers of immigration in the first category, which emphasizes the marital formations across racial and ethnic boundaries, tend to follow assimilation theories that associate intermarriage with mobility, and that used intermarriage as an integration proxy to support Gordon’s argument that fully assimilated immigrants and their American-born descendants tend to desire white spouses as an assertion of American mainstream values. For example, Jennifer Lee (2015) argues that formerly undesirable Asian Americans are now considered marriageable because of their collective racial mobility, and that this achievement is a result of hyper-selectivity generated by the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which abolished national origin quotas.
Researchers have identified numerous factors facilitating intermarriage in addition to mobility. They have described links between the likelihood of interracial or interethnic relationships and linguistic proficiency (primarily English), educational attainment, length of stay in the receiving country (Lichter and Qian 2007, 2011; Okamoto 2007), self-described multiraciality (Curington et al. 2015), perceptions of whites regarding the marriageability of immigrants and minority groups (Moran 2001; Rosenfeld 2002), and native or non-native status (Blau, Blum, and Schwartz 1982; Lee and Fernandez 1998; Lee and Boyd 2008).

There is a growing body of literature exploring intersectional variances in immigrant marriage. By looking into Latino-origin intermarried couple’s experiences, Vasquez-Tokos (2017) coined the concept of negotiated desire to unfold “processes by which people become attuned to what they want in a spouse and decide how to seek out a potential mate in a local context (p.2).” Although she recognizes the role of “intersectional concerns” in partner choice, her definition of “intersection” that involves “race, class, gender, nation, and generation” seems too broad to deal with “categorical complexities” and consequences of intersectionality on the re/production of social inequality (McCall 2005). Put differently, adding in intersectionality is not enough to uncover how race, class, and gender work.

How does the rise of intermarriage impact the black/white divide in the United States? In general, scholars believe that the color line is blurring and eroding (Gans 1999; Alba and Nee 2003; Foner 2005; Perlmann and Waters 2004; Frank and Lee 2010), and that a postethnic U.S. is emerging (Hollinger 1995). Evidence shows that children of intermarried couples are more willing to claim multi-racial identity. According to Ruggles et al. (2009), about 2.2 percent of Americans marked more than one race when filling out census surveys.

*What Makes Birds of a Feather Stick Together*

While intermarriage scholars are more interested in explaining how and why birds of different feathers flock together, several researchers stand in the opposite position to examine the other
side of coin, factors that influence people to marry along ethnic boundaries. This line of research, generally grouped as the opportunity model, focuses on neighborhood-related effects, such as social isolation, group size, residential patterns (Kalmijn, 1998; Rosenfeld 2009). Yet this opportunity model generally assumes that “marrying in” is a passively natural outcome of limited interracial/ interethnic contact.

Researchers of qualitative approaches to “birds of a feather flock together” have generally commented on the importance of parental preferences and the potential for intergenerational conflicts over marriage decisions. For example, Kibria (1998, 2000, 2002) found that even though second-generation Korean and Chinese Americans often insist on the centrality of romantic love in choosing spouses, awareness of their immigrant parents’ preferences influence their perception that they would be better off marrying coethnics (see also Foner et al., 2009; Perry and Whitehead, 2015). Whites are often identified as second choices, followed by East Asians, Southeast Asians, Latinos, and African Americans. Other researchers have confirmed the presence of hierarchical preferences among immigrant parents in terms of race and ethnicity that emphasize blood purity and cultural affinity (Foner, 1997; Lee, 2004). Parental gender also influences marital decisions: Rumbaut (1996) is among researchers noting that immigrant mothers tend to play a more significant role than immigrant fathers in controlling their children’s socialization practices.

Yet, insufficient attention has been given to the question of how people who were usually considered “one of us” become less marriageable: Why do individuals from similar backgrounds and with similar characteristics reject one another. Among the exceptions are Kibria’s (2012) and Ocampo’s (2014) studies on second-generation Chinese and Korean, and Filipino Americans, respectively, which found that these adult children of immigrants do not necessarily view coethnics as being in their “most marriageable” categories. However, neither researcher addresses the process through which coethnics turns into one of the unmarriageable.
It is worthy to note that people tend to attribute group difference in intermarriage to “culture.” It has become a common sense that “culture” decides who to marry whom, but people are different in what it means. Half of a century ago, Panunzio (1942) had developed this “cultural attribute” analysis to explain group differences in intermarriages: “The most striking illustration of this factor…. whether marrying with their own or other people, married within their own culture” (p. 701). Similarly, Wong (1989) also recognized the power of “culture” and attributed the tremendous increase of Chinese/White marriages to the realization of “acculturation” among Chinese immigrants. Yet, While Panunzio believed that “culture” could facilitate interethnic marriages and Asian homogeneity, Wong suggested that its role was to promote cross-racial relationships and American identity. In addition, “culture” was also believed to promote in-group marriages. Numerous studies have found that immigrant parents tend to encourage their American-born children to marry in for the reason of sharing the same “culture.” Yet, if one factor can explain everything, it explains nothing. The omnipotent explanatory power of “culture” instead exposes its ambiguity, if not limitedness. When people talk about “culture,” they are talking about their perceptions of group differences. In this way, they assume that between-group “culture” is heterogeneous and that within one is homogeneous. Given “culture” is a synonym of groupness, it is the whole greater than the sum of behaviors of a group in its broader sense; it is a residual between observed and estimated group differences when it is mentioned in analysis. This use of “culture” is, in the words of Andreas Wimmer, a “container” type of group-ness imagination. By assuming racial and ethnic groups entail homogeneous culture, racial, ethnic, and cultural differences have become three interchangeable terms. In addition, if racial and ethnic difference is a barrier to forming cross-boundary social relationships, the long development of intermarriages should have dissolved boundaries among groups. Yet it seems that the opposite is true.
1.5 Mobility as an Engine

The “birds of a feather” approach of the mobility model discussed above generally recognizes immigrants’ racial and ethnic identities as main sources of group differences in intermarriage. Yet this model entails a homogeneity imagination regarding group formation. Therefore, its analyses tend to offer contrasting answers to the question of “which came first?” about the causality between intermarriage and group formation. The first line of research traces the origin of group differences in intermarriage to socioeconomic status, which is broadly defined as income, education, occupation, and so on. In general, while straight-line immigration scholars specifying upward, racial, and marital assimilations assert that fully assimilated individuals tend to desire white identities and intermarriage as an entryway into the mainstream (Gordon 1964; Gans 1992; Alba and Nee 1997), segmented assimilationists are less strict about the unification, preferring instead to underscore the positive effects of ethnicity of origin on integration and the possibility of downward assimilation among immigrant-origin populations (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Although the scholars disagree in what role ethnicity of origin plays in immigrant integration, they agree that upward mobility works as an engine for the goal of assimilation. In this way, intermarriage is a means to the end of “American identity,” even though they hold different views on what this identity means.

Nevertheless, the second line of research suggests intermarriage is the end and that differences in intermarriages among groups are due to a lack of group homogeneity. Given this viewpoint puts much more weight on within-group variations instead of between-group ones, it suggests “homogeneity first” regarding the question of “which came first” mentioned above. A typical example of this reasoning is assortative mating research. Assuming “likes attract,” this line of work focuses on factors of “homophily” that facilitate cross-boundary social relationships. The growing literature on online dating is an extension of this line of work.
Several efforts have been made to challenge the homogeneity assumption of group formation in immigrant identity research. For instance, Rumbaut (1996) reports that children of immigrants tend to take on different identities within the same ethnic communities, neighborhoods, schools, and families. In addition, according to Kibria (1997, 2002), it is possible for the children of immigrants to simultaneously identify with hyphenated American and panethnic identities in what she calls a “dual identification pattern.” This indicates that ethnicity and panethnicity are mutually reinforcing rather than competitive (see also Okamoto 2003). Those using a global and transnational approach have also identified several non-mobility factors for the high rate of intermarriage between Asian Americans and ethnic whites, including global image (Kibria, 2012) and the globalization of racial attitudes (Gold, 2004).

Nationalism and colonialism matter, too (Roth 2009; Roth and Kim 2013; Ocampo 2016). For example, Kim (2006) has described the post-World War II impacts of American colonialism on the prevalence of Japanese, South Korean, and Filipina brides in the U.S., resulting in a unique form of oppression in which certain Asian American groups are trapped by the dilemma of being both model minorities and forever foreign.

Yet, some questions remain unanswered. How does the dual identification pattern affect immigrants’ partner preference and choice? What leads to in-group differences in immigrant identity? Would racial inequalities automatically disappear if inequities between racial groups were to dissolve? Although between-group differences in intermarriage can be attributed to a lack of racial and/or ethnic homogeneity in group formation, the how’s and why’s of within-group gaps are not fully explained. Also, it has been demonstrated that biologically within-group differences are more significant than out-group ones: “As a species, humans have dramatically low levels of genetic variation…. Regarding race, there is much more genetic variation—8.6 times more variation, to be precise—within traditionally defined racial groups than between them (Desmond and Emirbayer 2009: 6).
More important, the puzzles stay unsolved regarding how and why immigrant intermarriage maintains asymmetric along race, class and gender lines. Given that immigrants’ identity consists of racial, ethnic, class, and gender dimensions, they all contribute to group differences in intermarriage. Family is one of primary fields that generates and sustains racial, class, and gender differences.

1.6 Family as a Source of Differences

Although family is a main domain where racial differences are forcefully embraced (Patterson 2009), its relationship with class and gender are dynamic and intertwining. For instance, class can affect immigrants’ identity choice. Rumbaut (1996) found that children born to middle- or upper-class immigrant families are more likely to take on hyphenated American identities because they tend to feel proud of the national origins of their immigrant parents—according to him, ethnic identity is “a measure of how strongly a child identifies with his or her parents” (p. 127). This idea finds support from a study by Portes and MacLeod (1999), who found that the children of middle- or upper-class immigrant parents are the least likely to develop panethnic identities.

Second generation members’ spousal decisions further complicate the intertwining relationship among race, class, and gender by igniting intergenerational conflicts. The conflicts are resulted from inconsistent expectations between immigrant parents and their children (Foner et al. 2009). In general, immigrant parents tend to encourage their children to marry one of us because of blood purity and cultural affinity concerns (Foner 1997; Hein 2006; Lee 2004). Parental preferences do matter—for example, Kibria (1997, 1998, 2000, 2002) observed that Korean and Chinese immigrant parents would discourage their children’s socialization with Japanese because of Japan’s historical invasions of Korea and China. Consequently, although
their children often insist on the centrality of romantic love in choosing spouses, awareness of their immigrant parents’ preferences tends to influence a belief that they would be better off marrying ethnics. Likewise, Sara Lee (2006) found that the popularity of interracial marriages with whites among second-generation Dominicans and CEPs (Colombians, Ecuadorians, and Peruvians) was attributable to the racial preferences of their immigrant parents.

However, immigrant parents’ preferences lose strength after their children reach the age of thirty, especially since unmarried children are unacceptable for Chinese immigrant parents (Kibria 1997, 2002; Kasinitz et al 2008). Further, researchers examining the effect of life course found a negative association between parental control and interracial relationship development. Joyner and Kao (2005) found that decline in parental control is strongly associated with an increase in interracial relationships, and Rosenfeld and Kim (2005) noted that young adults in an independent life stage are more likely to develop alternative relationships (including interracial and homosexual unions) as they move away from the tight control of their parents, relatives, and community members. The effect of immigrant parents’ preferences is also gendered. Rumbaut (1996) observed that the role of immigrant mothers was more significant than that of the fathers in influencing their children’s socialization. In addition, sons are more likely than daughters to feel pressure to choose their spouse according to their parents’ hierarchical preferences.

Yet, scholars of this line of mobility research tend to assume that immigrant families exist in a vacuum, and that members exercise their agency free from any structural constraints (one exception is Glenn 1983). This assumption suggests that immigrant parents create meanings of race, ethnicity, class, and gender on their own, and that they reproduce the meanings in their children without any changes.

In addition, family is not just a field generating group differences but also an institution with its own logic. More important, like every institution, family is structured with multiple categories
of positions, such as father, mother, son, daughter, children in-law, etc. They are family roles in common sense. When every position is tied to implicit but rigid expectations that are taken for granted by a group of people, family ideology construction is completed. Further, inequality is produced or reproduced when a familial position is intentionally or unintentionally paired with certain identity categories. Without a perspective recognizing multiple identities of a human, one cannot fully explain the causes of gender inequality within families.

In short, the mobility model and its singular identity at work assumption can only see part but not the whole picture about what generates differences in intermarriage between and within racial and ethnic groups on a familial level. To comprehensively understand how marriage is relative and irrelative to identity, a multiple identities model recognizing that homogeneity is neither a means for an end of grouping process is needed.

1.7 Bringing in Human Conditions

To apply the multiple identities model is to recognize human conditions. By human conditions I mean the factors that display commonality shared by immigrants and non-immigrants in their lived experiences, such as multi-positionality—people all play different social roles in different institutions. It suggests that people moving across national borders are not only migrants/emigrants/immigrants, but also humans. The assumption behind it is that one is not born but rather becomes a Chinese/Asian/Latino/African/White American.

The multiple identities model recognizes the role heterogeneity plays in group formation. Race is doubtlessly of upmost importance in the U.S. context, even though its concept and usage are competing and problematic (Fields 1990, 2003). Yet there is no consensus about whether the significance of race is declining. Some scholars assert that racial relations are

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4 A term borrowed from Hannah Arendt.
power relations (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Omi and Winant 1994; Takaki 1979). Several studies have also shown that the black-white gap in socioeconomic achievement is not closing (Bobo 1997, 1999; Charles 2001; Massey and Denton 1993).

Class matters, too, but it alone, it too, is an insufficient condition. As Calhoun (1997) criticized, Marx and Engels’ class analysis rarely examines the power of national loyalty on workers’ sense of self. Thus, they failed to consider that within-class differences matter, and that identities other than class were also at work when people responded to the economic inequality generated by global capitalism:

Indeed, even though they thought of themselves as members of the working class, most workers continued to think of themselves first as members of their craft or occupation...not simply as workers. This was especially true of skilled and relatively privileged workers who...chose as often to defend their positions against the less skilled, the more recent immigrants, and simply those not already in the union....Marx and Engels did not give adequate recognition to the fact that these other identities—community, craft, religion, nation—not only exited but could shape the way people responded to global capitalism. (Calhoun 1997: 27-28)

Recent studies also show an intertwining relationship between race and class. One research study found that racial groups display a similar pattern of class mobility (Bloome and Western 2011); compared to people’s class origin, where they were born explains more about their life chances (Milanovic 2012); Class inequality was particularly persistent among minorities of the top and bottom of the hierarchy (Clark 2014).

One may also maintain that people’s identity is imposed by others, so race plays a more important role than class. Suggesting that race is the most objective identity, this argument does not consider the subjective basis of this objectivism. The act of “Imposing’ itself is a decision-making in nature, which is subjective.
Gender matters, too. According to Ferree (2010), although the concept of gender has changed from as a static factor to as a social relationship, it has not yet fully integrated into family studies: Scholars still tend to ignore that gender is a structural inequality relating to other forms of inequality. Therefore, “family change has continued to be seen more as a crisis than an opportunity for challenging pervasive structures of societal inequalities” (p. 420-421).

To employ the multiple identities at work approach is to recognize the power of time/history, too, i.e., the enduring effects of pre-migration conditions. Pre-migration conditions matter because they pave the way for upward mobility. It is undeniable that not all immigrants start their American dreams at a same point. Going abroad and settling down in a foreign country requires accumulation and conversion of multiple forms and types of capital, suggesting the role of class background in making decisions about whether to move. It also indicates that between-group differences in integration may have its roots in within-group ones generated during pre-migration phases. Given that some immigrants get a head start in this race of integration, inequality is reproduced during their integrating processes. In addition, it is reasonable that immigrants have learned specific ideas about which racial and ethnic groups are more marriageable before moving to a new country. Further, it is very possible that these ideas are gendered because males and females have long been expected to play different gender roles in the family. More important, there is usually a conflict in what counts legitimate perceptions of group differences between sending and receiving countries. An immigrant group’s search for difference seen as an act of fulfilling justice in their homeland context may be read as discrimination perpetuating inequality in their receiving country. Given that perceptions of group difference may be contradictory to or compatible with each other, the relationship between intermarriage and the grouping process is more complicated than the one depicted by the one identity at work model.

Note that the singular identity model and multiple identity one is complementary rather than
competitive. Studies of immigration conditions focus on particularity—how immigrants as a bounded group face and overcome disadvantages facing them in their receiving country, while scholars with human conditions in mind are more interested in generality—how immigrants and non-immigrants alike live in this one world.
This chapter, serving as a rationale for studying this specific group of people, is divided into three parts. The discussion will start with a reflection on the historical origins of group heterogeneity among Chinese immigrants in the United States. Then it will move to present the times and chronicle the group’s development since the passage of 1965 Immigration Act. At the same time, it will argue that the year of 1978 marks a turning point of the immigration, making Chinese from the People’s Republic of China newcomers, empirically and theoretically. As a result, numerous Chinese-speaking immigrants who may be identified as Chinese by others and census data do not identify with Chinese. The second part will move to data collection and sampling methods. I will discuss the ways I reached out to Chinese-speaking immigrants in the San Diego area. The interviewees were mainly PRC-Chinese and ROC Chinese and their spouses, who were mostly student-turned high achievers and retirees. The last part of the chapter is about methodology, in which I will discuss how I apply a process tracing method and abductive reasoning to establishing associations among morality, identity, and marriageability.

2.1 1978: A Turning Point

China has long been one of the largest immigrant-sending countries to the United States. Its emigration began in the seventh century, with a peak in the mid-1850s. 17% of the Chinese emigrants, mostly those who were from Guangdong and Fujian provinces, chose North America (the U.S. and Canada) as their destinations, followed by Cuba (11%) and Peru (9%). This long history of immigration has produced six to seven generations of Chinese in the United States (Yanagisako 1995).
The percentage of Chinese immigrants to the United States dropped to 3% in the late nineteenth century because of the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which remained in effect until 1943. Yet during this period, an elite class of Chinese who were treated as privileged whites instead of “yellow peril” was free to cross national borders and enter the U.S.. According to Hsu (2009: 107-108), this exemption included government funded students, diplomats, teachers, merchants, and their family members and servants. In 1917, the Barred Zone Act added some more categories of people to the list, including government officers, ministers or religious teachers, missionaries, lawyers, physicians, chemists, civil engineers, authors, artists, travelers for curiosity or pleasure, and their legal wives and children under sixteen years old. So it is clear that not ALL Chinese were excluded. The 1924 Immigration Act assigned the status of “non-quota immigrants” to Chinese students, thus granting them an exception. In 1952, the McCarran–Walter Act granted this group of Chinese top preference for applying for the adjustment of immigration status to permanent residency. This citizenship right of naturalization was only given to ‘free white persons’ since the passage of 1790 Nationality Law. The special treatment received by these privileged Chinese suggests that people, and states as well, may use a group’s collective class, instead of skin color, to decide its position in their classification systems.

The face of Chinese-speaking immigrants to the United States has changed dramatically in present times. The passage of 1965 Immigration Act marked the beginning of contemporary Chinese-speaking immigration to the United States. Yet, in the earlier phase, the Chinese-speaking immigrants were mostly not from mainland China but from Taiwan and Hong Kong. Their origin is very important as homeland politics matter for the emigration of Taiwanese and Hong Kongnese, even though the relationship between the two places, Taiwan and Hong Kong, is in debate.

The political context of Taiwanese emigration can be traced to ethnic conflicts on February
28th of the year 1947. Its effect endures and strengthens because of the Chiang Kai-sheng regime’s retreat from Mainland China in 1949 and the three decades of martial law beginning in 1987. To the immigrants from Hong Kong, the planned handover of Hong Kong from the UK to China in 1997 played out as a push factor. Yet although some scholars asserted that the nature of migration from and to Hong Kong has always been political (Wong 1995: 147), others maintained that one should consider the role of class, as the middle and upper-class Hong Kongnese’s decision to emigrate might not be pushed by homeland politics but pulled by professional development opportunities in North American countries (Fong et al., 1994).

Although the 1965 Immigration Act did facilitate massive immigration from Asian countries, the Chinese-speaking immigration to the United States did not have a dramatic change until 1978, when China initiated its economic reform and re-opened its national borders for international migrants. The year also marked the beginning of the normalization of international relations between China and U.S. Since then, the immigrants from China have replaced those from Taiwan and Hong Kong, becoming the mainstream and game changers in both fields of immigration and international education because of their large numbers.

Changes in international migration policy in both sending and receiving countries led to the heterogeneity in nationality, ethnicity, and class among Chinese-speaking immigrants. The year of 1978 especially works as a natural time point for differentiating this group’s early arrivals and the newcomers. The former refers to Taiwanese and Hong Kongese, the latter mainland Chinese. The main difference between them can be best illustrated by the ways they interpret what “Chinese” means and their attitude toward this identity category. In general, “Chinese” has three layers of meaning: Chinese people residing in China (mainland Chinese, Zhongguoren), Chinese people residing in Taiwan (mainland Taiwanese, Waishenren), and ethnic Chinese (overseas Chinese, huaren). I will discuss the complexity of Chinese as an identity of category in more details in Chapter 3.
2.2 Data Collection

Data for this study were collected in the San Diego area. San Diego is among the most popular destinations for Asian immigrants and their children. For this reason, the first national survey of the second generation, the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS), was conducted in this area between 1991 and 2006 (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). As of 2012, 13.2% of San Diego residents are Asian origin, increasing from 7.4% in 1990 and from 10.5% in 2000 (Logan et al. 2012). With 266,000 Asian-origin residents in the United States (8.5% of the local population), San Diego ranked tenth nationally in terms of the concentration of Asians, and fourth in California, following Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Jose. These four metro areas are home to 32% of all Asian immigrants living in the U.S. (UPAC 2015). Next to Filipinos, Chinese were the second largest group of Asians in San Diego, followed by Vietnamese, Japanese, Asian Indians, and Koreans (Logan et al. 2012).

Between January 2014 and June 2016, I conducted in-depth interviews with 67 Chinese-speaking immigrants in the San Diego area. The length of each interview ranged from thirty minutes to three hours. Prior to our interviews I showed participants a consent form stamped with IRB approval and explained the need for recording interviews. Interviewees were asked to talk about the racial and ethnic compositions of their nuclear and extended families, their expectations and preferences for their children’s marriage partners, and how they get along with family members from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. All completed interviews were recorded and partially transcribed based on notes taken during our conversations. Individual interviewees made the decision to communicate in Mandarin, Taiwanese, or English.

I applied a snowball sampling method in the form of asking for referrals, making clear my interest in interviewing both immigrants and second-generation members. I used my personal
social circles to reach out potential interviewees. I was a member of and volunteer for two ethnic organizations, respectively run by Taiwanese and Chinese immigrants. I attended their social activities frequently. In each organization I actively disclosed my identity and spread the information to other members that I was reaching out for interviewees for my dissertation project. I was also a visiting student at UCSD during that period. Some of my interviewees were, or had been, teachers or students there.

2.3 Descriptive Summary of the Sample

The sample size is 67 (see Appendix for a table of a descriptive summary of the sample). Among all interviewees, 23 were born in China, 30 were born in Taiwan, 13 were American-born, and 1 was from the Philippines. However, birth place does not translate directly into identity claims. Some immigrants from China claimed Taiwanese American identity whereas several Taiwanese immigrants identified with Chinese American. Some of the American-born might identify with Asian American, instead of Chinese or Taiwanese American. More important, identity categories are inclusive. One may take on Taiwanese American, Chinese American, and Asian American at different time points in our conversation. Furthermore, people from the same place may interpret an identity category differently. For instance, immigrants from Taiwan showed different approaches to making sense of what it means to be Taiwanese American (see Chapter 3 for more discussions on the complexity in categorizing people). Therefore, it is difficult to break down the sample into a table showing their identity claims, which suggests an intertwining relationship between identity choice and marital preference.

It shall be noted that not all interviews were recorded. Among 67 interviewees, 11 did not allow me to record our conversations. Chinese immigrants were less willing than Taiwanese ones to have their conversations recorded. Entrepreneurs from China who came here with an
EB-5 visa and the immigrants with a Party and political background were especially cautious in the presence of a voice recorder. These immigrants tended to be transnational ones, too. To them, flying over multiple countries during a business trip was common. Their social circles were selective, expanding from Southern California and San Francisco and the east coast to southern Americas and Asian continents.

In addition, not all recorded interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed. This is a strategy for efficiency. Throughout the dissertation I came up with two criteria to filter interviews in making my data claims. First, the interviews must be successful with vivid details, memorable moments, and expressions of emotions. To me, a completed interview was not equivalent to a successful one. Based on my rules of thumb, the interviewees whom I consider likable at the first impression tended to tell their stories clearly, without hesitation. In other words, shorter interviews lasting less than one hour were usually the unsuccessful ones. Second, the interviews must be representative of the patterns I found across the data. In other words, their stories must contain sufficient information about how they interpret their identity claims and the ways they draw their marital boundaries along race, class, and gender lines.

In the later phase of my dissertation writing, I also made two decisions that led me to focus on the stories of 18 interviewees. First, I decided to remove the stories of the second generation from my analysis even though I had transcribed half of their interviews (I discuss the reason in the last section of this chapter about my reflections on positionality). Second, I decided to start each empirical chapter with a thick description of a leading actor. This was a technique I learned from the course on script writing I took when I was an undergraduate. My purpose of writing in this way was not to display the figures’ perfect personality but to show their imperfect humanity, the conflicts in what it meant by the “right” decision between two groups of people. As humans, we all make judgements based on some preferences that are legitimated by certain ideologies.
There are some negative cases in the data for sure. I had identified three negative cases, but I did not discuss them in length in the current draft. Two of them were Taiwanese Buddhist and Christian, respectively, who played down the role of race and ethnicity in making a person marriageable. These two cases made me suspect that religiosity might play a role, too. The last one was a Chinese postdoc whom I met at Salk institution. He had settled down in the United States for over two decades but showed strong support for communist ideology that differentiated him from the rest members of the overseas June 4th generation in my sample. I suspected that his limited mobility was correlated to his strong disapproval of non-Chinese children-in-law. Although I have done a preliminary analysis of these three negative cases, I am not confident in making a conclusion about what makes them different.

In terms of logging data, an essential task for researchers who use interviews as their main source of data (Loftland et al. 2009), I used three strategies to ensure accuracy. The first was an interview guide that covered the main topics related to my research for data logging. The second strategy was recording interviews using a pen recorder with the consent of the interviewee. However, several interviewees did not allow me to record the interview. I refrained myself from pushing or asking for reasons to show my respect. The last strategy I employed to assure data accuracy was to take notes. During interviews, I jotted down key words that I heard on interview guides. I tried my best to write detailed notes (3 to 7 pages) within one week after each interview. In these notes I identified contents that were especially interesting, confusing, or useful to support my listening of each recording. These notes, which may be considered the first step of analysis, also helped me document some unspoken details, such as my first impressions on interviewees, my personal reactions, and questions needed to address during follow-up interviews. Given that not all completed interviews were successful ones, I selectively transcribed interviews based on the notes I wrote. For efficiency concerns, I transcribed only the
parts that I highlighted in my notes. These interviewees were chosen as representatives, outliers, or “impressionists,” based on my knowledge of immigration studies and intuitions.

In general, the immigrants interviewed for this study are in some ways textbook examples of immigrant integration, having achieved success via education and work. Over half (62.3%) were student turned immigrants. With three exceptions (two divorces and one separation), all interviewees were married at the time of interview.

There are some demographic similarities as well as differences between Taiwanese immigrants and Chinese ones. The similarities include educational attainment and the language they speak. All the interviewees can speak Mandarin, the standard language spoken in both China and Taiwan. Yet, compared to Chinese immigrants, Taiwanese ones are older. The Taiwanese immigrants in my sample generally arrived in the 1960s and the 1970s, while Chinese ones were leaving their country between the 1980s and 1990s. Therefore, most of the Taiwanese immigrants are retirees moving to San Diego from other states. Their relocation was generally based on a hope to live closer to their children, especially their eldest sons, who have settled down in California.

Additionally, all my Taiwanese interviewees have at least one adult child who is married at the time of interview. The married children are disproportionately in interracial and interethnic relationships. Yet, a few immigrants said that their children had never dated Asians, including Taiwanese and Chinese.

Maybe the largest difference between Taiwanese immigrants and Chinese ones lies in the role homeland politics plays in their life. The effect of homeland politics is illustrated by the collective memories they respectively hold. The Taiwanese immigrants frequently brought up the 228 Incident, whereas Chinese ones mentioned the 1989 Beijing student movement. Therefore, I refer the former group as overseas 228 generation whereas the latter ones overseas June 4th generation. Chapter 3 will detail how the immigrants’ collective memories of
the two historical events impact their identity claims.

Table 1: Case Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese-Speaking Student Immigrants</th>
<th>Taiwanese immigrants</th>
<th>Chinese immigrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cohort</td>
<td>Overseas 228 Generation</td>
<td>Overseas 64 Generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of stay</td>
<td>Over 40 years</td>
<td>20 ~ 30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility type</td>
<td>Mobility in the highest degree</td>
<td>Upward generationally, Downward Transnationally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalism</td>
<td>Anti-colonialism nationalism</td>
<td>Anti-imperialism nationalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related to the US nationalism</td>
<td>Conforming</td>
<td>Alternative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic-myth making</td>
<td>Constructionist</td>
<td>Primordialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard language</td>
<td>Mandarin Chinese</td>
<td>Mandarin Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental language</td>
<td>Japanese, Holo</td>
<td>Dialects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that neither the 228 Incident nor the 1989 Beijing Student Movement was relevant to any questions listed in my interview guide. Thus, I was surprised to see the pattern between collective memory and identity claims emerging during the interviewing process. This surprise impacted the way I imagined immigrant integration and how I established causality in my arguments.

2.3 Data Analysis and Abductive Reasoning
I did not realize that I have long applied abductive reasoning to theorizing marriage until I started reading the recent work of Stefan Timmermans and Iddo Tavory (2012, 2013) in March of 2018. Based on pragmatist philosopher Charles Peirece’s theory, Timmermans and Tavory (2012) attempt to find the “third way” of theory generation from qualitative data, a way of constructing theories that goes beyond grounded theory and the extended case method. According to them, neither of the two methods can logically lead to innovative theories:

As opposed to both grounded theory and approaches that assume that we address data “with our favorite theory” (Burawoy 1998:16), we show that if we wish to foster theory construction we must be neither theoretical atheists nor avowed monotheists, but informed theoretical agnostics. (Timmermans and Tavory 2012: 169)

At the core of this pragmatist turn is abductive reasoning: “We argue that in the process of theory construction, abduction comes first - temporally and analytically” (Timmermans and Tavory 2012: 169). Defining abductive reasoning as “a creative inferential process aimed at producing new hypotheses and theories based on surprising research (p. 167);” Timmermans and Tavory (2012) suggested that “abduction is the most conjectural… because it seeks a situational fit between observed facts and rules” (p. 171), compared to the logics of induction and deduction. In addition, abductive reasoning requires theoretical sensitivity prior data collection: “rather than setting all preconceived theoretical ideas aside during the research project, researchers should enter the field with the deepest and broadest theoretical base possible and develop their theoretical repertoires throughout the research process” (Timmermans and Tavory 2012: 181).

In practice, the logic of abductive reasoning goes as follows (Timmermans and Tavory 2012: 171):

The surprising fact C is observed.
But if A were true, C would be a matter of course.

Hence, there is a reason to suspect that A is true.

According to Tavory and Timmermans (2013), the causality generated by abductive analyses, is justified by three “irrelated activities” – “identifying a causal sequence based on meaning-making structures” (p. 683), examining three forms of observed variation (“data set variation, variation in meaning making over time, and intersituational variation” (p. 684)), and “engaging the proposed causal explanation within a broader intellectual community” (p. 684).

Getting here (theorization) from there (observation) is a long and winding road. To me, Timmermans and Tavory not only offer insights into the “third way” of doing ethnographic research, but also ease a graduate student of her worries about the validity and reliability of the story she has told because she has no right and no privilege to defend herself by saying “because I just know”. Therefore, I am so grateful that now I have a tool kit to describe, and hopefully to legitimate, this black-box-like process, given that intuition does not suffice to justify the process of knowing. Below, equipped with Timmermans and Tavory’s concepts, I have divided my puzzling-out process into three phases and offered a metacognitive narrative of what I have done along the way.

*The Long and Winding Road*

Phase One: Identifying a Puzzle (2013-2014)

The first step of initiating an abductive analysis is to seek for observational surprises, puzzles and anomaly, because they are, in the words of Timmermans and Tavory (2012), “a central object for qualitative research design” (p. 169), “strategic in the sense that they depend on a theoretically sensitized” (p. 173), and they “may trigger a novel theory then emerges
methodologically through careful data analysis against a background of cultivated theoretical expertise” (p. 181).

Based on the definition above, I identified my conversation with “Victor” on March 23, 2014 as the starting point of the phase one of my abductive analysis and my defense of dissertation proposal in the October of 2014 as the end of this phase. “Victor” is a patent lawyer and a second generation Chinese American whose parents were from Shanghai in China. I knew him by the referral of his younger brother, a Ph.D. student in Electronic Engineering at UCSD, who was also an interviewee of mine. Looking back, I believe, among the people I interviewed, that he is the “asymptomatic carrier” of inequality reproduction associated with the multidimensionality of marriage. I detailed the emotional impact of his story on me in my dissertation proposal (see the appendix), but the feelings did not translate into methodological justification as I was questioned about the representativeness of Victor’s story from time to time. No, Victor’s story is not representative from the perspective of immigration scholars applying the inductive logic of grounded theory. But, according to Tavory and Timmermans (2012), it is this theoretical insignificance sensitized by previous immigration studies that makes Victor’s story a great puzzle, an object of a research design, and a trigger for theoretical innovations.

Not discussed by Timmermans and Tavory is the possibility of proto-theorization at this initial phase. Take my dissertation research as an example. My theorization work began when I started to conceptualize the marital boundary in my dissertation proposal. This proto-theorization would have been impossible if I had not read Brubaker’s theory about the difference in categories of analysis, practice, and administration. I felt that Brubaker’s theory was key to solving the puzzle, but I did not know why I knew it and how to proceed. However, my experience shows that theoretical innovations can be generated in earlier phases of research from extensive reading and empirical observations.
Phase Two: Observing and Interpreting Variation (2013-2016)

In the second phase of abductive analyses, researchers’ goal is to recognize three forms of variation from the qualitative data they have collected: data set variation, temporal variation, and intersituational variation (Tavory and Timmermans 2013). Data set variation is identified from a comparison of what has been observed with a logic similar to Mill’s methods of difference and agreement: “[T]he ethnographer collects situations that seem—either prototheoretically or because of previous research—to be instances of “the same thing…. [S]ituations are compared in order to see how specific differences in the situation lead to different outcomes” (p. 690). The second form of variation, defined as “meaning-making instances over time” (p. 692), requires researchers to make sense of data set variation within a historical context: “the causal explanation must explain not only actions at a specific point of time but also transformations of meaning making” (p. 691). The last is the intersituational variation, “a form of variation that is harder to construct in other methodologies”:

[T]he researcher collects actors’—and not necessarily the same actors’—actions in different settings and situations and shows that seemingly unrelated actions make sense as a single set under the researcher’s theoretical description. In other words, the researcher keeps one aspect of the meaning-making process constant to examine how different situations are refracted through—or transformed by—these semiotic aspects. (Tavory and Timmermans 2013: 692)

My three years of stay in San Diego marked the second phase of my abductive analysis. The first and second phases have one year of overlap, because I began collecting data before the defense of my dissertation proposal. In retrospect, I did not observe data set variation until I started interviewing Chinese immigrants and compared them with Taiwanese ones. The two groups’ variance in the “dependent variable”, defined as their interpretations of us and marriageable us, was too clear to ignore. More puzzling is that they both believe that their
preferences are legitimate. To explain the variation in the outcome, I started tracing the historical origins of marriageability in order to make sense of the meaning-making-in-action of the two groups, and I identified 228 Incident, the 1989 Beijing student movement, and the Cultural Revolution as three turning points for the two groups. It is worthy to note that my focus on these historical events is a hindsight. No questions on my initial interview guide touched on these historical events, so if my first few interviewees did not bring them up and spell out their importance, I would not have known their importance and checked this variance over time in my succeeding interviews. This experience suggests that qualitative interviews should better understood as a catch-and-throw process that requires researchers to continually revise their interview guide based on the data they have collected. A complete interview guide should be data-driven.

Compared to the first two forms of variation, I did not deal with much intersituational one given that my research was a case study drawing from one immigrant group residing in one place. A cross-national comparison is needed if one hopes to systematically account for intersituational variation.

Phase Three: Connecting Dots (2017-2018)

The last phase of abductive analysis, according to Tavory and Timmermans (2013), is to offer “a simplified causal explanation” from empirical findings (p. 683) that traces “distant cultural and structural elements” and “precisely “grounded” in theoretical debates in one’s community of inquiry” (p. 700). Although I have tried to generate causal claims from the collected data, my task in this regard is incomplete. As of the April of 2018, all I can say, at most, is that there is a correlation among morality, identity, and marriageability. My current analysis does not allow me to conclude confidently that causality exists.

Establishing a correlation is never easy, though. It is a trial-and-error process. I did not connect the dots until after I submitted my first very ugly draft of my dissertation. The turning
points came from my reading of three works in the March of 2017: Morrison Wong’s article changed my sociological imagination about the phenomenon of marital asymmetries I was looking into; the introduction of Beth Berman’s first book helped me realize that I had to find a theoretical lens other than immigration theories to make my analysis more rigorous; Rogers Brubaker’s recent work on trans identities guided me to intersectionality research and motivated me to explore the universal dimension of immigrant marriage. Yet the whole picture did not come into a fuller shape until I started reading Gabriel Abend’s work about the moral background in the November of 2017. Making moral judgements in terms of identity choices and marital preferences is normal and humane; the key is to recognize the changing nature of moral claims and to identify the sources for legitimation. The way that I passed through the last phase of abductive analysis suggests that extensive reading on the work of scholars outside of one’s community inquiry is not necessarily a waste of time; cross-disciplinarily reading may serve as a scholarly compass pointing to alternative explanations for the subject in question.

2.4 Reflections on Positionality

“[T]he researcher is part of the world of the people studied,” Timmermans and Tavory (2012: 172) pointed to the role of positionality in their cutting-edge article on methodology, in which they advocated abductive reasoning for “the third” way of generating theoretical innovations from qualitative analyses:

We always occupy a certain position (as parents, as academics, as middle-class Latinas, etc.), and this position colors our vision, by (1) allowing us only a partial access to the field and shaping the way in which our inter with us and (2) arming us with prototheories of the
world, ways to “case” the phenomena in front of us that are already deeply ingrained in the ways we perceived the world. (Timmermans and Tavory 2012: 172-173)

Put differently, one’s positionality is inseparable from his/ her intersectionality: researchers’ race, class, and gender impact what data they collect from their interviewees because their positionality partly decides how their interviewees interact with them. Positionality makes any study essentially incomplete.

How does my positionality— as a young, college educated woman from Taiwan— influence my data collection process? Positively speaking, my positionality is a key condition for the honest interaction between me and my interviewees. My interviewees generally treated me as one of us because I could converse with them in their native language, even though the Chinese immigrants recognized my Taiwanese accent immediately when I spoke Mandarin and the Taiwanese ones frequently made fun of me when I pronounced some Taiwanese words wrong. My Chinese immigrants are younger professionals who are at the same life stage as mine. Therefore, besides research, we would also talk about many topics that only middle-aged people would be interested, such as investment, career plans, and the future. Several of them have become friends and we have kept in touch, even though many of us are not living in San Diego anymore. Some moved to Los Angeles, the Bay area, and the Texas State for better opportunities or to start their own company; I relocated to Ohio in the summer of 2017. In contrast, my Taiwanese interviewees are much older than me. Thus, they saw me more like as their junior, instead of as an equal. However, I am indebted to some of them who treat me like their daughter or even a granddaughter. They often invited me and my husband for social

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5 I thank Joanna Dreby for pushing me to think reflectively on how my positionality had affected the validity of my work. In an email exchange in April 2018 she pointed out to me: “You are a young, college educated woman from Taiwan. This clearly has an impact on your study.” I did not put thought into that before this email conversation. And I am grateful for this reminder.
gatherings and bought us tickets for political events or festivals. Several of them would preserve some newspaper clippings relevant to my research topic. One taught me how to grow roses and lemon trees, another showed me how to self-make a foot bath tub to take care of myself.

My interviewees with the second-generation members brought good memories, too. Although English is not my native language, it did not become a barrier to the conversation between me and my second-generation Chinese American interviewees. They were very patient for the slower speed at which we talked. However, they were as frank as the first-generation members. Their non-positive comments on their Asian female counterparts especially surprised me and would get them in trouble. More puzzling is that three of them—all are the eldest son in their family—burst into tears during our conversation. To me, the second generation lives in a world that is totally different from their parental generation’s, and there are some scenarios that do not fit to textbook descriptions. Because I haven’t figured out how to deal with the emotional impact of their stories and the generational differences in their lived experiences, I decided to remove all the discussions about them from my dissertation and focus solely on the life of the immigrant parents.

My positionality results into some potential problems, of course. First, my Taiwanese interviewees may think that my analysis is politically incorrect and that I betrayed their trust. Second, my Chinese interviewees might intentionally say good things about Taiwanese people in front of me to show their politeness. Consequently, the data I collected were skewed to some degree. Would my interviewees say otherwise if I were not Taiwanese? Possibly. We could only know what the answer is until a person with the opposite positionality—not young, not female, and not Taiwanese—go to conduct the same study and identify some mechanisms that are not observable in this research.
In her groundbreaking work on immigrants’ racial identities, Mary Waters (1994) found that being black entailed different meanings for American-born and foreign-born African Americans. The foreign-born, regardless of their class background, tended to highlight their immigrant status to distance themselves from the American-born, because they saw the latter as “lazy, disorganized, obsessed with racial slights and barriers, with a disorganized and laissez faire attitude toward family life and child raising” (p. 797). Although the American-born generally described the foreign-born as “arrogant, selfish, exploited in the workplace, oblivious to racial tensions and politics in the United States, and unfriendly and unwilling to have relations with black Americans” (p. 797), the middle-class African Americans would particularly underline their ancestry ethnicity to distance themselves from working-class ones (p. 816).

The implications of Waters’ findings are three-fold. First, even people from the same racial group may interpret race differently; Second, one’s identity choice may function as status signal; Third, ethnic differences can be used “as clues for class differences” (p. 818). Regarding to the last point, Waters further described the perception of equating race with class as “a self-fulfilling prophecy” by pointing to the role of mobility in deciding immigrants’ ethnic identity formation:

If the association found here between social class and ethnic identity is widespread, this perception could become a self-fulfilling prophesy. It could be that the children of poor parents will not keep an ethnic identity and the children whose parents achieve social mobility will keep the ethnic identity. This will reinforce the image in the minds of whites that the "island people" are "good blacks," thus giving the edge in employment decisions and the like to ethnic blacks over American blacks. (Waters 1994: 818).
Conceptualizing identity option as a moral judgement on group differences, this chapter offers an alternative explanation for in-group variation in the ethnic identity of immigrants by bringing in the factor of collective memory to trace historical origins of identity claims.

3.1 Sean Han’s Identity Claim

Sean, 51, was an easily forgotten person, an average Chinese man. The normalness he radiated—the car he drove (silver Toyota Corolla), the clothes he wore (white no-logo shirt and black suit pant), and the body shape he had (medium height, normal size)—made him effortlessly blend into the crowd of eaters in an all-you-can-eat Asian Buffet restaurant during the lunch time of a usual week day in the January of 2016. Sean revealed his background in monotone with frequent long pauses:

I was born in 1966. I came to the U.S. in 1994. I came here as an international graduate student. At the beginning I was pursuing a Ph.D. in Geographics, earthquake related, in Indiana. [Pause three seconds] But I changed my major to Double E after two years of study. Having a bite of food from a plate of fried shrimps, Sean continued: “Yes, I am married. My wife and I got married before we came here. That was also in 1994. We have two kids [pause]. One is seventeen and the other is thirteen. Both are girls.”

Although he looked indistinct, Sean had been living an unusual life. A witness participant in the 1989 Beijing student movement who described himself as its “direct victim,” his memory remained vivid after thirty years had passed by. He recalled this experience with no pauses:

I cared about politics very much when in China. I had participated in the June 4th Incident. I had been interested in politics before the June 4th. I was from the University of Science and Technology of China. The June 4th Incident happened in 1989, right? Before that, there was already a student protests in 1986. It was mobilized by USTC students. Since then, I had
been actively participating in politics. I had been interested in it for a long time, enthusiastic about it.

The movement was indeed a turning point in Sean’s life. Since then, he walked a winding road to the American dream: applied to study abroad with one-year delay in the application; left for a software startup after receiving his candidacy; moved to California when the company went bankrupt. Yet after years of hardworking, he has gained a foothold in the country currently—he is a senior engineer in an international company at the time of interview. As the literature predicts, he claimed Chinese American identity: “I feel half (Chinese) and half (American) because I have been living in the United States for over twenty, no, twenty-one years. I was out when I was 28. So, I’ve been living here for about half of my life.”

Yet later in our conversation, he embraced Asian American, too.

I am a naturalized citizen, so I am kind of both (Chinese and Asian American). Of course, there are still some Chinese traditions in me; this is the part of being Chinese. But politically speaking, Chinese are too small to be a race. Compared to other Asians, Chinese population is tiny in number, with weak bargaining power. Many times, we must group with other Asians.

What should the interviewer of a questionnaire encode and key in Sean’s identity choice? Can we call him a bi-ethnic person because he self-identified with both Chinese American and Asian American? Immigrants’ identity option has long been considered a predictor for their adult children’s marital formation. A source of intergenerational conflicts (Foner 2006), it is a field where “the contest between new and old ethnic labels reaches its climax” (Portes and MacLeod 1999:29). There is a rich empirical literature on the role of ethnicity of origin in affecting immigrants’ identity option. Traditionally, ethnicity of origin plays either a negative or a positive force within American identity development among immigrants. Yet we know little about in-group differences in ethnicity of origin among immigrants, and their effects on identity claims. In
Sean’s case, if he is ethnically Chinese and racially Asian, what do “Chinese traditions” and “politically Asian” mean here? What is this mixture of hyphenated and pan-ethnic identities? One may recognize it as a transnational identity. But from which two places does Sean construct his “in between-ness”? Is it a cosmopolitan identity because Sean embraces all identity options available for him? Do all Chinese-speaking immigrants make a similar choice and interpret “Chinese” in a same way? If not, what generates the difference? In short, how do all these categorical identities and identity categories relate to one another?

This chapter addresses this question by applying Rogers Brubaker’s approach to explaining in-group differences in identity claims among Chinese-speaking immigrants. I pay attention to changes over time as well as discontinuities in the meaning of ethnicity of origin to reveal historical, relational and processual dimensions of identity formation. The main argument is: the ways that the immigrants interpret their ethnicity of origin decide what categories of practice and administration are and how they related to each other. Note how the argument sets a stage for the next chapter’s analysis on marriageability constructions.

This chapter is organized as follows. Section 3.2 focuses on Chinese-speaking immigrants’ identity claims to illustrate the workings of hyphenated (Chinese American and Taiwanese American) and panethnic (Asian American) identities as both categories of practice and categories of administration. Sections 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5 employ three categories of analysis (symbolic, political, and cosmopolitan) to investigate the intertwining relationships between Chinese, Taiwanese, and Asian American identities, and between categories of practice and administration. The analysis shows variations in identity claims within the Chinese-speaking immigrant group by uncovering the differing ways that the immigrants define and interpret ethnicity of origin. Finally, section 3.6 sheds light to the role of perceived moral values in making us/them boundaries among the immigrants.
3.2 From Option to Formation

The study of identity as an option is an example of the one identity at work model. It implicitly assumes that categorical identities are mutually exclusive, and that immigrants’ choice of identity is conditioned by social mobility and length of stay. More important, it applies a coincidental approach to identity categories. When a scholar is researching identity options of immigrants, s/he is studying immigrants’ decision on which category to practice from available categories of administration. S/he is employing the two categories of analysis (Chinese American and Asian American) to examine what identity China-origin immigrants choose from the available categories of administration (here the two available options are Chinese American and Asian American) and how they practice these categories. In this way, Chinese American and Asian American are functioning as categories of analysis through the eyes of the scholar, and at the same time, they are categories of administration and practice to the immigrants of interest.

The Enduring Power of Tiananmen

The 1989 Beijing Student Movement, the so-called June 4th incident or Tiananmen Square Protest, was a turning point for making a new Chinese generation, broadly defined. It is a historical episode transforming not only the internal politics of China but also international relationships of the world. Tiananmen Square, where this Incident occurred, was a place that “the true believers came for inspiration, for a glimpse of Mao, for the most Durkheimian of collective representations of social membership” (Calhoun 1989: 56). That the incident is a symbolic marker of a generation is best expressed by Cai Jian, a singer of social conscience in

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6 The movement’s causes, consequences, and mechanisms are an ongoing debate. While Calhoun (1996) attributed its successful mobilization and failure to culture, Zhao (1998) shed light to its material basis, pointing to the effect of campus ecology on student mobilization. Here, campus ecology illustrating spatial layout of the Beijing university campus worked as a meso-level condition for promoting dormitory-based network and student population’s distribution.
China, who once identified his generation as a “Mao generation” in an interview: “Don’t say that we are not belonged to the same generation. If Mao’s picture is still hanging on the Tiananmen Square, we are the same generation.”

In academia, Dingxin Zhao is among the first and the best to illustrate the impact of the incident on the making of a new generation. In his groundbreaking book, *The Power of Tiananmen*, he (2000: 159) described the incident as the peak of a student movement lasting for three months:

Beijing students started the movement on April 15, 1989; upon Hu Yaobang’s sudden death. The movement achieved some success by early May. However, unlike the two earlier student movements, the 1989 BSM was not able to sustain its success. While the government was pushed to make limited concessions, a few students started a hunger strike at Tiananmen Square on May 13 to demand more radical changes. The action drew hundreds of thousands of sympathizers once the condition of the hunger strikers deteriorated. The hunger strike was a big success in mass mobilization. However, it interrupted the Sino-Soviet summit and antagonized most of China’s top state leaders. Thus, the government announced martial law. Yet, martial law could not be carried out immediately. On the night of May 19, in a popular belief that the soldiers were going to harm the students in Tiananmen Square, Beijing residents went out by the hundreds of thousands and stopped the army. The troops had to withdraw, and the student occupation of Tiananmen Square was preserved. Then, on June 3, the army entered Beijing once again. They met with violent resistance. Yet with much more resolute orders from the government, the troops pushed their way through the square, leaving behind several hundred dead and thousands more wounded. (Zhao 2000: 159).
“The movement was suppressed, but people did not forget,” Zhao concluded: “Much of Chinese politics since then has centered on the ghost of the movement and its aftermath. The impact of this movement on China’s politics has yet to be fully realized (p. 159)”. It is true that “the ghost of the movement” is, and will be, haunting Chinese people who were “there” at that time, even though they might not be “at the scene” or later moved out of the country.

3.3 Overseas June 4th Generation

In general, among the June 4th generation, the memory of the incident imprinted on them three characteristics. First, its members tended to be college students when the incident took place. Before the incident, they were an “aggrieved population” who were “ready to be recruited” because of discontent for China during the 1980s (Zhao 1996: 160). Consequently, they had long desired to study abroad by viewing it as a safety valve that could provide them with “hope and a way of escape” (Zhao 1996:152). By 1989, the estimated number of Chinese overseas pursuing a post-college degree was about 90,000.

Second, these college students tended to hold a pro-the U.S. attitude. This was exemplified by a “going to America” fever among Chinese college students at that time. The number of people taking a TOEFL exam in the Beijing area rose from 285 in 1981 to 35,000 in 1988; the population of Chinese graduate students registered in the U.S. universities grew from 2770 in 1980 to 33,390 in 1989 (Zhao 1996:148-150, 156). My interviewees confirmed this “going to America” fever. Sean Han told me that he just “followed the trend” when deciding where to study abroad:

Coming to the United States was a trend at that time. It was a fashion. Everyone came to the United States. It was easier to come here. The reason I chose to study in the United States was related to my situation at that time. The Mainland was poorer at that time.
Although I was working— I was already a graduate student— the monthly salary was low. I earned six RMB as a graduate student at that time. Generally speaking, graduate students were poor unless the major you studied was one of the government’s focus areas. In short, I was poor, so I wanted to go abroad.

The pro-democracy attitude has long characterized Chinese student nationalism. Defining nationalism as “more about a certain people’s perception than about the objective reality as seen by outsiders” (Zhao 2002: 890), Zhao summarized the contributions Chinese student nationalists made to the political development of contemporary China (pp. 887-888):

During the Republican era, student nationalism contributed to the demise of the Kuomintang regime and the rise of Communist China. During the late 1980s, a widespread crisis of faith among Chinese students towards the communist regime led to frequent student protests, which culminated in the 1989 pro-democracy movement. The political attitudes of today’s Chinese students will shape tomorrow’s Chinese politics.

This pro-U.S. attitude hardly disappeared even after the movement failed. Examining the U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999, Zhao (2002) concluded that anti-U.S. nationalism was not a reality among elite college students in China, who “had very ambiguous feelings towards the United States”:

They disliked some of the United States’ foreign policies, but they thought very highly of American democracy, greatly admired America’s achievements, and wanted either to study in American universities or to work in American companies. A great admiration of the United States’ political system plus other personal interests had prevented the development of anti-American feelings among Chinese students. (Zhao 2002: 903)

Lastly, June 4th generation members were playing the traditional role of intellectuals. As intellectuals in China, the students were obligated and entitled to challenge the state’s legitimation. This observation is not new as Calhoun (1996:23) has reminded us. In order to
better understand what brought the ups and downs of the movement, the student participants should be conceptualized not just social actors but “uncompromised intellectuals” who were “moved by a sense of national identity and of profound cultural crisis.” Yet, they were unable to make “common cause” with the rest of non-educated Chinese populations, leading to the movement’s failure.

Given the 1989 incident was inherently a pro-democracy movement aiming to establish an autonomous public sphere independent from the China state (Calhoun 1989), its failure fueled the anti-Communist ideology among student participants who were pushed to leave. An interviewee from Zhao’s study (1996) recalled how TOEFL centers in Beijing were packed after the incident:

[After the crackdown of the 1989 CSM, many Beijing students rushed to apply for the TOEFL test.] [TOEFL centers in Beijing] started to accept the January 1990 applications for TOEFL test in October 1989. There was a rumor around that this would be the last test held in China. The other testing centers were already full. Qinghua center was the only one that still had not started the application. The scene was unforgettable. Many people waited in line overnight simply to be registered. Yet the situation had become so chaotic in the morning that the registration had to be cancelled. Then they decided to hold the registration at the university education bureau.... At least three to four thousand people showed up. Many people came not for themselves but for their classmates or friends to make sure that if the applicant had failed to register, they would register for him/her.... Terrified by the situation, the TOEFL center decided to let everybody register and created a new testing site at the centennial hall of Jingxi Hotel. I took my test there. (Zhao 1996: 152-153)

_Uncompromised Intellectuals_
Among my interviewees, Peter Ren, 50, a real estate broker who was born in Anhui Province, a relatively underdeveloped place in China, recalled how he made his mind to “go out” because of the failure of the movement:

When I was a young adult in school, you wanted to do something to make the society better. I was the chair of a student union….in the deepest of my heart I wanted to do something influential to help people. Student protests already started when I was in Anhui in 1987. That’s prior to 1989. If you read wiki it started already in 1987. I had been involved in the 1987 movement. I met many students from my school. We became the core of the protests because we wanted a better government, a democratic society. It was always my dream back to that teenage time. In 1989 when the government started to crash down this movement I felt desperately helpless and I knew there was nothing I could do to change that country. I told myself: “This is not the place I want to stay, and these people don’t need my help. They don’t need to be awoken. Screw you guys. I am out of here. I am pursuing my personal achievements.

Further, the intellectual-like students' participation in the movement was a demonstration of morality in action. As Zhao (2000) pointed out, the students applied a traditionalist approach to justifying their protest by underlining the immorality of the regime. The historical origin of the immorality could be traced to the Cultural Revolution. Put differently, culture matters for the mobilization of the movement as it works as a stimulus for the emotions of actors as well as viewers. In the words of Calhoun (1989:21), the movement was characterized by “an internal temporal rhythm”— “wild swings of emotion, euphoria and panics, periods of calm and of intense activity, sleepless nights and midday fainting spells”— that transformed the students' identities.

Like Chinese student immigrants belonging to the June 4th generation whose members share similar memories of traumatic-like historical events, the Taiwanese ones in my sample are
part of the overseas 228 generation influenced by a massacre which resulted from ethnic conflicts in 1947 in Taiwan.

**Ethnic Massacre within “Us”**

While the immigrants from China tended to mention the 1989 student movement when talking about what it means to be Chinese American, the immigrants from Taiwan generally associated their identity claims with an ethnic massacre happening in 1947, the so-called 228 Incident.

To highlight the effects of historical origin on their identity claims and marriageability constructions, I refer to this group of immigrants as the “overseas 228 generation.” The 228 Incident of 1947 (with 228 referring to the date, February 28) is considered a turning point in Taiwan history, one leading to ethnic polarization and paving the way for the long-term development of Taiwanese nationalism. The incident has been described as a breaking point resulting from long-held resentments between two ethnic groups mistakenly described as blood-related. One group consisted of government officials, soldiers, and their relatives associated with the KMT, and who fled to Taiwan following the 1949 victory of the CCP. The other group consisted of residents whose Taiwanese roots could be traced back many generations prior to 1949. At the time of the incident, a significant number of Taiwanese considered Japanese their native language due to their upbringing during the Japanese occupation. Starting in 1945, the KMT government enforced authoritarian rules across the island (including a ban on speaking Japanese in schools and in public areas), thereby establishing a large inequality gap between the two groups. The 1947 incident was started by a KMT agent’s unreasonable arrest of a Taiwanese street peddler selling cigarettes in Taipei. There is no official number of deaths in the riots and random shootings that followed, with estimates ranging from the hundreds to 10,000. The imposition of martial law that began in 1949 lasted until 1987—among the longest periods of martial law ever recorded for a national government. Evidence of ethnic polarization
beginning in the 1940s can still be found today, primarily expressed as preferences for the KMT or DPP (Democratic Progressive Party). The 228 Incident is still considered divisive, with some viewing it as an intentional attempt to “murder or exile [a] whole generation of social and political elites” (Falbertschauer 2002). During the martial law period several political activists went into exile, some escaping to Japan, but most moving to the United States. Some of those who settled in the U.S. agreed to be interviewed for this research.

3.4 Overseas 228 Generation

The 1947 Incident has multifold influences on the development Taiwan; one of them was to “murder or exile the whole generation of social and political elites” (Falbertschauer 2002). The survivals played an important role on the ethnic polarization in Taiwan; the exiles fled to foreign lands, some to Japan but mostly to the U.S., becoming what I call overseas 228 generation. Although the mobilizing power of the 1947 Incident had officially turned from substantial to formal when a memorial museum was established in 1997, it stayed forceful in the mind of its overseas members in the U.S., the Taiwanese student immigrants in this research. When arriving in the new land, they soon replaced their counterparts in Japan, becoming hardcore advocates of Taiwan independence movement in the 1970s (Falbertschauer 2002).

The composition of this overseas 228 generation has more similarities to, rather than difference from, the June 4th generation represented by the Chinese student immigrants discussed in the previous chapter. Its members, participants and observant of the 1947 Incident, were also a small group of elites and intellectuals. Not a small proportion of them were college students who later applied to the U.S. universities for graduate education. After graduation, the Taiwanese ones showed a “study and stay” model of immigration, too.

Elites on the Blacklist
Nevertheless, the mobility pattern that the 228-generation developed is different from that of the June 4th one, directly causing their involvement in the formation of a transnational political community. The transnational downward mobility facing the Chinese student’s immigrants indirectly led to their minimal participation in China politics. Different from the overseas June 4th generation, the Taiwanese student immigrants’ transnational movement had changed from the state of immobile to highly mobile. The 1947 Incident brought Taiwan to enter the world’s longest martial law period, giving rise to the complete immobility of its students overseas. The direct product of the martial law was decades long of White terror. The Taiwanese student immigrants commonly shared the memory of black-listing during the White terror era. Some described White terror as a main push factor for their emigration. This was expressed by Steven, who expressed no regret to leave when asked if he would do the same choice when things re-started over: “Yes, I would still choose to leave, because, first, I don’t like the weather in Taiwan. The summer is too humid, and the winter is too cold. The second concern is about politics. At that time, the main reason pushing us to go abroad was our discontent toward the politics. In White terror we were living!” Numerous Taiwanese student immigrants had experience years of “stuck” for being black-listed. Black-listing was a way used by the KMT government to put under close surveillance overseas Taiwanese suspected for having pro-communist, pro-democratic attitude during the White terror era. When people were black-listed, their application to the renewal of passport and visa tend to be rejected, resulting into the loss of nationality. A direct consequence of was a decades long separation from their relatives left behind. Since most of the Taiwanese immigrants in my sample had held positions in Taiwanese student associations when studying in the United States, being black-listed was a common experience. Steven Chen had lived apart from his wife for over five years because of it. His wife recalled this experience:

I was unable to go abroad at that time. He was on the black list. He had service spirit. When living in Kansas State, he was always giving a hand to friends, like helping friends to move.
He was elected to the President of an Association, and then he was black-listed. I was unable to come here when he was on the list. He couldn't go back, and I couldn't come here. We had been separated for almost five years. An American congress man finally helped us out.

Yet, after the immobility phase, the Taiwanese student immigrants have instead developed a highly mature transnational political community, which is in opposition to Chinese ones' low interest in participating in homeland politics transnationally. Several them visit Taiwan yearly; numerous would never miss Taiwan's Presidential elections. Every four years, they gathered as tour groups, spending thousands flying back to just vote. Backed up this highly transnational mobility is the immigrants' exceptional "integration" in the United States. The difference in transnational political community formation between Taiwanese and Chinese immigrants suggests an independent relationship between upward mobility and transnational attachment.

Note that the effect of collective memory is so transcending that it extends to non-witness participants. Although some interviewees were not “at the scene” in either the June 4th or 228 incidents, they belonged to the same cohort. Although Dan Zhang did not personally participate in the Beijing Student movement, he was nevertheless belonged to the June 4th Generation as he expressed similar emotions as the witness participants did:

I had experienced the June 4th Incident, because I went to college in 1988. The June Fourth Incident was happening in 1989. It might be the only time that China was so close to the West. It totally had a chance, but unbelievably it was [pause]. The government put it out just for its own interests, for a small group of officials to keep riding on folks' back. This was very, very selfish. The communist party, the people in high places didn't follow communism to do things. The communism was used to fool the people below. How you can sacrifice yourself for it? Everything they did was totally selfish. It didn't consider ordinary people; it didn't consider universal humanism. It was totally a policy of deceiving people. The country has
many chances, but they use the so-called communism to [pause]. I hope China can soon give up all these things like living in lies.

One may argue that the stories of the overseas June 4th and 228 Generations were cases of diaspora, instead of immigration. I stick to my stand point by defining diaspora in a strict sense: “dispersal was due to some politically traumatic event and that those involved seek to return to the homeland” (Rex 1995: 29). Given the interviewees rarely expressed an intention to return to their homeland, they were better conceptualized as immigrants, instead of exiles.

3.5 Symbolic Ethnicity

Taking on a symbolic form of hyphenated identity means to attach ethnicity of origin with culture (Gans 1989). Most of the China-born immigrants in my sample are of this type. When asked to choose their identity, they tended to claim Chinese American and equated Chinese ethnicity with tradition, education, family values, genealogy, and behavior. Sean Han chose to identify with Chinese American because he felt “there are some Chinese traditions in me,” as described at the beginning of this chapter. Later in our interview, Sean brought up Chinese traditions again and used the term and education interchangeably: “Because I received Chinese education before out of the country, I didn’t know other Asian countries, didn’t know what their traditions or educations look like. I am more familiar with Chinese, so I much more identify with it.”

In addition to tradition and education, Sean also mentioned family values when discussing how Chinese culture was different from American one:

I feel one thing different (between China and the U.S.) is that in China they still value family relations, like respecting the old and cherishing the young. These traditions were the education I received since I was a child. At least it was this tradition in the old times but maybe it has changed now.”
Another example was Greg Chen, 52, a senior manager in Qualcomm, one of the largest wireless technology companies in San Diego. The company was so popular among Asian males that San Diegans frequently classified this group of people into Qualcomm men and non-Qualcomm men. “Always Chinese; it’s about blood and culture,” Greg answered firmly. Having stayed in the United States for over half of his life—he came to the United States in 1991 from Nanjing Province to pursue his Ph.D. in Electronic Engineering, he too emphasized the cultural elements in his hyphenated American identity: “Being Chinese means keeping Chinese tradition and culture. Food, cultural advantages, values, sacrificing for your family, and education, [these are] Chinese benefits.”

Several immigrants hold a neutral, sometimes negative, attitude toward their ethnicity of origin. Peter Ren, a real estate broker, was one example. When we first met at a Starbucks in the UTC mall, he introduced himself by saying that “I agree to do the interview, because I feel that I have to let you see another version of Chinese.” Arriving in the U.S. at the age of 25, and now turning to 50, he said he was “half Chinese and half American.” He was one of few interviewees who answered all questions in English:

It depends. Coming to a dinner table, I am more Chinese. I have my food with chopsticks, and that’s the Chinese part. But in terms of other values such as hygiene matters, I think I am more American. American culture is healthier. For example, in Chinese culture we kind of dig everything with chopsticks. We don’t see that very often in American culture. That is unsanitary. You don’t see that in a dinner table in the U.S. But Chinese dig in the same place. That’s sometimes I feel distanced from that culture when I go to party. It is not about which culture is better, it is about hygiene.

Later in our conversation, he defined Chinese culture with family and education, like other immigrants from China did: “There is a good thing and a bad thing in Chinese culture. The thing
I like it is its values. I think the most important value in Chinese culture is family. The second important value is education."

Compared to Peter, Dan Zhang held more negative attitude toward Chinese culture. He put emphasis on American ideals, instead of Chinese benefits, when talking about what it meant to be Chinese American:

I think I would choose Chinese American. I personally identify with American ideals. Taking on this identity means— of course, I am Chinese in terms of blood lineage, but (as a native) coming from the Mainland and had been living there for twenty-three years, I do not feel that there are many good traditions kept there. I came here, and I feel cultural differences existed. Its culture and value are better than that of the Mainland.

“May I conclude that you see yourself more American than Chinese?” I asked.

“Yes, you can say that. I appreciate American culture [more than Chinese one].

Note that the point here is not what attitude the immigrants hold toward their ethnicity of origin but how they interpret it. Because the way they interpret ethnicity of origin decides the relationship between categories of practice and categories of administration, between hyphenated identity and panethnic identity, between Chinese American and Asian American.

Inclusivity

To the immigrants who attached symbolic/cultural meanings to their ethnicity of origin, Chinese American and Asian American were not exclusive but complementary. They tended to view Asian American as a political identity that helps them to cope with the discrimination they faced in the United States. Greg, the Qualcomm manager, told me: “I feel particularly uncomfortable when people are saying that Chinese are stealing technological ideas from the United States.” The two solutions he took were stopping overthinking in the working place and participating in civic activities advancing Asian American rights in his leisure time.

Sean’s interpretation of Asian American revealed its inclusivity with Chinese American, too:
Chinese American and Asian American are hard to tell. I know many Asians but most of my friends are Chinese. There are many differences [in Asian Americans], but being an Asian American is mostly based on a political concern. Politically I am Asian American but culturally speaking, I go for Chinese.

To the immigrants who held a less positive attitude toward Chinese ethnicity, hyphenated American was still inclusive with panethnic American, but they did not see much political power in the latter category. As Dan described:

To me, every Asian group is different because their native language is different. Each has its own tradition, too. I respect each of them and what they bring in, like Laos’s community, Vietnamese community, and Indian community, if everyone identifies with American. I think that is the most important thing: different, but American.

Peter expressed a similar opinion:

When you say Asian American, it is a big giant pool. It includes people from Philippines, from Singapore, from Malay, from Indonesia, Japanese as well as Koreans. Even Chinese we ourselves have people from Singapore, Hong Kong, Malay, Indonesia, and Taiwan. Taiwanese do not identify themselves as Chinese, though. There is a huge difference. I see it [Asian American] as a category about how you define yourself. Asian American is a broader category, and when you claim it, it includes Japanese American, Chinese American, whatever you want to call them. I think it’s just a category, just a label.

For some cases, the immigrants interpreting their ethnicity of origin symbolically hold neutral if not pro-Taiwan attitude toward cross-strait relations, too. Peter is one example:

Taiwan is already [pause]. Taiwan has its own places, its own systems, and its own army. They are already there. It doesn’t matter how you call it. Part of China? It is not connected with China, right? I am not a big fan of big, giant China. I care more about individual freedom. So, if you ask me whether a country is bigger, or an individual is bigger, I think individual is
bigger. Countries ask individuals to sacrifice for them because they need it. That’s part of the doctrine I hear in China for twenty-five years.

Chinese-speaking immigrants from Taiwan may display symbolic ethnicity, too. Mary Liu, 65, a wife of a 1.5 generation Colombian and a mother of three mix-raced children, expressed firmer American-first standpoint. The fifth child of her nine siblings, Mary was used to working her way through. While in Taiwan, she had been working for a cafeteria of an U.S. air base during the day and studying for a degree in Pharmacy at night. Yet she could not wait for graduation and decided to try her opportunities in the U.S. to get rid of poverty. Mary, with a tourist visa, went and find a job to support her on the second day after arriving in New York City in 1974. In the working place, she met her Colombian husband, an intern from Syracuse University who moved with his upper-class family at 14. The couple married and had their first kid in 1979. They together raised three biracial children, two daughters and one son. Yet, Mary went solo after forty years of marriage mainly because the husband was a habitual cheat. They have been in a legal separation for four years but decided to stay as what it is due to the disagreement on property distribution.

Although having long been in an interracial relationship, Mary replied with “I am Taiwanese American” without hesitation when asked what her identity was:

My parents grew up in Taiwan. They were islanders. They spoke Holo, not Mandarin at home. My mom hardly understood Mandarin…. I am always lived by Taiwanese American. I am not Chinese American. I know nothing about China. I have never been to China. So, I really don’t know what Chinese are like. Most Americans don’t know what Chinese like.

To her, being Taiwanese American means not being Chinese American:

It depends on your geographic relations. I am not Chinese American. I am not entitled to speak on behalf of them. But from my perspective— I have been living here for such a long time, and I have many Taiwanese American neighbors— comparing them with me, [they]
are less able to be connected to this society. It’s a melting pot. They’re already fifty, sixty years old when living here. They are here because of their children, and the main purpose of their stay is to take care of their grandchildren. So, they are more close-minded. Because I was only in the early twenties when arriving here, I am adoptive to the culture of this society. I understand its system and their ways of doing things [more than they do]. Their life circle is more limited, smaller. They were not living here in a younger age, so their knowledge and understandings are more confined.

Yet, Mary’s identity is an American-first one.

I have been here for over forty years. I have left Taiwan for such a long time. I don’t feel I am a real Taiwanese now. I am, bloodily speaking, though. I cannot say I am a 100% American, either. There are many habits and cultures in me are Taiwanese. I am like 70% American and 30% Taiwanese. Although I am not 100% [American], I used to the life here. I like the weather here more, the environment, the air, and the way people doing things. I am totally used to it. I am OK for a visit to Taiwan but will not be used to it if it is a long stay.

Mary insisted that her Taiwanese American identity is irrelevant to a pro-independence attitude:

I have no interest in politics. I’ve been living here for, so long. Taiwan’s independence has no meaning to me. Anyhow, I will not go back when getting older. Independent or not, I am fine with either, if there is no war, no killing each other.

To Lisa, being Taiwanese American means she was born in Taiwan and married to an American: “My parents are Taiwanese Fukenese. After I was marred to my husband I did not change my identity at all. I am still Taiwanese and American.” Lisa’s American first attitude is revealed by her full hearted expression of her pride for the U.S. when talking about how living here has transformed her life: “I am very proud of the U.S. because this country... I lived here more than I lived in Taiwan. This was the country educated me in many ways. I am still learning;
I am still growing up.” Since her identity is American-first, she showed priority of the U.S. over Taiwan. In her eyes, the U.S. is a country with no flaws:

Which part I couldn’t accept? My god, I can’t think of any. I have a hard time accepting, you know, how Taiwanese people…. You must be patriotic, right? You cannot speak of freedom. I came here, and I understand I can speak of freedom. My favorite part is the people over here. They would dress everything including wearing American flags on their pants, and they wear them around the beach. Chinese people would never wear like that flag in their pants. I felt uncomfortable to see them wearing their flags around the beach. But now it doesn’t bother me.

To Lisa, being Taiwanese American means not being Chinese American. Lisa chose the former category to distance her from the latter:

We must identify ourselves as Chinese when I was in Taiwan. We had that identity because your brain sort of washed that way. I was born in Taiwan. When I came here, I had that change [in identity claims]. When people asked me, ‘are you Chinese?’ No, I am not Chinese. I am not from China. And Taiwanese were from Taiwan.

Like Mary, Lisa’s symbolic approach to her Taiwanese ethnicity leads to her indifference to politics. As Lisa expressed:

I don’t have opinions about Taiwan independence. I think if Taiwanese have good life. I don’t like a war going on, because, you know, Chinese are always aiming the gun to Taiwan to make sure Taiwanese behave.

Lastly, symbolic ethnicity facilitates her embrace of Asian American identity:

It doesn’t bother me whether others see me as Asian American or Taiwanese American. I am very open-minded. It’s like religion. They are the same thing. I don’t go to church. But I believe God is good to Christians as well as other people.
3.6 Political Ethnicity

Although some high achieving immigrants from Taiwan spoke Mandarin, too, they identified not with Chinese American but Taiwanese American. Being Taiwanese American involved multiple layers of meaning. On a surface level, it meant their naturalization. Steven Chen applied this approach to defining the meaning of being Taiwanese American:

I am Taiwanese American. I didn’t become Taiwanese American until in the 1980s. At the beginning, I didn’t consider myself as Taiwanese American. I started identifying myself as Taiwanese American when I applied for the U.S. citizenship. You choose it as your country, so you live here. That’s why I am Taiwanese American. But you still have ties to Taiwan, so you become a Taiwanese American. This means your nationality is the United States, but you are always from Taiwan, and you are always Taiwanese.

Exclusivity

For many of the immigrants, birthplace matters because they can use it to justify their perceived exclusivity between Taiwanese and Chinese. An example of this thinking was expressed by Larry Lin, a retired computer engineer who grew up in a village in southern Taiwan, and who moved to the U.S. in 1970:

The difference comes from where you are from. For example, if you are Taiwanese, then clearly you are from Taiwan. If you are Chinese American, then I know you are from China. “Chinese American” is vague, though. Sometimes it refers to ethnic Chinese,<br />
Huaren, but not Zhongguoren [PRC-Chinese] … I do not correct people who say I am a Chinese American, unless it’s related to certain viewpoints, [for example] they purposefully say, “you are PRC-Chinese, Taiwan is China’s.”

An association with the Japanese colonial period is another factor perceived as justifying a sense of exclusivity between Chinese and Taiwanese. A typical example is Frank Deng, a
transnational entrepreneur who moved to the United States in the late 1960s after graduating from the best university in Taiwan. After completing his postdoc training at MIT, he started several bio-companies that have made him a billionaire. Although Frank has achieved the highest degree of upward mobility, he has taken on a Taiwanese-first identity:

I am Taiwanese American. It’s of course because of China. We Taiwanese are not Chinese, I have always thought this way. I can talk a lot about it, but in short, Taiwan is not China, and Taiwanese are not Chinese. You know Taiwan’s history, right? Taiwan was colonized by Japan for fifty years, so Taiwan has been “Japanized” since that time. From our generation—both my father and mother received Japanese educations, and I was influenced by them—we are more like Japanese if Japanese and Chinese are compared. Every time I visit Japan, I always admire the environment in Japan and the people there. Many Taiwanese think this way if you ask them. We are more like Japanese. We are less like Chinese. I think it’s very important to emphasize “Taiwanese.”

Another example is Steve Chu, who has lived in the United States for over five decades since graduating from Kansas State University. He cited Taiwan’s democratic institutions and elections when describing his perceptions of differences between Taiwanese and Chinese:

I have long considered Taiwan as an independent country, even though international relations are changing. If Taiwanese work hard, it should be no problem to maintain a democratic regime ... A long time ago the Chinese here were belittled because they were railway workers. When we came here in earlier times, Americans said we were “Chinamen.” This was their discrimination toward Chinese. Many Chinese come here with hopes that China will become a strong country that they can rely on. But Taiwanese have no such thinking. This is where they differ from each other. So, Taiwan needs to keep its democratic systems. Economic development is less important. Democratic life is more important than material stuff.
Larry expressed a similar opinion: “Politically speaking, I identify with Taiwanese for sure. Taiwan shall be our own country. Frankly, Taiwan is an independent country. It does not change because of China or something. China shall be a brother country. I don’t have to listen to what you say.”

As the comments above indicate, “being Taiwanese American” is a political statement, and a strong way to express support for Taiwan independence. Describing oneself as Taiwanese American means disagreeing with Chinese who claim that Taiwan is part of China—an example of Brubaker’s (2009, 2013) differentiation among categories of practice, analysis, and administration, meaning that a Taiwanese American identity overrides the Chinese and Asian categories that have been assigned to immigrants, either officially by the U.S. Census Bureau, or informally by Americans who tend to collapse all Chinese or Asian categories into one.

Being Taiwanese American not only means to be against-Chinese but distant themselves from the label of Asian American. To them, Asian American was neither a political identity nor a cultural one. As Frank put it:

Asian American is a more general identification. Everyone knows that. I think the main point here is that we emphasize “Taiwanese.” We say more frequently that we are Taiwanese American than Asian American. In fact, Americans also do this way. When they are asked about where they are from, it is rare that they say they are from Asia. Supposed they are from Japan, they will say they are Japanese American; from China, Chinese American; if from Korea, Korean American they are. Asians are probably referring to people from Southeast Asia.

To some immigrants, there is no conflict in being politically Taiwanese and culturally Chinese. This is illustrated by Philip Huang, the professor with a 1.5 generation Chinese wife, who described himself and his American-born children as “ethnical Chinese”:
Although I am Taiwanese American—we have a family tree document; it seems that our ancestors moved from Fujian’s Fuzhou, or Quanzhou, I am not sure, before the tenth generation—it means that ethnically I am Chinese. It is like German means the citizens in Germany. Chinese refers to the citizens of the PRC. Since we are not PRC citizens, we are Taiwanese from Taiwan. [We are] ethnically Chinese, though. Therefore, my children say they are Chinese American because they have never lived in Taiwan. They were born in the United States. Both their parents are ethnically Chinese. Both are Hans, right?

Yet Philip Huang’s support for Taiwan independence promotes his Taiwan-first identity, suggesting he adopts the political approach to interpreting what Taiwanese-ness means.

3.7 Becoming Cosmopolitan

Several Chinese-speaking immigrants developed their identity neither symbolically nor politically. They applied a cosmopolitan approach to interpreting their homeland ethnicity. These immigrants emphasized not culture or politics but humanitarianism when they talked about what it meant to be hyphenated American, in which the term hyphenated could be replaced with Chinese, Taiwanese, or Asian.

Albert Lin, a professor of music, was one of three who went for Asian American identity among my parental interviewees.

I generally choose Asian American. This choice is totally chosen from the perspective of American politics. My simple thoughts are that [taking on Asian American identity] enables people to recognize the existence of a stronger community. Koreans, Japanese, and other Asians, all can possibly group together. That power given to a political situation is what I am thinking of.
Born in 1972, Albert arrived in the U.S. when he was just 17, less than one year after his participation in the 1989 Beijing Student Movement. He recalled what happened on the night of June 3rd and how the Incident pushed his leaving of China:

I was born in 1972 and went abroad when I was seventeen. So, I was sixteen when I was in Beijing … Then it was the night of June 3. I was in Tiananmen Square, too. I oversaw the restricted area, to stop soldiers from breaking into the Square. At that time, I hit a small solider. My voice was hoarse because I was shouting at that time, every day. But I remember him and me; I caught him and held him down on the ground. He was crying and kneeling. Then he looked at me. He was a small solider. He didn’t know what he was doing; he didn’t know why he was in Beijing. He was near my age. His eyes, his crying with knees on the ground, you will never forget.

Different from the immigrants accepting the whole Chinese benefits package, Albert took an elective approach to his Chinese traditions. He embraced not cultural China but historical China, which he believed to facilitate his cosmopolitan awareness:

More precisely, it means the culture I like. That said, there are many things in Chinese culture that I dislike. But when you are learning, you begin with the contemporary history, then dating it back to the Qing dynasty, the Ming, and the Tang. You trace the culture and art little by little. You learn and meanwhile you start to feel that your imagination is opened. You can give yourself more, like you are more cosmopolitan, more open-minded, and have richer cultural deposits. It is these things that I identify with.

Therefore, Albert distanced himself from anything that was too “Chinese,” manifested by his rejection to China-related symbols. One time he refused to let his art work to be associated with “the red”:

I would resist [to be called Chinese], but of course it is very subtle. For example, I frequently had a book in print. One time when they designed a cover, they wanted to describe me as
Chinese American or Chinese, which seems perfectly compatible with “red” to them. My name was written in bright red! I refused it. It is the same. It is the symbolism that it represented I rejected. What I dislike the most are the culture and values in the Mainland China. Because of my background, because of my own June Fourth experience, I think the Mainland culture and education are deeply harmful. Many of them are lies. I have long strongly objected to the education in China, to the culture in China, and to the ways the Mainland teaches us what it means to be Chinese.

**Becoming Humanitarian**

Like other overseas members of the June 4th generation, Albert too acknowledged that his witnessing of the Incident played a large part in his identity choice. Nevertheless, the Incident did not promote his anti-communist ideology but his humanity:

I feel that relationships between people and politics are very complex. They are all tragedies, from our perspective as well as theirs. Since then I have long felt that what really interests me is not political movements but the stories of people, the humanity. When I left China, I wanted to find a way back, because I don’t identify with the Chinese government, even though I have a Chinese passport. What parts of China can I identify with? Since then, I have started to do self-learning of those things I couldn’t learn in China, but they were all about China.

More important, to Albert, the relationship between his Chinese ethnicity of origin and Asian ethnicity of settlement was neither inclusive nor exclusive. He employed a broader category of identity, here his Buddhist religious identity, to transcend the tension derived from his identity formation. This was expressed by our conversation below in which he discussed the ways he solved marital conflicts with his Japanese wife which resulted from the difference in political viewpoints.
“Many are from this problem,” Albert recognized the political source of marital conflicts: “I think they are related to a broader issue: politics, such as the tension between China and South Korea or between China and Japan. It is about their very different ways of expression.”

Me: Do you two discuss politics?
Albert: Of course, we do. I really wanted to know what the truth is from their perspective.
Albert continued:
We even go visit their Yasukuni Shrine. We visit it every winter. They lost all their ancestors during the War, so we must pay respect. To me, this is very important. I must go and see, to understand what it is from their perspective. Do they go there with an attitude of militarism? Or, is that just a way of worshiping their ancestors? I must figure out, so I go there every year.
Me: How do you negotiate this political tension?
“I think the easiest way is to,” Albert replied:
Listen more carefully. The stronger the emotions are, the more carefully you must pay attention; to listen what people say from the bottom of your heart. This is a kind of, you know, Buddhist thinking. I learned it from Buddhism. Real annoyance can lead you to true comprehension. You see, in Vimalakirti Sutra, it says: “vexation is Bodhimanda.” People without worries are not in the Bodhimanda…. This means when I am involved in strong conflicts like this, I feel listening and experiencing more important. Therefore, I am willing to visit Yasukuni Shrine: to experience, to understand what they are talking about. We bring out kid together to immerse ourselves in that atmosphere, to understand their experience. It is very important.

Note that Asian American identity does not necessary promote one’s cosmopolitan awareness. Claiming Chinese American identity, Yvonne Zhao, 55, a senior software programmer in the Turbo tax company, was another example evidencing how some immigrants
had developed a cosmopolitan-oriented identity to transcend the tension between ethnicity of origin and ethnicity of settlement.

Sitting in the company’s spacious food court, Yvonne, a single mother of two children, one eighteen years old and the other was sixteen, radiated confidence and independence. Her all black suit, fast speaking, and sharp logic were somewhat intimidating. Before settling down in the U.S., Yvonne had worked in Singapore for several years. She was poached by an international head hunter company and moved to the U.S. in 1993. Like most of her fellows, Yvonne identified with Chinese American: “I am of course Chinese American. It has no meaning to me. That’s a fact. It just meant I was born and trained and received primary education in China. It’s just a fact.”

Like the immigrants showing symbolic ethnicity, Yvonne developed an American-first identity and equated Chinese culture with education:

In fact, I feel I am more American in terms of life styles. I live like an American. But deep inside, I am Chinese. I am more culturally Chinese by the traditional education I received. My ethnics, my morals, are more like Chinese. For example, in the working place, when I take a job assignment or a project, I make commitment to it. I work hard on it. I think this spirit was coming from my original education.

Also, like her fellows, she thought people from Taiwan were one of Chinese because they spoke the same language, “I have Taiwan-origin friends. I am not sure if they call themselves Taiwanese. I think they shall be Chinese American. In general, if you speak Chinese, you are part of it.”

The inclusivity between Chinese American and Asian American characterizing most Chinese immigrants was also seen on Yvonne:

[Being called Asian American is] totally OK for me. You see, there are many forms without the box of Chinese American on it…. I never thought about that [the difference between
Chinese and Asian]. Asian American may include non-Chinese Asians but being called Chinese American is more representative. I think it depends. For example, in my company, it’s a very large one. There are many Americans, aka whites, and non-immigrant ones. You say to them that you are Asian, it is [pause]. Chinese is easier to understand. If I say I am Asian, they may not think I am Chinese. They may think I am Vietnamese. I have that kind of feeling.

However, Yvonne’s emphasis on diversity when she talked about her parenting philosophy made her more cosmopolitan alike.

I don’t purposely raise my kids to become Chinese American. But I do emphasize diversity. You have people from different backgrounds. You learn the best out of what you have. You see many American kids around you, at least in California, no matter you are Chinese or not. There are many racially and ethnically mixed kids in school. I think they all come from different backgrounds. There are many varieties. I generally let them know that no matter you are Chinese or non-Chinese, or like Indians— you can tell from their look, right? — whites or non-whites, every racial and ethnic group has their advantages. You must learn best of it.

3.8 Identity Claim as a Moral Judgement

The immigrants took differing approaches to interpreting their ethnicity of origin, but their identity claims nevertheless showed a common “moral background,” in the words of Gabriel Abend (2014). Their decisions regarding identity categories involved judgments about which groups had good character. This was evidenced by Peter Ren, the real estate broker, who praised Taiwanese over Chinese for the former’s better values in terms of human rights and parenting styles:
I have a lot of friends from Taiwan. Some people’s backgrounds are deeply related to China, some are not. I learn perspectives from both sides. That is an extraordinary opportunity for me to understand Taiwan. And I think Taiwanese, in a lot of ways, is evolving in its own way. It's different from what we have in China. Let’s put it this way. Taiwan at least produced Ang Lee, a world-known director, right? They produced Jason Wu, a fashion designer, right? He designed a dinner gown for Michelle […] He was brought here [from Taiwan] because of his very girly side. Wu is probably homosexual, a gay. But his parents saw it as a gift. They had no problem for that. But I would say about 99% of Chinese in China will not accept that. They would try to correct that. His mom knew that Taiwan at that time would not accept him either. But his mom has a good value, like “Mencius’s mother moved her home three times to better her son’s education.” She left Taiwan to support her idea.

Peter also brought up civic engagement indexed by the degree of self-centered ness to differentiate the two groups of people:

Taiwanese would donate money for the public good. Most people from China, we are not giving, we are taking. We are taking more, we ask more and more and more. We are more self-centered. That’s what I see. Of course, you know maybe a lot of people disagree with me. We have a hard time to recruit people and to make people donate money and get people involved.

An immigrant associating his Chines-ness mostly with food culture, He continued to compliment Taiwan for its healthier food:

Also let me tell you, Taiwanese food, it’s very intriguing, like steamed dumplings from Ding-Tai-Fung, right? It’s very light oiled, very tasty, but not as oily as what we have in Shanghai. It is very oily, but Ding-Tai-Fung dumplings are much lighter. It’s healthier. Every time I go to Chinese restaurants, every time I see the oil, it’s not healthy at all. But still a lot of Chinese like that. That’s the trend, that’s why we need to catch up.
The identity claim of Dan, who emphasized the common factor between Chinese American and Asian American, was essentially a moral judgement, too. In his later description of the difference between Americans and Chinese, he associated the former group with good culture, truth, and public interest whereas the latter with bad culture, lies, and utilitarianism:

The twenty-year education I received there is very narrow-minded. Money is put above everything. I felt very ridiculous and many lies. After coming to the U.S., I feel everyone truer, more down-to-earth. In terms of values, everyone is doing things for public interest and doing these good things from the bottom of heart, not just for [pause]. In the Mainland, everyone does things in a utilitarian manner.... Although I speak Mandarin, I feel the Mainland very bad. That's why I identify with Americans more for their ideals and thinking. In short, it is because the ways I grew up there. Although I speak Chinese, and was born to be Chinese, I did not receive good culture for the over twenty years I stayed in China. I feel the culture in the U.S. better. I personally identify with it, and I also hope to absorb the U.S. culture.

Lisa, who developed a symbolic approach to her Taiwanese ethnicity, drew a moral line to differentiate herself from Chinese Americans:

There is a difference between Taiwanese Americans and Chinese Americans. I am not ok when people say I am Chinese American. I think culturally we are different, because when Chinese Americans, Chinese people, come to Taiwan, they act differently. They bought women at that time. I heard many stories about that. They didn’t bring their wife when they came to Taiwan, and they need wife. It’s also because, at that time, we Taiwanese have resentful feelings for Chinese.

Likewise, the immigrants showcasing a development of a political identity were making a moral judgment. For those who identify with Taiwanese American, they tended to mention cultural differences in languages, habits, and behaviors, to justify their rejection to being
identified as Chinese American. Alan was an example. Note the realism effect of these perceived cultural differences, instead of their contents.

They (meaning Taiwanese Americans and Chinese Americans) are from different countries! They are different people from different places. Their “roots” are different. Their languages are different, cultures are different. So are their habits. They talk in a different way. Sometimes they seem to be in fight when talking. They talk loudly. When Taiwanese are talking, they are not like calling names, not that loud […] In addition, Chinese would promise you everything when they have things ask from you. They humble themselves. But when they get what they want, they act differently. You see a lot of people like that. I didn’t have such an experience. This is from my observation of others.

Another example is Frank Deng, the transnational entrepreneur. His comment mentioned earlier that “we are not Chinese, we are more like Japanese” is an implicit indication of perceived moral differences among Taiwanese, Chinese, and Japanese. Nevertheless, his comparison of the three groups of people explicitly expressed the idea that identity claim is a moral judgement:

The main difference is culture. Like current young people in Taiwan, in fact, they are so different from Chinese. Because they like Japanese and western cultures more than Chinese do. So, the hugest difference is in culture. Another difference is in moral standards. In my opinion, the moral standard of most of Chinese is too low. Compared to Americans and Japanese, of course, I dislike current Taiwanese’ moral standards, either.

Frank’s anti-Chinese resentment led him to construct a moral hierarchy with Americans and Japanese on the top, Taiwanese in the middle, and Chinese at the bottom. This hierarchy was revealed when he discussed how rich people behaved differently:

Frank: The rich people in the United States and in Japan are very humble. Taiwanese are a little humbler than Chinese. Chinese are very arrogant.
Frank’s wife: Because they are unconfident.

Frank: Only the people with no confidence keep showing off. You see how low-key Americans are. American tourists are stingy when shopping overseas whereas Chinese ones, wow, it looks like they have money to burn. This is conspicuous consumption. This is the worst culture, which will drag the whole country. You see the rich men in the United States. They wear slippers and shorts when walking on street. You can’t tell they are wealthy. Taiwanese are somewhat showy by insisting on wearing branded clothes. But [the rich] Chinese are, wow!

Even the immigrants displaying cosmopolitan formation were making a moral judgement when discussing group differences between Chinese people and white people. This was expressed by Yvonne, who compared the working ethic between Chinese and white people in her working place:

I am not saying that whites are immoral. But when doing things, if it is difficult, I will keep digging into that. I will not give up. But they, many of them, will request for more discussions with other people. But Chinese will find other way around sometimes. We will be, at least for me, more independent and trying to dig in things overnight. This is not totally about [the difference between] Chinese and American. But anyway, it is at least true for those who I’ve met. Chinese are doing things that way.

3.9 Seeing the World through a Moral Eye

The immigrants’ perceptions of group differences in morality affect the way they look at the world in general. Steve expressed this idea when describing perceived connections between Taiwan and both the U.S. and Switzerland, based on their shared democratic values:
Taiwan is a country of equality. The situation is like that between the U.K and the U.S.—the English is the same, but a new type of American language has been developed. Americans and English also have different accents. Taiwan already has its own culture. Taiwan is itself an independent country. So, Taiwanese are Taiwanese; Chinese are Chinese [...] You Look at Switzerland, it is a smaller country than Taiwan. But its income is among the highest. People there work hard to earn money, but they are happy. Taiwan is like Switzerland. We can do it.

Frank, too, drew a moral line between good countries and bad ones in terms of their people’s differences in culture and educational attainment:

Therefore, I keep emphasizing that, to Taiwanese, the most important thing is education. It's important to enhance ordinary people’s standards, and to compare Taiwan with the United States, Japan, and German, not to with China, Philippines or Southeast Asian countries. We need to compare with developed countries. Taiwan is in the middle status, maybe below average, far worse than Japan and the United States, but better than China. Therefore, I think cultural difference is hugest.

The Changing Nature of Identity Categories

Note the constructed and changing nature of identity categories. For instance, Taiwanese American identity category did not emerge until the 1990s, and it tends to be emphasized only in specific contexts by specific groups. Prior to the 1990s, immigrants from Taiwan, including islander Taiwanese, were generally identified as (and often identified with) Chinese. Larry recalled how his understanding of cross-strait relations was broadened after arriving in the U.S., leading to a change in identity choice from Chinese to Taiwanese:

It changed! When I came to the United States, I still defended the Republic of China [the official name of Taiwan] because at that time, we represented “free China.” I still had that
kind of idea in the first few years. But then I realized something was not right. What we had been told since we grew up was different from what I saw in the United States …

When I came to the United States, in the first year I was asked, “Why does Taiwan claim to have all of China? Taiwan is so tiny. How is it possible that you can have all of China, that you can retake the mainland?” At that time, I still said that yes, we could. When you were in Taiwan, you were taught that people in the mainland were anti-communists. They were oppressed. When the horn sounded, they would fight for you. I had that idea when I first arrived here. How deep and influential that education was! What you received was such a thing, like a frog at the bottom of a well.

Philip Huang, a professor in a STEM area at UCSD, admitted his identity option changed, too. His Taiwanese awareness was not emerged until in the 1970s, a period that he was in graduate school and had the chance to interact with a variety of “Chinese” students:

When I just arrived in the United States, I was a high school student. There were very few Asians at that time. There were only two in the whole school at that time. The difference between Taiwanese American and Chinese American didn’t occur to me. Even being Asian American was not a thing at that time. Then I went to Canada for college education. Most students I knew were from Hong Kong. They were of course Chinese Americans. Although I started to participate in the activities of a Taiwanese Association, my feelings were not that strong, and I didn’t think it necessary to differentiate Taiwanese from Chinese. Then it came to my graduate school time. I remember it was 1974. I was the President of a Taiwanese Association in New Haven. At that time, I had already observed the difference, because there was another Chinese association whose members were also from Taiwan. In the 1970s, there were no Chinese students, no students from the mainland China. But there were KMT students at that time. There was a conflict in a multi-cultural night held in our
school. They had a booth and we had one, too. At that time, no one would say I was a KMT. We called them ‘waishenren’ (mainlanders) and [we were] ‘beshengren’ (Taiwanese).

Both Larry’s and Philip’s comments illustrate the constructed nature of identity categories. Given people’s identity options are changeable, their perceived moral values and perceived links between any group’s marriageability discussed in the following chapters are not fixed but changing.

3.10 Conclusion: Also Living Paradoxes

In their groundbreaking book, Legacies, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) described children of contemporary immigrants as living paradoxes (p. 189) for their varied ways of ethnic self-definition. “Situated within two cultural worlds, they must define themselves in relation to multiple reference groups (sometimes in two countries and in two languages),” Portes and Rumbaut concluded, “The decisive turning point for change in ethnic and national self-identities can be expected to take place in the second, not in the first, generation” (p. 150).

However, my research shows that first generation members, foreign-born immigrants/immigrant parents, are living paradoxes, too. The ways they make sense of their homeland ethnicity are as complex as the second generation’s. Fitting to findings of previous studies on the second generation, first generation members display multiple identity outcomes, too. They may show “twilight of ethnicity” (Alba 1985) or “high noon of ethnicity” (Portes and Rumbaut 2001: 190), depending on their attitude toward their birth place is symbolic or political. To the Chinese and some Taiwanese immigrants in my sample, symbolic ethnicity is even a norm, not an exception. My research also shows that immigrants might become cosmopolitan to reconcile the identity tension derived from the ideological conflicts between their sending and receiving nation-states, as well as between theirs and their spouse’. I further recognize collective memory
as a key factor facilitating homeland ethnicity. Put differently, length of stay and immigrant identity are insignificantly related.

Yet, different from the second generation, the ways that first generation members answer to the race question, how they define what it means to be Asian American, is not determined by the degree of their acculturation or English proficiency, but by how they interpret groups of people from sending and receiving countries. Therefore, choosing is judging. To the immigrants, choosing what to identity with uncovers their perceptions of moral differences among groups of people. These perceived moral traits not only pre-exist identity options, but also enable immigrants to legitimate their choice.

Immigrants, like their American-born children, are not only living paradoxes but also translation artists, in the words of Portes and Rumbaut (2001:113), who employed the metaphor of translation to describe the role of linguistic assimilation in shaping second generation members’ ethnic self-definition. According to them (p. 145), children’s knowledge of parental language, together with their parents’ command of English, decides whether the second generation will develop positive acculturation or not. Along the process, children of immigrants are translating themselves, and they may gain or lost in translation. Yet, the phenomenon of lost in translation may occur between first generation members and English-speaking scholars, too. Sometimes, the lost is not caused by linguistic assimilation but by the limits of the English language. As Peter reflects on the translation problem among Chinese people, Chinese language, and English language:

Situation from Hong Kong is probably easier because most people there recognize that they are Chinese. For people from Singapore, they often recognize that they are Chinese, too. For people from Taiwan, there are a lot of different situations. Many Taiwanese people don’t identify with Chinese. I can’t impose my opinion on them. I will say, my definition of Chinese is people with a Chinese background. Chinese is a word that is difficult to define. Huaren is
probably easier to define people with a Chinese background. Zhong-guo-ren only refers to the people living in the mainland China. Chinese people from Singapore, Hong Kong, and Malay are more like Huaren, like Singapore Huaren or Taiwanese Huaren. Maybe this is easier to clarify the confusion. Unfortunately, we haven’t invented a better word in English. Most people in this country just equate Chinese with people from China. That’s what it is, and that causes the people from Taiwan to choose the word very carefully and differently.

What is lost during this translation process is not only the nuance of Chinese as an identity category but also the different ways it is attached to, or severed from, other groups of people. In the context of marriage talk, the effect of Chinese ethnicity on the preference for co-ethnic children-in-law is not direct but mediated. This is implicitly revealed by Mary’s comparison of Chinese, Taiwanese, and Japanese people, which serves as a prelude to the analysis of the intertwining relationship between ethnic and marital boundaries in the following chapter:

I may be biased, but I feel that Japanese people tend to have an attitude. This is my impression. Like one friend of my son, his parents are both Japanese, and they are both Ph.Ds. They are very kind to my kid. One year when my son was in high school, they invited him to take a trip to Japan for a month. They, as the host, paid for everything! This was very nice of them, so I cannot have a bias towards Japanese. But in general, they think they are superior … But such thinking needs to change. Recently, Japanese are not as outstanding as before. Chinese are more outstanding now. Chinese are very rich now. The U.S. has borrowed so much money from them. China is chasing up. When you go to Shanghai and Beijing, you will find that they have become very civilized. They have made huge progress. We already can’t compete with that.
Identity formation works differently in different quadrants of the marriageability field, but immigrants’ identity claims, i.e., us/them distinctions, have a direct effect on the making of marital boundaries in the first quadrant. Here I analyze the role of identity claims in constructing immigrants’ ideas about “marrying in,” i.e., their perceptions of marriageable us. More specifically, this chapter will focus on how the two most dominant identity formations—symbolic and political—shape immigrants’ drawing of marital boundaries between marriageable us and unmarriageable them. The workings of cosmopolitan identity among the immigrants will be discussed in Chapter 7.

4.1 Dan Zhang’s Happy Marriage

Born in the Nanjing Province of China, Dan Zhang came to the United States in 1993 as an international graduate student with a major in Electronic Engineering. A committed member of a local dragon boat team, he stood out among Asian geek peers for his V-shaped torso. Conflicting to his athlete outlook, Dan apologized to me more than once during our interview at a Starbucks in the University Towne Centre area on January 9, 2016: “I am sorry, I am not good at talking.” Yet, his boulder shoulders relaxed with a beaming face when describing how he met his wife:

We were both from the Mainland. I met her after I moved to San Diego. She was a postdoc; I was already an engineer. I have become a fan of water sports since moving here. We got to know each other in some activities. She is excellent in studies, very smart. A postdoc she is! She received her Ph.D. from a world-class university. She is superb, a Xueba (straight-A student), a very nice person, too. I am lucky to have her.
This straight- A Chinese female was Dan’s second wife. His first wife, born to a cadre family in Beijing, came to the United States after graduating from high school in 1989. They met when Dan was in Dallas where he completed his graduate studies. According to Dan, his first wife was “very different than general Chinese”:

She is a Guanerda (second generation government officials). She is spoiled. Her father is a diplomat. In China, an official makes way more money than ordinary people do [...]. She is different than general Chinese. Her family is not a traditional Chinese family.

“Her personality,” Dan continued, “she works very hard— she has been promoted to director, earned more than I do. She earned less when we met. She is a workaholic. She has no traditional love for her family, the love of mother for her children. She showed little care, basically speaking.” Dan concluded, “It’s very strange. I have never seen other Chinese mothers like her. She is not a bad person, though. The problem is her personality. She didn’t think much for kids. She only remembered to give kids hugs. She paid special attention to it.”

With the first wife Dan raised a son who was going to apply for colleges at the time of the interview. After divorcing from the Guanerda wife, Dan maintained close ties with this seventeen-year-old, who stayed in his house every six months: “We get along okay, sometimes not that good, though. He is rebellious recently. But it is natural at his age, a teenager.” Dan believed that his young boy had zero experience in relationships: “boys are generally later [than girls] in this stuff.” “What is the most important thing for you son’s marriage?” I asked. “The most important thing is that they are happy together. They can support each other and have a decent job. One income is enough, and the other can feel supported.” Dan answered without hesitation, as if he was describing his marriage with his first wife. Despite the abstract idea of happiness, Dan held more concrete expectations on his future daughter-in-law. Race/ethnicity was the first criterion he brought up: “I will be more comfortable with Huaren, though. In this way, it will not be too difficult to hang out.”
Me: What do you mean by Huaren?

Dan: Ha! I never thought about it!

Note that Huaren refers to.....That Dan hoped his son to marry a Chinese is expected, as numerous studies have shown that immigrant parents, who tend to marry in, generally prefer coethnic children-in-law over interracial or interethnic ones. Yet, there is a gap between Dan's identity claim (Chinese American) and his definition of marriageable us (Huaren) that calls for a further review. What leads to the gap? Are all ethnic Chinese people equally marriageable? If not, why?

The following sections will address these questions. I will argue that the immigrants’ different identity formations lead to their contrasting approaches to deciding who are marriageable us. I examine how symbolic identity transforms us into marriageable us in the first section. Next, I show how one of us becomes unmarriageable them by looking into a very specific group of Chinese-speaking immigrants who have developed a Taiwan-first political identity. Finally, I will compare the ways that the two subgroups of Chinese-speaking immigrants interpret the marriageability of Japanese people, highlighting their feelings toward their homeland to reveal the role of perceived moral values in making marital boundaries.

4.1 From Us to Marriageable Us

When talking about what was the most important thing for their children’s choice of partner, the immigrants were color-blind at first glance. They tended to bring up some abstract factors, such as the importance of happiness or fit of personality. Representative was Greg, the Qualcomm project manager, who strongly recognized “Chinese benefits” when elaborating what it meant to be Chinese American. He first mentioned the following color-blind criteria, such as “having a good job, good salary, cultivated, making contributions to life and to this society.” Sean, the
senior manager at an American branch of SONY, adopted this no preference attitude, too: “We
don’t have any preference, because my wife and I are more open-minded. They choose whom
they like. It is no need to force them to marry a Chinese. They don’t have such a preference. We
don’t, either

Yet, the immigrants’ preferences for coethnic children-in-law emerged when they were
asked to list desirable traits of their children-in-law. The traits they mentioned were the
characteristics of Chinese culture as well. As Greg described, the ideal son-in-law should “value
education, respect elders, fulfill filial duties, and follow ‘the Doctrine of the Mean’ (the Confucian
ideal of maintaining balance and harmony).” These traits were mentioned to scale down the
marriageability of “Americans” because “Americans don’t care about education and family!” This
finding is not new, as previous studies have shown that immigrant parents tend to develop a
hierarchy of preferences with coethnic children-in-law at the top for cultural and communication
concerns.

However, applying differing approaches to interpreting “us” shows different ways for defining
marriageable us. As mentioned earlier, there is a gap between us and marriageable us; being
Chinese American does not necessary mean all Chinese people are equally marriageable.
Further, Chinese is a contested concept referring to different groups of people for different
people in different contexts. In addition, for the immigrants whose native language is not English,
the meaning of us is frequently lost in translation.

*From Chinese American and Huaren*

In general, the immigrants applying the symbolic approach to ethnicity of origin equated us
with marriageable us. Yet, to them, “us” referred not only the people in China but multiple
groups of people over the world, a nuance that could not be captured thoroughly by “Chinese.”
My interviewees were aware of the limit of “Chinese” as an identity category. Sean offered his
observation on how Chinese in English differed from Huaren in Mandarin:
Huaren refers to the people who have connection to the Mainland China/ Dalu. They may be born there, grew up there, or migrated from the country. Huaren also includes the people whose ancestors were once living there […] In this way, Taiwanese and Hong Kongnese are Chinese. Even some people born in Vietnam are Chinese, too. We call them overseas Vietnamese Chinese/ Yuenan Huaqiao.

Put differently, the immigrants claiming Chinese American identify with Huaren, instead of Zhonguoren (PRC Chinese). When answering questions in Mandarin, the term they employed to identify themselves was either Huaren or Daluren. The interchangeable use of the two identity categories was best expressed in Dan’s discussion on his children’s social circles:

All my kids’ playmates are daluren. There are many people from China. I think they will eventually find someone to marry from China. My son’s best friend is a second-generation Chinese and his parents are Huaren. I don’t know their background, but they seem like Huaren. There’s Chinese calligraphy and paintings in their house.

Dan’s interchangeably use of Huaren and daluren was a result of the education they received from China, which was characterized by one drop rule. It meant that if there is one drop of Chinese in a person’s blood, s/he is, and will be, always Chinese no matter where and when s/he was born to. His/her offspring will be always Chinese, too.

More important, there is a hierarchy within the Huaren of us, indicating that not all Chinese people over the world are perceived in a similar way. In general, this hierarchy of Huaren marriageability was topped with the Chinese from Taiwan and Hong Kong, with PRC Chinese in the middle, and Southeast Asian Chinese at the bottom. As Dan put it:

I don’t know why it becomes harder to find Taiwanese kids now. It looks like fewer and fewer Taiwanese go abroad to study. Other Huaren, those from Southeast Asia, they are very different. In my kid’s social circle, none is from Taiwan. Some of his friends are from Hong
Kong, and they are OK. He has a very good friend when we were living in Dallas. His parents were from Hong Kong. Their family was pretty good.

*The Effect of the Cultural Revolution*

Yet it is cultural differences that play a more important role in deciding who is the most marriageable us. One of the sources for the cultural difference is language. Although Chinese over the world speak Mandarin, there are some nuanced variations in how the language was spoken. Sean spotted the lingual difference in accent: “I knew you were Taiwanese the second you spoke. Your accent and your tone are Taiwanese. For example, [you called me] Mr. Han/ Han Xiansheng. The Mainlanders from our side don’t call it that way.”

Underneath linguistic differences are perceived variances in morality in terms of the degree of Chinese cultural authenticity. To the immigrants with symbolically Chinese ethnicity, they were mostly belonged to the June 4th Generation of China, Taiwanese were morally better because of their lack in the experience of the Cultural Revolution. Sean expressed this viewpoint by valuing traditions positively:

I heard, in fact, that Taiwan’s culture, customs, and values are probably more traditional than China’s. They are already lost in China because of the Cultural Revolution. Relatively speaking, Taiwan is more traditional. Those traditions, like respecting the old, caring the young, and loving your family, are probably richer in Taiwan.

Hong Kong Chinese represent more authentic Chinese for the same reason. Although Sean admitted that he had little contact with this group of people, he thought they were as marriageable as Taiwan Chinese because good traditions were kept in Hong Kong:

I am not familiar with Hong Kong Huaren. I have no chance to visit Hong Kong. But my impression is that it is better than most Chinese societies. Dalu is the one with fewest traditions. Take family tree documents (jiapu/家譜) as an example. All my family’s
documents were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. All of them! I don’t know who my ancestors were, and I really want to know more about them.

The above discussions have revealed the historical origin of perceived within-group differences among overseas June 4th Generation members who have developed a symbolic approach to interpreting their Chinese ethnicity. To them, because the Cultural Revolution did not happen in Taiwan and Hong Kong, people from these two places display more authentic Chinese-ness that makes them more moral than PRC Chinese. Put differently, the logic of their narratives is: Because a historical event H did not happen in the place P, people from the P are more moral. This logic supports the first phase of transforming us into marriageable us. In the following section, I will show how an equation of the moral with the marriageable is established in the second phase of the transformation by discussing how Taiwanese become the most marriageable among us in the minds of the Chinese immigrants.

4.3 The Moral, The Marriageable

That Dan held Taiwanese/ Taiwanese American in high regard became more illustrative and consistent as the interview proceeded. Exclusively drawing from my interview with him, the discussions below show how historicity is intertwined with morality and marriageability. That is, how his interpretation of the Cultural Revolution, supported by his anti-Communism logic, generates his perceptions of in-group differences in morality among us/ Huaren over the world, and leads to his conclusion on the higher marriageability of Taiwanese/ Taiwanese Americans.

Note that the discussions are not to spread and reproduce stereotyping narratives. Instead, they are to reveal the constructed and contextual nature of marriageability.

Like his fellows, Dan added the tag of the Cultural Revolution to the immorality of PRC Chinese. Because the Revolution has become a historical truth, his perception of the morally
in inferior status of the people in China has an essentialist, “realism” effect. This was evidenced by his comparisons of groups of people. To him, because the Cultural Revolution did not happen in the United States, the line between good Americans versus bad Chinese was drawn:

They differ a lot. Chinese government has long refused to apologize for the happening of the Cultural Revolution. It is a terrible, horrible thing. It did harm to so many people. A society filled with lies. In the United States, you can feel its system functioning, like the separation of the three powers. It has established a great system that allows people to have opportunities to speak the truth. Some histories of huge events were hidden in China. This whole thing makes you unsure about what is true. When I was a kid, I read official news and believed in everything the government said. Then I realized that those things were totally different [from what it was described]. It went too far from what the reality was; too many lies. The historical knowledges about things, about people, about social reality, they are all fake!

Historicity has a realism effect on not only between-group difference perceptions, but also within-group ones. When Dan compared people in Taiwan and China, the train of thoughts stayed the same: The Cultural Revolution did not happen in Taiwan, so Taiwan Chinese are better than PRC Chinese. Note that although Dan was anti-communist, he still held the One-China ideology that made him spontaneously perceive people from Taiwan as one of us. This was exposed by his comment below that “I am very glad that China still has Taiwan”:

I think people from Taiwan have good qualities in culture. They are more trustable. I am very glad that China still has Taiwan, two places with similar culture, even though they are now in the hands of two separate governments. Chinese culture was truly preserved in Taiwan, even though people from Taiwan and from the Mainland must have different family values.
The perceived morally superior status of Taiwanese within us is unharmed even though Taiwan has been falling behind from China economically, indicating the more important role of culture than materiality in making marital boundaries:

I have been in the U.S. for over twenty years. In general, the people from Taiwan are truly, you know, culturally better. Besides they are more trustworthy. Two decades ago, when I was new here, Taiwanese were of course richer than Chinese. But now it is different. Yet the people from the Mainland still have no culture. I feel distant from them. When I am with Daluren, including with my previous classmates, we socialize a lot, but the gap is huge. They cannot be trusted. Hanging out is OK, but when you really have some problems...

That morality is the anchor of marriageability is further illustrated in Dan’s comparison of PRC Chinese with American-born one. He believed that after PRC Chinese had been sufficiently instilled with the good culture in the United States, they would become more marriageable:

I think there is no difference between them. There are good girls in the Mainland China. The information in China is more transparent now. Good people in China have more chances to reach out to the good culture we have in the United States. Nevertheless, the life of little overseas students is worrisome. The second-generation members of the rich (Fuerdai in Mandarin) think their money can make them do whatever they like.

The hidden equation, more moral= more marriageable, was uncovered when Dan compared Chinese girls with Taiwanese's. Again, he brought up the Cultural Revolution to support his standpoint:

I’ve seen a lot of immoral things happening among our classmates. They do harm to others for their own good from time to time. Although they tell you that “we are all laoxiang” [meaning town fellows/老鄉], they do harm to you behind your back. I feel that Taiwanese are more decent […] I have pretty good impressions on Taiwanese. Their heritage and
traditions are better than Chinese’s. Comparing the Mainland with Taiwan, I’m not sure, but I heard that girls in Taiwan are more family-oriented. Many women in the Mainland, because of the influence of the Cultural Revolution, they like to work more than Taiwanese women do. So, they are relatively bad at taking care of family.

An unintended consequence of associating morality to marriageability is the reproduction of gender inequality. To Dan, and the Chinese immigrants more general, the higher marriageability of Taiwanese was inseparable from their reservations of “good” traditions. However, the good traditions were associated with gender biased stereotypes with an assumption that women are naturally more family-oriented than men. Chapter 6 will provide more detailed discussions on how interpretations of familial positions differences change marriageability perceptions and reproduce gender inequality.

4.4 How One of Us Became Unmarriageable Them

The equation, moral us = marriageable us, works well for the immigrants displaying political ethnicity. Most of them were from Taiwan and expressed hope that their children would marry the most authentic us, which refers to Taiwanese, too. Larry made clear his preference for Taiwanese children-in-law:

Of course, a Taiwanese is better, we’re from Taiwan! I believed that having a daughter-in-law from Taiwan would make the two families closer … So, it would be perfect if he married someone with Taiwanese origins.

Yet the hierarchy of Hauren marriageability did not exist in the minds of this group of immigrants from Taiwan, because of the exclusivity between Taiwanese and Chinese as two categories of practice. Thus, while the Chinese immigrants view Taiwanese as the most marriageable among us, the Taiwanese one sees Chinese as unmarriageable them.
The transformation process through which “people who look like us” become “unmarriageable them” consists of two steps: a transition into “immoral them,” and linking immorality with non-marriageability. The first step has been discussed in Chapter 3 in which I have shown how the happening of a severe conflict between mainland Chinese and native Taiwanese in the 1947 of Taiwan has resulted into its ethnic polarization. The discussions below will analyze the second step, i.e., the linking of immoral Chinese with Unmarriageable them.

*The Immoral = The Unmarriageable*

Given that being Taiwanese American mainly means being anti-Chinese, preferring Taiwanese children-in-law means being disapproving of Chinese ones. Most interviewees are islander Taiwanese who believe that a shared language is insufficient for claiming that they share similar cultural values with Chinese Americans, thereby making them marriageable. During our conversation, Frank became increasingly open about his lower preference for Chinese children-in-law. When discussing the chances of his son marrying a Chinese, he confidently said, “Impossible, I think it’s impossible. First, he has been brainwashed by us. Chinese are very very bad.” His wife added, “I think the chance is zero.” Frank’s opinion regarding the marriageability of Chinese is consistent with his identity claim that “we Taiwanese are not Chinese.”

Note that the Taiwanese immigrants defined “Chinese” in a broader essentialist manner, placing “Chinese,” “Mainland Taiwanese,” “Mainland Chinese,” and “Chinese American” in a single identity category, revealing the effect of “one drop rule” on perceiving group differences. This idea was expressed by Susan Wu, 79, a retired registered nurse who moved to the United States with her husband in the mid-1960s, after he finished his medical training at National Taiwan University. She applied the “one drop rule” when she equated “one of us” (meaning Mainlander Taiwanese) with “them” (meaning Mainland Chinese/Mainlanders and Chinese Americans):
I had thought that Chinese [meaning Chinese Americans] were fine. But we found out the inferior part in Chinese ethnicity when we took a trip a few years ago. Why do they still act that way? They [Mainlander Chinese immigrants from Taiwan] have been here for a long time, grown up here, and received higher education in Taiwan! ... We went to Africa one time. There were only six Taiwanese and the rest, over sixty persons, were waishengren. Because they are younger, they either were born in Taiwan or grew up in Taiwan. Many have lived in the U.S. for almost thirty or forty years. And they are still unable to throw away their minzuxing [ethnicity].

Susan’s attitude toward Chinese was decidedly negative and naturalized— she clearly linked their lack of marriageability to their immorality derived from ethnicity in an essentialist way. Yet later her description revealed the historical origin of her perception of Chinese as unmarriageable, underscoring its constructed nature:

Me: What do you mean by minzuxing?
Susan: They feel they are superior to Taiwanese. They misbehave. When we were in Africa, their group members—all graduates from National Taiwan University, with at least a master’s degree, more were Ph.D.’s—intruded into a private yard zone. When we had meals or a buffet on a cruise ship or in a hotel, they always cut in line, not like us, we all waited in line! In addition, they were very noisy. So, it is the same. They are like current daluren [mainlanders]. I said they all received higher education and they all grew up in Taiwan. But they have their own community [jiuquan, referring to neighborhoods built for KMT military dependents]. They do not mix with Taiwanese. Thus, they themselves grow up in their own way. Maybe this is the reason. They are not influenced [by outside factors]. That’s why I say it is their minzuxing!

At first glance, Susan’s comments appear to be evidence of stereotyping Chinese. Yet the point here is not how many negative adjectives she uses to describe the behaviors of Chinese,
but the illogical connection between her first statement—“They feel they are superior to Taiwanese”—and her following description of immoral Chinese. Put differently, she employs historical events to legitimize her judgments about the immorality and unmarriageability of Chinese—that is, the injustices of Mainlander control of Taiwanese since the 228 massacres. In other words, her rejection to Chinese children-in-law could be a way to express her pride of being Taiwanese. This finding confirms a study of Chang and Wu (2000). Using Taylor’s (1994) modern nationalism theory as a springboard, they argue that this long-held hostile attitude toward Chinese-descended people among islander Taiwanese reflects their search for dignity. My research further shows that this attitude stays constant as time goes by. The idea that my interviewees’ perceptions of moral differences can be traced to Taiwanese nationalism suggests a colonial dimension to immigrant marriageability.

4.5 Are All Asians Equally Marriageable?

In general, the Chinese-speaking immigrants, whether from China or Taiwan, see Asians as one of us and thereby acceptable children-in-law. Susan, the wife of a retired Taiwanese physician, expressed a preference for having the children-in-law who were one of us [zijiren in Mandarin]. She defined zijiren as followed: “I mean Orientals [donfanren in Mandarin]. At least we will share similar culture, and it is better for communication.” Larry even preferred Asian children-in-law over white American ones for similar values in family:

Based on what I observed from my relatives and friends, I really feel children-in-law with a similar background better. At least they should be oriental—it was a racist term and now we call it Asian—Never American, those Whites and Blacks in the United States. I don’t like their family values, their ideas about parent-children relations.
Greg, a native of the Nanjing province in China, embraced Asians, too, by describing this group of people as “big culture with small differences.” He also prioritized Asians over Whites for the latter group’ lacking family values: “I am not fine with Americans because they are too individualistic. We value networks [guanxi].”

Yet, not all Asians are favored uniformly by the Chinese-speaking immigrants. The hierarchy among Asians is generally decided by their skin color. This was best illustrated by my following conversation with Jessica, 55, an Islander Taiwanese immigrant with two children:

Jessica: Some Asians’ skin color is too different. I feel uncomfortable. You see Asian Indians, they’re pretty good, but some are too dark. The good Vietnamese are fine, too, but many make a living by running restaurants. I feel their backgrounds too different from our middle class. Even if the two families can be together, there must been many things that cannot be compromised.

Me: This applies to Filipinos?

Jessica: Yes, the main concern is the job they do.

Note that Jessica associated Asian un-marriageability first to race (skin color), then to class (job), indicating an intertwining relationship among the three factors. The interactive effect between race and class will be the focus of the next chapter.

More important, the immigrants generally justify their judgement of a group’s marriageability by pointing to its moral traits. This was revealed by Sean, who told me, “Asian Indians are marriageable, because they are smart, diligent, and having leadership.” However, he also issued a warning, “Be careful, some are two-faced.” This brings us back to the role of morality in deciding group differences. The equation, the moral = the marriageable, is best illustrated by the Chinese-speaking immigrants’ commonly positive attitude toward Japanese people, a phenomenon that I call Japanese exceptionalism.
4.6 Japanese Exceptionalism

Given that Japan’s colonization of Taiwan is a critical element for defining authentic Taiwanese-ness, it is expected to see the islander Taiwanese immigrants preferring Japanese children-in-law. The majority believe that Japanese have good qualities that make them marriageable, frequently referring to the Taiwanese-Japanese colonial connection that existed for half a century in positive terms.

Larry expressed a preference for Japanese over Chinese, attributing the former’s marriageability to their cultural values and other qualities:

I think I’m okay with Asians. But if this is about individual preference, I like Japanese more. I think Japanese, their society and culture, in my impression, their qualities are very high. I believe people who grow up there are more cultivated.

Susan, too, expressed her preference for Japanese daughters-in-law because of qualities such as politeness and thoughtfulness:

Japanese are great as prospective marriage partners. They are all very polite and courteous. Besides, you know, Japanese girls are, in short, very thoughtful. They do not embarrass people in front of their face, right? Maybe it is about upbringing, maybe it is about ethnicity. All people like Japanese girls!

Note that Susan’s high regard of Japanese girls parallels Dan’s praise of Taiwanese females. These comments expose not an ethnic essentialist viewpoint, but a gender one. The ways that gender trumps race and ethnicity will be the focus of Chapter 6.

Even lesser achieving islander Taiwanese immigrants hold a strong preference for Japanese children-in-law. This was evidenced by Andy Cheung, 79, a retired worker in an electronics factory. Answering all my questions in Holo dialect, he emphasized the importance
of birthplace in claiming one’s immigrant identity, and gave strong approval to the idea of Japanese children-in-law:

I prefer Japanese if comparing Japanese and Chinese. They do their work in a more planned way. They are neat, and they speak more softly. Although I can’t understand what they say, they look very polite.

The moral differences between Chinese, Japanese, and Taiwanese that my islander interviewees perceive are an example of Seol and Skrentny’s (2009) hierarchical nationhood. They created this idea to illustrate differences in hierarchical status between three groups of Korean Chinese in South Korea: those from China, those from the United States, and native Chinese Koreans. They described Korean Americans as being the most privileged because of the long relationship between South Korea and the U.S. In a similar manner, the islander Taiwanese immigrants tend to add Japanese elements to their descriptions of authentic Taiwanese-ness to minimize the historical link between native Taiwanese and Chinese in general.

If following the same logic, we would expect to see Chinese immigrants expressing a lower preference for Japanese children-in-law, since Japan has been constructed as the immoral other for its holocaust of Chinese during the 1937 Nanking Massacre. Yet in my research, I did not necessarily find it, indicating that race/ethnicity trumps nationalism in the immigrants’ construction of Asian marriageability.

4.7 Although They were Once Immoral

The workings of Japanese exceptionalism in marriageability among Chinese immigrants involve two parts. The first part is to decouple nationality from marriageability by redefining spousal choice as a personal matter. In the second part, the immigrants strengthen the association of
Japanese marriageability and morality to reach cognitive consonance between their judgement and the logic of marriageability: the moral = the marriageable. Dan’s discussion on who were marriageable could best capture this process of transforming the moral other into marriageable them. Note that the following quotes were taken from different time points of the interview, indicating the consistency of the workings of the marriageability logic.

First off, Dan, like his Chinese immigrant fellows, showed a preference of hierarchy for the race and ethnicity of his children-in-law with Huaren on the top.

Dan: I really hope I can get along well with my daughter-in-law. No one wants to see conflicts. So, it is for sure that Huaren are better. For the next preference, it is Japanese and Whites.

That Dan put Japanese and Whites side by side suggests, in his mind, that Japanese are Whites among Asians. Put differently, Chinese/ Japanese marriage was perceived as racial, instead of ethnic. Dan’s preference of Japanese to Koreans further illustrated the former’s supremacy status:

Dan: I feel he [his son] will be happy if he has a Japanese wife.

Dan: I know little about Korea. Of course, there are many white-collar Koreans. Korean culture is good for my kids’ discipline. They practice Taekwando when they are little. But anyway, Koreans are not the most preferred. I don’t know much about them and other Asians, and I am afraid that it will cause contradictions and unpredictable conflicts.

Dan’s discussion shows that although ordinary Americans frequently see Japanese and Koreans as equals, they weight differently in terms of marriageability through the eyes of Chinese immigrants. Note that Dan attached class (white collar) to Korean marriageability. The interaction between race and class will be discussed in the next chapter.

The above quotes about Dan’s preference for Japanese over other Asians show one part of the transformation process, i.e., the logic of marriageability. The other part, the decoupling
between nationality and marriageability, is uncovered by the following long conversation between Dan and me:

Me: I've met some Chinese who dislike Japanese even refuse to go to Japanese restaurants.

Dan: It's understandable. In fact, I have complex feelings, too. I was born and grew up in Nanjing. I had been taught with many things about the Nanjing Massacre since I was young. What Japan did during the anti-Japanese war was indeed harmful to China. And my family was a victim. My grandfather’s mother was killed in an air raid. So, my grandfather hated Japanese very much. In this regard, I think Japan did wrong things to China. I myself side with victims. But Japanese culture is truly better. Because of the war, Chinese people like me really have mixed feelings toward Japanese. But I won’t tell my kids not to marry them because of the Massacre. Having a Japanese daughter-in-law is totally a personal matter.

Me: Are you saying that national hatred and personal choice are two different things to you?

Dan: Yes. If his wife is Japanese, and they really get along well, and they are happy, why not? There should be no restrictions. I once told my kid history about the Massacre, and he did not turn to dislike Japan because of it. I don’t know what the solution should be: to totally forget it, or to seek for an apology. But I do think I shall pass on the history to the next generation. They don’t have to figure out solutions. But it is unacceptable if they forget all of it for a person like me, who is Chinese in his blood.

Sean, too, adopted the strategy—decoupling nationality from marriageability and strengthening the role of morality—to justify his preference for Japanese children-in-law to other Asian ones. He giggled for a few seconds before giving an answer to the question about the marriageability of Japanese people:
I think I’m fine with it. I have a Japanese neighbor. We get along well. The manager of my department is also Japanese. I don’t have many Japanese friends, but I think, in general, they are a group that takes things seriously. They work very hard.

Like Dan, Sean’s preference for Japanese was not based on personal contact but on a generally positive impression on this group of people. Nevertheless, his description filled with less struggles between national hatred and personal choice. He recognized Japan’s immoral role in history but eased the tension by wrapping the immorality with historicity:

My father was forced to flee the country [because of the Sino-Japanese war]. He had to retreat to Chongqing with a school when he was just four years old. That was far away. He’s been away from his parents ever since he was that little. His parents were poor at that time. Having no money meant that they had to stay in Shaoxing [a Zhejiang county]. Only could he run away with the school. So, his life was influenced deeply by Japan. But to me, those are old-time things. I don’t have to hate Japanese people because of that.

Sean further brought up his emigration from China and place identity to wash down the ought-to-be strong resentment toward Japan:

I think they hate Japanese for historical reasons. I can understand why they have such strong feelings of hatred. But since I am out [of China], my relationship with the Mainland has become different. Since I am out, I can be myself. Being myself means that I don’t have to hate Japanese. In fact, my family didn’t experience those unpleasant things caused by Japan. I am from Zhejiang. Basically, those histories have no effect on me.

Although several Chinese immigrants did not mention the Nanking Massacre during the interview, this ideology of “Japanese supremacy”— they were immoral, but they are still marriageable— held true. For instance, when Greg compared his daughter’s Japanese and Vietnamese ex-boyfriends, he showed his support for the former by pointing to the latter’s wrong behavior of “failing to show his respect for elders.” This idea that Japanese are Whites among
Asians reveals the disadvantage of defining race and racism exclusively by people’s skin color. The above discussions illustrate that perceptions of group differences are not a result of the function of a singular factor, but an outcome of historical configurations, as well as competitions, among nationalism, colonialism, and imperialism.

4.8 Conclusion: Collective Memory Matters

Immigration research focusing on the effects of non-socioeconomic factors on marital patterns has offered insightful findings about the role of cultural affinity in facilitating preferences for marrying-in. In this dissertation culture is defined in a narrow sense, referring to common language, food, and dressing.

More recently, researchers have shed light on the unique historicity of groups, a relatively neglected socio-cultural factor, to illustrate the power of the past on people’s present behaviors. By identifying four collective memory schemas (cultural trauma, ritual belonging, grounded community, and empowerment), Harold and Fong (2017) found that Jewish people’s choice of where to reside in Toronto was a behavioral outcome of their interpretation of the Holocaust, suggesting that the persistence of residential clustering could be better understood because of symbolically boundary reproduction:

These schemas shape the Jewish residential landscape in Toronto by transforming neighborhoods into sites for the socialization, recollection, and mobilization of collective memory…. Jewish neighborhoods are places of communal and social cohesion, not because neighborhoods have specific memories attached to them, but because they are critical sites for the preservation, reinforcement, and transmission of collective memory. (Harold and Fong: 2017: 3)
Resonating with Harold and Fong’s work, I identify two collectively memory mobilized routes for marrying-in preference which serve as sources of legitimation that shape the Chinese-speaking immigrants’ marital patterns in San Diego. Representing the cultural trauma schema that “links temporal experiences involving cultural trauma to collective understandings of a shared ancestry” (Harold and Fong 2017: 7), the Chinese-speaking immigrants from Taiwan live similar lives by sharing a historical memory of the 228 Incident that leads them to water down the effects of their Chinese-origin ancestry. As a result, they tend to equate “us” and “marriageable us” with Taiwanese Americans, instead of Chinese Americans. In contrast, the history of the Cultural Revolution shared by the immigrants from China leads this group of people to identify Taiwanese and Taiwanese Americans as the most authentic “us” among ethnic Chinese groups over the world. Put differently, they adopt the ritual belonging schema that “the recollection of a ritualistic and sacred history bolster… identification and reinforces group solidarity” (Harold and Fong 2017: 9).

Chinese-speaking immigrants’ decisions on who is us and who is marriageable us reflect the behavioral result of the group’s collective memory. Yet, the power of the past to inform marital preferences has its limitations. Despite their collective memory of the Nanking Massacre that attaches the immoral other to Japanese people, the Chinese immigrants rank Japanese among the most preferred Asian groups. Japanese are whites in this context. This Japanese exceptionalism challenges conventional wisdom on the subject, which suggests that race is a concept constructed exclusively based on skin color and that there is a clear line between race and ethnicity. By attending to how ideas about the past are mobilized in the making of marital boundaries, this Chapter advances the racial and ethnic boundaries literature and collective memory scholarship.

However, neither collective memory nor immigrant identity can fully explain the marital asymmetries of Chinese-speaking immigrants in San Diego. Immigrants’ preference for coethnic
in-laws is indeed inseparable from the ways they enact collective memory to make sense of their identity claims. This dimension of marital boundary-making provides information about how the past is mobilized in reproducing or dissolving ethnic boundaries (Lamont and Molhar 2002; Wimmers 2008). I interpret the overlapping of ethnic and marital boundaries as not just a form of resistance to marital assimilation, but as a necessary piece of the broader picture representing the workings of marriageability logic. This logic, as outlined in the Introduction, involves the elements of homogamy and hypergamy that are emphasized to generate the significance of class. The next Chapter will further unpack Immigrants’ marital decisions and preferences by showing how perceptions of class- and race- based group differences are intertwined to remake marital boundaries.
Chapter 5 Remaking Marital Boundaries along Racial and Class Lines

5.1 Susan and Her All White In-Laws

Susan Wu, 79, a retired registered nurse, left Taiwan to chase her American dream in the mid-1960s with her husband, who had just finished his medical training at National Taiwan University, one of the best higher education institutions on the island. An example of middle aged women in their seventies, she wore her hair in a short bob with light make up and red-toned lipstick. In the pink of health, she shared with me the story of her model family on April 15, 2015.

The family not only has succeeded the American dream but did it so successfully that its story can be explained as a case of upward assimilation in any immigration textbook. Susan and her husband, an orthopedic doctor running a clinic for over thirty years, had been living in a suburban neighborhood of New Jersey that she described as pure white — “No Koreans living in the town. No Japanese, either. We are the only Chinese, um, Taiwanese.” The couple raised their three children, two daughters and one son (all married).

“All are Whites!” With this conclusion Susan started to introduce her children-in-law one by one. Her eldest daughter, a surgeon with a medical degree from New York University, is married to a Jewish lawyer graduated from Columbia University law school. Susan emphasized his American element, though: “He is a Jew, but he is a third generation. His grandfather came from Ukraine.” Her second daughter, an attorney graduated from Cornell University, is married to a colleague, who is also a Jewish. “He is a Polish Jew,” Susan added, “He is from Toronto, Canada, though. But he has been naturalized many years ago.” Her son is an orthopedist like his father. He earned his medical degree from the University of California at San Diego, and currently works at UCLA. The son married a nurse, reproducing his parents’ marriage. The
daughter-in-law was highly regarded, “Her ancestors were Norway Polish, but she was born in the United States, a third generation.”

Although Susan was happy with her three White/American/Jewish children-in-law at the time of the interview, she initially preferred zijiren [one of us in Mandarin] as briefly mentioned in the previous Chapter. Susan recalled how she firmly disapproved her eldest daughter’s dating with a White:

My eldest daughter met her current husband in high school. We were opposed to it. We truly hoped she could marry a person who was zijiren [one of us in Mandarin]. Because my husband graduated from the Medical School of National Taiwan University, and all the children of his classmates are very outstanding—many of them are doctors—we really hoped that they could marry Taiwanese. But nothing could be done. When she was dating him, we were so angry. We still had that kind of idea at that time and firmly objected to the relationship. But my eldest daughter has a strong personality. She didn’t care about what we said. She moved out [of our home] to live with him as soon as she graduated from college. I couldn’t do anything about it.

Why did Susan mention her husband’s educational attainment and privileged occupation when talking about her ideal children-in-law? As discussed in the previous chapter, Susan referred zijiren to Asians. Would Susan object to her daughter’s choice of partner if the daughter was dating an Asian born to a working-class family or doing a blue-collar job?

In this Chapter, I specify the ways in which race interacts with class in constructing the immigrants’ ideas about who are marriageable, shifting the analytical focus from the marriageability’s field first quadrant to its neighboring ones. I first explore the workings of white supremacy, showing that immigrants generally embrace whites because they recognize the mainstream American values this group of people represents. In the following two sections, I examine how class (perceptions of people above and below) impacts immigrants’ drawing of
marital boundaries. The analysis shows that while class has little effect on the immigrants’ preference for whites, among nonwhites’ better educational and working backgrounds can make their undesirable differences less visible. In other words, race enables working-class whites to cross the immigrants’ marital boundary and become marriageable, but it perpetuates the un-marryability of non-whites unless they have occupied higher or equal socio-economic status. Finally, I analyze why and how darker skinned people can and cannot loosen the attachment of morality to marriageability, offering alternative explanations for the perpetuation of black exceptionalism.

5.2 Drawing Boundaries Within Us

To understand the interactive effect between race and class, we must understand how the immigrants define class to differentiate people above and below themselves. The Chinese-speaking immigrants generally use one’s education attainment to decide the status difference within us. At the beginning of this Chapter, Susan’s hope for zijiren/one of us children-in-law revealed this point. Here zijiren refers to not general Taiwanese, but the Taiwanese with similar educational and occupational backgrounds (“We truly hoped she could marry a person who was zijiren [one of us in Mandarin]. Because my husband graduated from the Medical School of National Taiwan University; plus, all the children of his classmates are very outstanding—many of them are doctors—we really hoped that they could marry Taiwanese.”) The halo of ivy leagues and the big three occupations (doctor, lawyer, and accountant) outshines other indexes of socioeconomic status. In a word, to the immigrants, the baseline of group differences is less who you are than where you graduate or what you do.

Therefore, when introducing their children, the first thing the immigrants mentioned tended to be where the children graduated. This was illustrated by Steve Chu and Mrs. Chu, the
Taiwanese couple who ran an Asian fusion restaurant before retiring. Although their son turned out to make his living by running a restaurant like them, in the eyes of the couple, he was always the one with a medical doctor potential.

Mrs. Chu: He is really a kind person. When he received his degree from Caltech, he said he wanted to take a break. He asked me, “Mom, why can’t I just open a restaurant like what you are doing?” I said, ‘Only the people who don’t study go run a restaurant. You love studying so much. Why do you want to do that job?’

Mr. Chu: His teacher once told him to apply to medical schools. But he said he didn’t want to become a doctor. I don’t know the reason. But he had the qualifications. He turned it down.

Steve’s wife: He is scared to see blood.

Me: Were you kind of tiger parents holding high standards on children’s grades?

Mrs. Chu: No, we were not. We didn’t push him to study. We encouraged him. I told him, ‘you see, Mom didn’t study much. I learned little things in school. I have lived here for a long time, but I don’t speak English. What I can do is to work. So, let us work hard. I fight, and you must fight as well. Your job is to study. Your father came here, washed dishes to support our living, and worked hard on his study. We fight to get where we are now.’"

The couple’s emphasis on their son’s education, instead of his occupation or income suggested an unspoken hierarchy of occupations, even though a successful restaurant owner, to my knowledge, earned way more than a professor did.

More important, one’s educational attainment decides one’s degree of morality. Putting an emphasis on education, which he associated to personality and IQ, Sean suggested that people with higher educational attainment were more moral:

Sean: The most important thing is personality, isn’t? What is personality? It is honesty: Is he honest? This is very important. Honesty is the opposite of two-facedness. We value it very much. Another criterion is— we surely don’t want them to marry someone too stupid — they
shall be on the same level. This means educational attainment matters, including comprehension of things and so on. All taken together is called IQ.

Me: What decides IQ?

Sean: It consists of two factors. It is natural, but on the other hand, it is also about education. When they have comparable IQ, they share the same vocabularies.

5.3 White Supremacy vs. Black Exceptionalism

Although the immigrants generally prefer co-ethnic children-in-law to other racial and ethnic groups, there is a gap between their expectation and reality. In general, immigrants’ children tend to marry across racial and ethnic lines, establishing an UN-like family. The following conversation between Steve and his wife best captured the gap:

Steve: We have two kids, one son and one daughter. I have no specific preference. But it would be easier to communicate if they married Taiwanese. For a generation like us, that’s a huge difference. We don’t 100% understand English because of our educational background. So, it was better if we had a Taiwanese daughter-in-law.

Steve’s wife: But ours are not Taiwanese. Our daughter-in-law is Korean; our daughter is married to a white, an American. Our home is a United Nation! We were thinking in that way in the old times, before the kids married.

The Figure below presents generational differences in partner choice. Given none of the children of the Chinese interviewees were married at the time of the interview, the data drew only from the islander Taiwanese immigrants in my sample. According to the Figure, immigrant parents themselves seldom marry out and that those who do generally have an interethnic spouse. In contrast, marrying in is rare for the children of the immigrants. Moreover, about 80 percent are intermarried; over 55 percent have a white partner.
The percentage of U.S.-born descendants of Chinese-origin immigrants in the total Chinese population is decreasing, but the actual number is increasing. As of 2010, there were 1,199,467 American-born Chinese living in the U.S., about 30% of the total Chinese immigrant population. Prior percentages were 37.2% in 1980 and 46.4% in 1990. Most people of this group are second-generation members with at least one foreign-born parent. A small number are the third-generation dependents of parents who were both born in the U.S. (Logan and Zhang 2013; Hoeffel and Colleagues 2012; Zhou 2009; Kibria2002). Compared to other Asians, children of Chinese-speaking immigrants are more likely to marry late and to live with their parents in early adulthood and less likely to live in Chinese enclaves, to become teenage parents, and to enter intermarriages (Kasinitz et al. 2008).

Marriageable Whites

That there is a generational difference in intermarriage is not new as several studies (e.g., Lee and Edmonston 2005; Foner 2009) have shown that immigrant parents do encourage their

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7 Source: data from author interviews.
children to marry a white. They believe that their children’s socialization with whites shows the next generation’s fuller integration/ Americanization. In my research, a typical example was Frank, the Taiwanese transnational entrepreneur, who told me that his son dated only white people before he married to a second generation German American. Their son, a cellist who tours internationally, got married seven years earlier in New York’s Central Park. Frank depicted his daughter-in-law as “an American,” to which his wife added, “She is white, see … blonde hair and blue eyes.” Frank followed with “Her ancestors were in Germany. Her last name is Muller.” They both expressed deep affection for their daughter-in-law (“She’s good-mannered”). Like experts of immigration theories, Frank and his wife discussed their son’s partner choice in an assimilationists tone.

Frank: All his relationships developed naturally, because we have many white friends, around half and half. Our white friends do not discriminate against us because we are Taiwanese.

Frank’s wife: That’s because we are assimilated into this white neighborhood.

Frank: Whites are more highly educated. When I was at Purdue pursuing my Ph.D., my white advisor took good care of me. I did my post-doc at MIT and my boss there was also a white. All my lab mates were whites, except one was Korean. But, there were no blacks there.

Frank’s wife: It’s strange.

Although the Deng couple’s embracing whites is not surprising, it is puzzling to observe that they, like Susan, brought up the white group’s collectively educational attainment to justify their opinion. Here we see Frank drawing his marital boundary not along ethnic lines but class ones. Therefore, for the immigrants, race is class in terms of decisions on which people of color are more marriageable than others.
More important, although the workings of marital boundaries become more complicated because of the overlapping of racial and class lines, the underlying marriageability logic, the moral = the marriageable, still stands. Through the eyes of the immigrants, white people are more marriageable than other people of color because they entail better moral traits. Dan's opinion expressed this viewpoint:

Whites are better. If he can marry a white—my kid has some good white friends, but they are not the outgoing type—I think the chance is small, though. But I think if he can marry a white, it will be good for his future. Because, after all, this American society’s mainstream value is white, whites’ values. They built the foundation; they built the basis of the entire system. If he has white relatives, his road to the future will be broader.

Sean, too, backed his support for white people by emphasizing the group’s collective cultivation:

I think whites are good children-in-law. In general, of course there are good guys and bad guys in every racial group, but proportionally speaking, I feel whites collectively more cultivated. I have worked for so many years. I have many white colleagues, many white neighbors, and I socialize with many of them.

The above discussions show that the Chinese speaking immigrants generally think that whites are marriageable because they tend to assume that this group of people is collectively more educated, thereby more moral. The ways that they attach the marriageability of white people to morality again confirms the workings of the marriageability logic. Yet, Larry was one among exceptions, who voiced his opinion without hesitations: “Never Americans, those whites and blacks.”

Unmarriageable Blacks

Given that perceptually race is often seen as class, it is not surprising to see the immigrants excluding black people from the marriageable group. While the immigrants’ perceptions of the marriageability of whites reveal the equation of the moral and the marriageable, their ideas
about the marriageability of black people uncover the equalization between the immoral and the unmarriageable. Susan rejected black children-in-law with a stereotype that this group is ill-mannered and less educated:

Okay, put it this way, first, family background is very different. Most black people, you know, half of the blacks here, I am sure almost 90 percent of them, were not born to well-off families. They are ill-mannered, too. Plus, they receive little education. If my children married to them, I am worried that their children would be discriminated in this society.

Likewise, Larry, too, expressed few preferences for black in-laws: “Honestly speaking, I could not accept them at all. My impression of blacks is mainly derived from here. I’ve seen a lot of them. Among them, many are great. But in general, I think that their qualities are lower, no matter what causes that.”

The immigrants from China generally share a similar viewpoint. Dan held a negative attitude toward black in-laws by believing that this group was in worse socioeconomic status and entitlement:

Dan: I didn’t know much about them. Plus, considering their financial conditions, I wonder if, hmm, anyway, I think they go too far now. They ask for too much entitlement. I’m afraid that they will behave that way in home.

Me: Can you talk more about it?

Dan: Of course, they suffered a lot for being enslaved. Then there were human rights movements, and old polices started leaning in their direction. Now it looks like they are still asking for something, right? It’s too much. Here is how they think: ‘because we suffered, we now don’t need to do anything.’ They ask too much for social welfare. I am worried that their attitude will affect the next generation.

The above discussions show that the immigrants generally draw their marital boundaries along class lines to differentiate marriageable whites from unmarriageable blacks and that there
is an invisible moral line between people above us and below us. In this way, four boundaries overlap: marital, moral, racial, and class.

Yet, in the field of marriageability, we also see situations when race is not class. This raises another question: between race and class which is more significant? If race trumps class, the situation goes that working-class whites stay marriageable, and upper-class blacks are still unmarriageable. In contrast, if class trumps race, working class whites become unmarriageable, and upper-class blacks become marriageable. The answer is both.

5.5 Marrying Out by Marrying Up

How do darker skin people with a middle or upper-class background become marriageable, i.e., how is the immoral transformed into the moral? Below I show how the transformation proceeds by discussing the way Larry talked about his Iranian daughter-in-law. Perceptually, as revealed in previous and this chapter, Larry prioritized coethnic in-laws and put black people at the bottom of his hierarchy of preference.

When Marrying People of Color above Us

Yet class trumps race when the immigrants face the situation in which their children marry to a darker skinned person with an equal or better class background. Larry admitted that he had serious concerns when he knew that his son was going to marry a girl from Iran, a country that was not on his preferred list.

I was concerned, was afraid that the [interracial] marriage would not make the two families closer. I was thinking it might be better to marry someone with a Taiwanese background. I was concerned the daughter-in-law would not be close to us.
Nevertheless, in the end of this conversation, Larry expressed neither concern nor rejection. It was obvious that Larry’s concerns disappeared and that he had seen the daughter-in-law as one of us:

We were lucky, compared to some people’s sons married to American whites and blacks. The sons seemed disappear after the marriage; sometimes [the interracial daughters-in-law] just not fit in. Maybe this was because Iranians value family more than Americans do. Maybe this was the reason that makes a better relationship between her and us.

How does Larry redraw his marital boundaries to perceive his Iranian daughter-in-law to be one of us? The transformation process consists of three phases.

Three Phases of Transformation

Phase 1: She is like our son. The first phase is to add class prerequisites in “them” to replace “other-ness” with “we-ness.” The purpose is to make the racial other become moral, following the marriageability logic. Larry’s practices were to highlight the couple’s similarly educational background to show the in-law’s compatibility. He first brought up her class background, including her unusually maternal family and educational attainment:

She is from Iran, a country that Bush called one of the Four Evils…. She was born in Iran, but her family is open. The family is not usual because it is rare to see female students in Iran. They were studying in the same school. They met each other in the University of Toronto and went to its medical school together. They have different majors, though. According to Larry, the young couple did not decide to get married until both became the residents of a hospital in Michigan. The doctor-to-be status is a huge plus that makes the in-law more eligible to become us.

Yet, class alone cannot fully negotiate the tension between us and them. After making the class line, Larry then “culturalized” it by emphasizing the couple’s shared American-ness:
Although she did not come here until college graduation, there is no cultural conflict [between her and my son]. Conflicts exist in any relationship; typical young couple fights. But culturally, I don’t think there is a conflict, because they both have already left—His Chinese culture from Taiwan, and she is from Iran—they have already left [their respective culture] behind when settling down in the United States. So, there is really no conflict in culture. Plus, because they both speak English; they both understand it; they hardly have conflicts.

On the other hand, Larry had to “de-culturalize” his in-law to make her racial differences less visible.

Phase 2: She is not like them. Larry played down the Iran-ness in his daughter-in-law by emphasizing her modern-ness revealed by her unconventional behaviors:

I can’t think of anything that I can’t accept, because there is none. It turns out I don’t find anything incompatible in this marriage. For example, there are radical Muslims in Iran. I very much disapprove of them. But they [the in-law’s family members] are not like that. My daughter-in-law doesn’t have that attitude. I had been concerned about her religion. I didn’t know what Muslims look like. But she is obviously not that devoted, well, not that superstitious. My daughter-in-law is not a typical Muslim woman. She doesn’t wear a veil when going outside. She is very open and not traditional. She is not that kind of Muslims who pray five times a day, either. Her inner spirituality is Muslim, but she is not obsessed with outer rituals. So, strictly speaking, she is not that Muslim.

While Larry emphasized cultural similarity in the first phase, he turned to highlight the “bad” Iranian culture in the second phase to distant his in-law from the stereotyped image of the Middle East. Again, the point is not whether the in-law is an authentic Muslim, or whether Larry is biased, but her unconventional behaviors make her less immoral.
Phase 3: She is one of moral us. Lastly, Larry brought up family ideology to signify the marriageability of the Iranian in-law:

We are lucky. Fortunately, Iranians’ family relationships are closer than Americans’. Maybe therefore she is closer to us. Like, now, there is Skype. It was usually my son who took the lead. But now she’d actively say: ‘Let’s have a chat!’ when we are Skyping. We didn’t have much small talk before. But now we frequently talk about kids, about grandchildren.

To make his Iranian in-law be more like us, Larry even figured out a connection between Iran and Taiwan. As he put it:

The part I like Iran most? I think I like its culture most. When I knew they were going to get engaged, I went to read books about Iran’s history and its language. Iranians speak Persian. But her English is very fluent because Iran is like our Taiwan. There are American schools with bilingual education. Plus, like us, their culture has a long history. To us, there are really many things worthy to explore, so many interesting things.

Given that Taiwan hasn’t yet become a formal country with “a long history,” the culture Larry mentioned here actually refers to Huaren/ ethnic Chinese culture. However, again, the key point is not whether ethnic-Chinese culture can represent Taiwanese’s, but Larry must display the cultural commonality between Iran and Taiwan to legitimate his in-law’s marriageability. Note how Larry’s praises were based on his traditional expectations on daughters-in-law, suggesting the role of gender in unmaking marital boundaries. Chapter 7 will cover this topic.

5.6 Brown Supremacy or Brown Exceptionalism?

Thus far, I have shown the interactive effects of race and class on high achieving Chinese immigrants’ perceptions of the marriageability of white and black groups. Because race is class in terms of their effects, white people are generally perceived to be more marriageable than
black ones. More important, class works differently for the two groups. While the white supremacy ideology makes working-class whites marriageable, their black counterparts suffer from black exceptionalism. Nevertheless, competing class backgrounds, defined broadly, can make invisible undesirable group differences.

Another question is still left unanswered: Are Latinos whites or blacks when their marriageability is considered? If the Latino group is closer to white people, we can see the effect of “brown supremacy” working making all Latinos marriageable regardless their class status. In contrast, if “orange is the new black,” they become conditionally marriageable: “brown exceptionalism” exists, but the class effect can overcome it.

Before answering this question, it should be emphasized that my interviewees’ knowledge of Latino, Hispanic, and Mexicans are different from their official definitions. Since there were very few Latinos in Asian countries and these identity categories were not official in both China and Taiwan, the interviewees tended to equate Latinos with Mexicans, especially darker-skin ones, with whom they had more contacts in their life.

Both brown supremacy and brown exceptionalism had their support. Yet no matter which side the immigrants represented, the ways they justified their choice reaffirmed the workings of the marriageability logic.

Larry embraced all Mexicans children-in-law with the idea that they were one of us in suffering of being looked down by white people:

I think they are okay because of what I see on streets. I have not few contacts with Mexicans, and compared to whites, I am more comfortable with Mexicans. This is probably because of racism. Whites have a higher status in this society. In every dimension of life, you always feel you are being looked down upon by whites. Mexicans are like us. We are from the outside. Put it this way, we are fellow sufferers, so I instead think Mexicans are okay.
Johnny, too, a scientist in a biotechnology company in his fifties, assigned Mexicans to the marriageable group for their honesty:

I don’t have any particularly bad impression on Mexicans. There are many illegal immigrants among them, but that’s not our business. They came here for their reasons. To send them back or not, that is the government’s decision. Individually speaking, I have seen many Mexicans, and we oftentimes hire them to clean up, I personally think that they are honest.

Yet not a few perceived Mexicans to be conditionally marriageable. Greg expressed his concern first, “They focus on the trivial,” but later expressed acceptance of “those who can see the big picture and who are able to make big decisions.”

Another example was Frank and his wife, who put Mexican and black artists side by side, suggesting only the people of color with similar socioeconomic status were marriageable:

Frank: In fact, several his friends are blacks, but no. He has tons of friends who are artists, performers, and photographers. He likes contemporary music, too. He also enjoys popular music. He knows many musicians

Frank’s wife: He does have black friends. He gets along well with them. But, not so many; he has more friends from Latin America, because, you know, many musicians are from there.

Susan, too, held a similar attitude toward Mexican in-laws by pointing the role of background: “South Americans are okay. It’s also about, you know, look is very important. So is culture, as well as background. Yes, I think Mexicans are more acceptable.”

Dan’s comments were also representative. He classified this group into good Mexicans and bad ones by their socioeconomic status and occupation.

There is a huge gap between rich and poor Mexicans. For Mexicans at the bottom, they may not be able to understand good values, thus they are scarier, and I am more concerned about them. Anyway, the Mexicans I’ve met in my workplace are sharper, and their families are generally better.
The above discussions on the immigrants’ perceptions on the marriageability of the Latino group have limitations in generalization as my interviewees did not recognize racial differences in this group and that they tended to refer this group to darker-skin Mexicans, as mentioned earlier. Yet, it is no doubt that their narratives, even though intertwined with ideas about race and class, support the argument of this and previous chapters that people are marriageable because they are moral.

5.7 Cosmopolitanism and Color-Blindness

However, several Chinese-speaking immigrants downplayed the role of race in discussing what made good children-in-law. They were either cosmopolitan or intermarried. To these color-blind immigrants, who was marriageable us? Did their color-blindness follow the marriageability logic, too? How did the ideologies of White Supremacy, Japanese exceptionalism, and Black exceptionalism function in their life?

For many years, Albert, the professor in music who has developed a Buddhist identity to transcend the tension between Chinese-ness, Asian-ness, and Americanness, did not view marriage as part of his life plan. After the crackdown, his father decided to send his only son away from China:

My father laid at the door of the U.S. consulate in Beijing. He waited overnight for me to make sure I could get a ticket for an interview the following day. The circumstances were very difficult. On that day I was the only one whose application received approval and got a visa.”

Recognizing his father’s efforts, Albert had long rejected marriage. Yet “when the moment came” in his late thirties, Albert married a cellist from Japan who was attending Harvard. Their son, who he described as “multi-cultural,” had just turned nine-years-old at the time of the
interview. Although the son is years away from dating, Albert told me that he had speculated with his wife about what their future daughter-in-law might look like:

Sometimes we joke, “It’s better to find someone like us, right?” One likes Japanese food and the other Chinese cuisine, so that it will be very convenient for us to eat out. But as a matter of fact, our circle of friends is very large. Because he goes to a Jewish school, there are all kinds of kids in our circle, all kinds of races, and many Jewish and American friends. We’re all close. Unofficially, my kid’s first girlfriend was Jewish. Now he mostly hangs out with an Asian girl. They’re a great fit!

Peter, too, minimalized race but put an emphasis on love, respect, responsibility, and “we all have one life”: where his Vietnamese Chinese wife lived. They “found” each other via an online dating service when Peter was studying and working in Houston. “I was so moved when she bought a flight ticket to come to see me,” Peter recalled. Their eighteen-year-old son just enrolled at the University of California at San Diego.

If they love each other, respect each other. Chinese parents have traditions to overstep children’s territory and tell them what to do. That’s his choice. Even if he tells me he is a gay, I am okay with that. Because we all have one life and I hate people to waste their life. This is how I educate my son. I don’t really care if he studies in Ivy League schools. I am more concerned about his responsibility. If he is responsible for what he says and responsible for what he’s done.

Yvonne, the single mother and a successful career woman expressed her color-blind statement in a strong tone:

I don’t have any preference. Hey, I’m American! I have no preference at all. I think people should be more open-minded. Think about why we wanted to go abroad twenty years ago, one reason was that we were stupid. Another was that we thought the living conditions in the United States were better. It was more developed. It was better in every dimension.
What made the United States good? I think it’s because this is a tolerant society overall. Think about if blacks and Mexicans were living in China, would it provide the same conditions? That said, you come to the U.S., you see a lot of its good qualities. I think tolerance is one of them.

Note that Yvonne employed her American identity (“Hey! I am American!”) to legitimate her opinion, revealing her belief that all Americans were, or should be, color-blind. This attitude of politic correctness was shared by the immigrants with an interracial or interethnic spouse.

5.8 Intermarried Immigrants’ Perspective

In 1971, 21-year-old Lisa Tsai left Taiwan with a visa sponsored by her fiancé, 14 years her senior, who claimed to work for the U.S. Navy. According to Lisa, she met her husband in Taiwan through a friend of her brother, who was working in the Taiwan police department where her husband happened to be there to “practice his Chinese.” When I asked for more details about what he was doing at the police station, Lisa replied vaguely, “I cannot tell you that part, and I was too naïve at that time. I just knew I liked the guy, that’s how we met.” He flew back to the U.S. two months later, but soon wrote a letter in Chinese to Lisa’s parents asking for permission to marry her. Lisa’s parents were unsure at first, because they had only met him once, but relented when Lisa promised that she would return if the interracial marriage did not happen. “My family prepared the money for me in case I had to buy the ticket myself. It wasn’t cheap.” On the day Lisa departed Taiwan as a marriage migrant, her parents held a traditional wedding ceremony for her at the airport, even though her future husband was not present. “Many relatives came to the airport. I remember it was in Songsan airport! It was crazy; they played the song of Dragon and Lion Dance. It was so sad to have that song played in an airport.” Lisa got married the day after arriving in the U.S. and gave birth to her daughter in the
following year. Her husband retired from the Navy in 1976, had a heart attack in 1978, and was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis in 1988. He required intensive care until he died in 1997. After raising her daughter as a single mother and working as a computer programmer in Southern California for almost twenty years, Lisa retired in 2014.

Lisa admired her late husband as he had given her a second life despite he had been ill for over two decades.

I am a better person after I met my husband. I am happier. He was just everything to me [in a choking voice]. I miss him a lot. My husband and me, I just couldn't think of any conflicts. He was very good about problem solving. He was very supportive. Once I came to this country, even though he could speak Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinas, he said to me that if you want to be able to live in this country, you must learn how to speak English. So, he said that I would not speak Chinese to you, you got to learn.... My husband was very Taiwanese. He makes me feel great. He’s my living-in teacher. He was everything to me. I loved him so much and he loved me a lot. I couldn’t find anybody to replace him.

Lisa's bi-racial daughter experienced a different marital life. She divorced her first husband, an ethnic Chinese from New Zealand, and later married the son of an African American-Vietnamese couple. Lisa told me that she likes her current son-in-law because “he is very polite.” She appeared surprised when I asked her if she had any preferences for the race and ethnicity of her son-in-law: “I think the important thing is that my daughter is going to marry that person. It is not this person is black or white or yellow, I don’t care just if she loves the person. For me, I really don’t see color.”

Peter, whose wife is a Vietnamese Chinese, asserted that he had no racial and ethnic preference for future in-laws.
I have no preferences for that. But I think that having an international marriage is to make a Chinese future a rich ethnic background. One time we had a joke and I said [to my son], if you have a girlfriend that is American, that’s great, because you make one guy that less dislikes Chinese.

He further justified his standpoint by advocating individualism on the one hand and disapproving white supremacy on the other:

I value individuals, and everyone should make these decisions for themselves. If he happens to meet a girl, even if she is not white, because people think whites are more superior or whatever. If your parents tell you not to do that, this is sad. I think to me, if my boy tells me he chooses it, I will give him my best blessing. I will pray for him and hope they are happy together.

Mary, who was in separation with her Latino husband, claimed that race had nothing to do with her preferences for her children’s marital choices: “I don’t think it’s up to me. It’s up to them. No one is unmarriageable.” In English and Mandarin, she added, “They’re all grown up, and know wrong and right. It’s not me who is getting married. If they say yes, I say yes. They have their own decision, 100%. I’m just on the side to assist.” When I directly asked about the possibility of an African American son- or daughter-in-law, Mary stuck to her claim of color-blindness: “I am pretty open-minded; I have no objection to it because that’s their thing. I am open to it. No, race doesn’t matter.”

Color the intermarried and cosmopolitan immigrants might not see. But did they see class when deciding who is a better child-in-law? If yes, how was class intertwined with morality to affect the immigrants’ marriageability perceptions?

5.9 Conditionally Marriageable
Although the “color-blind” immigrants were different from the “hierarchical” ones in terms of the role of race in making marriageability, they were similar in putting emphasis on the morality factor. Mary commented: “It is totally okay with me if my kids were married to Chinese. Japanese are acceptable, too, as long as they are good persons.”

Albert embraced Chinese children-in-law not because they were “us” but because of their good quality and kindness:

China is developing rapidly. The Chinese students I know are very lovely. It’s not about they are wealthier or whatever. That really doesn’t matter. The most touching part lies in their simplicity. I had no such feelings when I went to do lectures in China Central Academy of Fine Arts. But when I went rural places, such as Shandong province, I felt their lovely. You see the way current Chinese students talk. Their attitudes are very great, not aggressive at all. They work hard, too. They also read a lot. That’s what I care about. When one’s quality shows, the kindness in them shows.

Yvonne, the single mother of two children, topped honesty on her list of what made an ideal in-law:

I think honesty is the most important criteria. Compatibility is important, too. They can do many things together, care for each other, understand each other, and communicate with each other. Occupation does not matter for young couples. I feel it better to let young people explore and figure out different things. Family background is not important, either. This thing is all about the children themselves, and it should be irrelevant to family.

White supremacy seemed disappear among the “color-blind” immigrants, so did black exceptionalism. In other words, occupying an equal or higher-class status makes people of color conditionally marriageable. To Yvonne, choosing a partner was like making a moral judgement between the good and bad:
Although statistically speaking blacks do not look good on the marriage market, you must believe your children. I don’t think my kids are stupid. My kids are smart. They know how to tell the good from the bad. I have confidence in them.

Her description below further revealed her equation of black people with working class, suggesting this group of people’s conditionally marriageable status.

I have been here for over twenty years. I really feel there are all kinds of people. Although there are not many blacks and Mexicans in my office, I feel they are pretty good. The blacks working in my office are pretty good. Considering they are from that kind of family, they must make a lot of extra efforts to get to this step, right? They probably made more efforts than we did.

Albert, too, embraced both white and black people, but unintentionally brought up occupation when describing the latter:

Me: Are whites marriageable to you?
Albert: Of course!
Me: What would you do if your son marries to an African American?
Albert: That’s fine with me, too! I think the marriage is quite discriminated against in Japan. When we were in Japan we saw some of our friends having a black husband. The husband was not even allowed to attend family gatherings. I am not familiar with the situation in China and Chinese community here. I can’t really understand what causes this. But I know many blacks here, especially those who are army-affiliated and are married to Japanese. I just don’t know what creates the tension. But for myself, I am doing art. I know many great black artists. I very much admire them. There is no problem for us to get along.
5.9 Conclusion: Between Hypergamy and Homogamy

What role does marriage play in stratification systems? In general, scholars conceptualizing interracial marriage because of upward mobility, either economically or racially, tend to see spousal resemblance based on race as a barrier to integration. With a tendency to equate marrying out with marrying up, this perspective suggests that coethnic marriage reinforces social boundaries within and across generations and that it is a source of inequality (Lee 2016; Vasquez-Tokos 2017). This argument finds strong evidences in Lisa’s and Mary’s stories, among others. Their social mobility occurs when they are respectively married to a white American and a light-skin Latino. They marry up by marrying out as they give their vows in exchange for both class and racial mobility. In this way, race is class.

Yet, the relationship between marrying up as well as marrying out becomes complicated if race and class differences are examined through the theoretical lens of assortative mating by social background (Blau and Duncan 1967; Kalmijn 1991). This theoretical model is generally established on the status exchange assumption (Merton 1941) indicating that one’s social origin and background are changeable, and thus undesirable differences can be compensated. The complexity of status exchange marriage is mainly generated by the dual meanings of class. Although class is broadly defined as people above/below in this research, the sources of class differences are two-fold. The difference can be generated by one’s ascribed status and/or achieved one if the boundary between people above and below is drawn by educational lines. As defined in the first study that examines “the exchange hypothesis with respect to social origin and education”(Schwartz, Zeng, and Xie 2016:), “status exchange marriages are those in which people with high social origins but low educational attainment marry those with low social origins but high educational attainment— in other words, people marry up in education by marrying down in social origin (and vice versa)” (pp. 1003-1004).
That class difference can be natural and/or nurtured complicates what it means by hypergamy. Sometimes hypergamy refers to “marrying up by marrying out,” a pattern of status exchange in which undesirable racial difference is symbolically compensated via intermarriage. As mentioned above, and in other scholars’ studies (see Vasquez-Tokos 2017), this pattern occurs if non-white persons tend to marry to white people. Yet sometimes, hypergamy equates “marrying up by marrying down,” a pattern of marriage when “persons with high education from modest backgrounds tend to marry those with lower education from more privileged backgrounds” (Schwartz, Zhang, and Xie 2016: 1003). Likewise, this pattern shows that marriage could compensate one’s undesirable class difference. A typical example of this pattern is the marriage between Steve and his wife. Their cross-class union, once disapproved by their relatives, leads to their liberal attitude toward their children’s spousal choice.

However, I argue that these two types of hypergamy—“marrying up by marrying out” and “marrying up by marrying down”—capture only part of the big picture. To the highly-achieving immigrants who were generally born to privileged families, their preference for coethnic in-law suggest that “marrying up by marrying in” is the norm. They hope their children to marry “one of us” along racial, ethnic, and class lines not because the marriage can compensate undesirable differences, but because it can reproduce or advance their distinctions.

More important, the immigrants’ ideas about hypergamy and homogamy are not contradictory perceptions. Marriageability is not an either/or mindset; it is more like a concept of area or field. The area of the marriageable is determined by both race and class. While race trumps class when white people are the prospects, class trumps race when darker-skin candidates are considered. The finding that upper-class black people are as marriageable as working-class white ones not only confirms the role of intermarriage in perpetuating social divisions (Davis 1941), but also points to the potential of intermarriage in dissolving black exceptionalism (Gans 1993). In addition, this Chapter offers evidence for both the status
exchange model (e.g., Kalmijn 1991) and the marital sorting one (e.g., Rosenfeld 2005) by showing that homogamy and hypergamy are not mutually exclusive but representative of different quadrants of the marriageable area. Put differently, the racial asymmetry characterizing the marriage pattern of Asian Americans can be better understood because of the interaction between race and class.

One may raise an objection that I did not directly examine the social origins of children of immigrants, such as marital status, education, occupation, and income. Can the research drawn from immigrant parents represent the lived experience of their children? If I include the children’s perspective, the story told here would be more valid at least at face value. However, my findings of would likely stand. This is because parents’ social origins are highly correlated to their children’s. In addition, according to Blackwell (1998), parental education as a resource plays a significant role in affecting their daughters’ chances of marrying up. This brings us to the last piece of the puzzle: Where did the gender asymmetry in the marriage pattern of Asian Americans come from?
6.1 The Piano Lesson of Deng Family

When I interviewed Frank Deng, he wore a simple short-sleeved shirt and chinos, but the floor-to-ceiling windows with a magnificent ocean view in his living room belied his wealth. His house, protected by a coded gate, stands alone on a hillside outside of La Jolla, an affluent San Diego suburban community. During our interview Frank was joined by his wife, a fulltime homemaker and occasional private piano tutor, also from Taiwan. The Deng couple genuinely loves their German-origin daughter-in-law. “See! She is a blonde with blue eyes,” they showed one of family photos to me and described.

Yet, when taking about the in-law's parenting style, the couple attitude’s changed a little. Mrs. Deng especially expressed her concern about the in-law’s “wrong” method for children education. She demonstrated how to be a good mother via the example of teaching piano classes.

When I was a private piano tutor, I had many beginner students and I taught them in this way. I give them the training when they are little. You don’t have to really become a musician, but you must give them the concentration training. Like my son. When he was little, my training for him was to focus on the thing you are doing. He was doing very great at school. I never had to worry about him. When he was in third or fourth grade, the first thing he did when he woke up was to practice piano. He was disciplined! He himself had got that habit. He got up by himself at four or five and started to practice piano. Then I went back to sleep and cooked breakfast for him at six. After practicing piano and finishing his breakfast, we would go over his homework then I took him to school. There he had a lot of extracurricular activities to do. That was his free time! Then of course she said that the kids
didn’t like to practice piano. When this happened, she told them, “That’s okay. Let’s go.” But I told her, “You have to build it up slowly. When you read, don’t let the kid go play alone. When he plays toys, sit next to him even for only ten minutes. Don’t let him play alone. You must let him focus on one thing.

This chapter represents not only a sequel to Chapter 5, but a finale of the whole process of marital boundary-making. Thus far, I have discussed how race, ethnicity, class, and nationalism are intertwined with each other to shape Chinese-speaking immigrants’ marital boundary formations. Shifting the focus to gender, this chapter will examine the immigrants’ perception of family position differences, and the way it is paired with other forms of group differences to reproduce inequality. Family, like any institution, is structured with multiple categories of positions, such as father, mother, son, daughter, children-in-law, etc. They are the so-called family roles in common sense as well as in sociology. When every family position is tied to implicit but rigid expectations that are taken granted, family ideology construction is complete; when the positions are paired with certain identity categories, tightly or loosely, inequality is reproduced. By defining family as a source of inequality, I offer an alternative explanation for the gender gap in immigrant intermarriage, revealing the changing yet institutionalized nature of marriageability constructions.

6.2 Filial Piety as Institution Logic

In general, the families of Chinese-speaking immigrants are embedded within a network pillared by the traditional ideology of filial piety. This ideology, the so-called Siaoshun/ 孝順, centers on the traditionally Confucian culture of son preference, and works as an institutional logic to assign certain obligations to certain family positions. Put differently, this ideology provides the
immigrants with moral traits to legitimate their evaluation of their children and in-law’s performance.

What does being filial mean to the immigrants who have stayed in the United States for over two decades? The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines this term as “reverence for parents considered in Chinese ethics the prime virtue and the basis of all right human relations.” The definition equates filial piety with Chinese culture. To the immigrants, its meaning changed. Steve no longer asked his children to be 100% filial:

Siao-shun? It’s about the idea that children must obey what their parents say. But now I think this is not right. If they speak up their thoughts that are different from yours, you must see if theirs are truer than yours. If theirs are right, we must shun (follow). If mine are right and they listen to me, then it is [Siao-shun].

Several the immigrants equated filial piety with caring. As Frank Deng put it, “Caring us is enough. It’s about their expression of their care for us.” Practically speaking, caring is about giving calls and sending emails:

Me: Is your son filial?
Mrs. Deng: He is filial, very affectionate.
Mr. Deng: He is very affectionate. You can feel it from every bit of life. He cares us a lot.
Me: Could you give me some examples?
Mrs. Deng: Like one time it was close to my fifty-year-old birthday. We were visiting Taiwan at that time. He got the time zone wrong— he was in New York and called me in the middle of night. He sang to me Happy Birthday on the phone…

Mr. Deng: He gave us an international call from the United States! He truly cares us. Like earlier today, I told him that I will have a friend visited us next week, and that I am going to bring him to play golf. I told him that I didn’t play golf for a while. I have no idea how to begin. Then
my kid went to check and made a reservation for me. We had emails sent back and forth several times this morning. He never emailed us so frequently before.

Mrs. Deng: He said, ‘Mom, you better not go to the golf club at Torry Pines. If you play badly, people behind you will push you.’ He plays golf very well and enjoys it a lot. He knows that it is difficult to play it well at Torry Pines. Then he collected data for us…

Mr. Deng: We didn’t expect that! I am very surprised. He did not talk that much before.

Mrs. Deng: He taught us in detail, was afraid that we were confused.

Susan, too, disconnected obedience and monetary contribution from what it meant to be filial and redefined the virtue with emotional terms, such as care, concern, and family love. She expressed her hurt feelings when she realized that her kids did not give her calls as frequently as her friends’ children did:

Compared to others, I think [my kids are] filial. But sometimes, I don’t know, I feel, seeing these kids doing this way, sometimes I feel hurt. Like one of my friends, she says her children call her every week. My kids, we used to be close, but now they don’t call me sometimes even for several months. Sometimes I really feel hurt. My husband would scold me, ‘They are all grown up! Nothing can do about it. They have their own life.’ But I say, isn’t there any “love” (Ching/情 in Mandarin) left? We don’t expect them to do everything. We are not in need financially. It is about our raising of them, about family love, care, and giving a call to you. I have moved here for eleven years. It turns out my son-in-law—because my eldest daughter needs to be on call—my son-in-law instead makes [his] kids Skype us every week.

Note that the above narrative further reveals Susan’s different expectations on the filial duties of each family role. She feels hurt because she expects frequent calls from her maternal children. She feels surprised when her white son-in-law skypes her and her husband every week. Sections 6.4 and 6.5 will detail what makes in-laws be treated differently.
6.3 Living Closer but Not Together

Another change in the meaning of filial piety is shown by the immigrants’ decision to not live with their children when they are retired. Traditionally, Chinese parents expect that they can count on their children, especially the eldest son, to take care of them as they age. The duty includes providing allowances and family care. Yet, all the immigrants in my sample choose to live independently from their children to show their Americanization, another change in the meaning of filial piety. This was revealed by the following conversation among me, Steve Chu and his wife:

Mrs. Chu: We’ve always been thinking to live on our own. We never think of living with them.

Mr. Chu: We have lived here for a long time, around fifty years.

Mrs. Chu: But his father and mine had lived with us for several decades.

Mr. Chu: Her father stayed with us when he retired. He did not go back to Taiwan until 90.

Me: Do you want to live with your children?

Mr. Chu: No, we don’t have that plan.

Mrs. Chu: I am thinking, one day, when something happens, I will move to a nursing home. I don’t like to live with the kids. They are always busy. I don’t want them to live their life in this way. We can do it.

Mr. Chu: We have talked it through with the kids. When we grow much older, we want to move to a nursing home. They understand this plan. I tell them to send us there.

Another example is Thomas Huang, the professor of Electronic Engineering who moved to the United States with his family in 1965: “I think I will not [live with my kids when retired]. No one do that today, because children have their own life. Plus, my wife and I have lived in the
United States for over fifty years. Her stay is even longer. We don’t expect that they can live with us in the future.”

Although there are some changes in what it means to be filial, some elements continue. Among them is son preference. Although the immigrants chose not to live together with their children, they tended to move near by the house of their son. The immigrants’ demographic background shows this characteristic. Over half of the immigrants did not move to California until they retired. The main factor pulled them to relocate in their older age was a desire to live closer to their sons. Susan, the wife of an orthopedist and the mother of one son and two daughters, explained why she and her husband decided to close their clinic in New Jersey and moved to San Diego:

Susan: We go visit our son every other week…

Me: You fly to the east coast every two weeks?

Susan: No, no, no. My son lives here. That’s why we moved here. He lives in [the city of] Huntington Beach. He is a resident doctor of the UCSD hospital.

Me: What made you want to live with your son?

Susan: I am thinking that one day when I am getting old, I will be in and out of hospital. It’s more convenient. A house next to my sons happened to be on sale. I looked, I liked it, I bought it. So, we stay in our own house when go visiting him.

Me: Did your husband want to move here, too?

Susan: He wouldn’t move if his wife and son are not living here. He has long wanted my son to take over his business. It turns out that my son didn’t move back. Since he was not moving back, I moved here.
When having more than one son, the immigrants generally choose to live nearby where the eldest one works. Larry Liu, a retired Taiwanese engineer, told me that he will be moving to Michigan State once his wife retires, because his eldest son lives there

Me: Do you have any plans for your retired life?
Larry: My wife is still working, but we have talked about it. We haven't decided yet, but I think the best scenario is that we live nearby our son’s house. I hope we can live in our own house, but nearby. In this way, conflicts can be reduced but we can still take care of each other.

Me: Where does your son live?
Larry: I have two sons. The eldest one does not live in California. He is in Michigan. Currently he is a resident physician. He might also move back after three or four years when he completes his residency, so that he can live closer to us. The second does not say so, and we don’t dare to expect that.

More important, the sons, even though they were American-born, may internalize the idea that it is their duty to taking care of their aging parents. This was expressed by Susan, who believed that her son had long “prepared” to do his filial duty:

He thinks that this is his responsibility to take care of us when we are old. Because when he was in high school, many of his friends— he used to befriend our Taiwanese or Filipinos, so it was to everyone’s surprise that he married to a white person. One of his friends is a Filipino who is the eldest son in his family. It seems that he (the friend) has long realized that one day he must take care of his parents. Maybe therefore he (her son) knows he must take care of us when we are old. Plus, [among the kids] he has been the affectionate one. He cares us a lot.
“What did you mean by ‘it’s to everyone’s surprise that he married to a white woman?’?” I probed.

Among my three kinds, he is the one who cherishes family love most. My son dated a Taiwanese girl before, an American-born, when he was in medical school. But he said he was not ready for marriage, but she wanted to. So, they broke up…My eldest daughter has long assumed that my son would marry someone who is our person (Woo-Men-De-Ren in Mandarin). Because he is more conservative; he is more a person who keeps our culture. My eldest daughter once said that she was very surprised that he married to this white person.

This traditionally son-centered approach to filial piety was mostly taken by Taiwanese immigrants. The Chinese ones instead expressed filial expectations from their daughters. Again, this difference is one unintended consequence of the Cultural Revolution.

Although the immigrants have different expectations on who should take filial duties between sons and daughters, this difference instead exposes their gendered approach to aging care, indicating the reproduction of gender inequality within Chinese-speaking immigrant families. This is evidenced by the ways the immigrants talk about what makes good in-laws.

### 6.4 What Makes Good Daughters-in-law?

The normative model of care— differing attitudes of the immigrant parents toward their sons and daughters— simultaneously decide the roles children-in-law are expected to play in filial piety ideology. More important, this gendered ideology has led to the immigrants’ contrasting evaluations of what makes good children-in-law. This is best expressed by Susan:

In terms of individual personality, I have no expectations. But surely, she [the daughter-in-law] must be docile (guai-guai-der in Mandarin), not bad-tempered (Susan expressed it in
Taiwanese: chai-bei-bei). These are for the daughter-in-law. Regarding sons-in-law, hmm, I just hope he is a responsible husband who will be dear to my daughter.

Susan’s emphasis on docility—guai in Mandarin, which is generally defined as good temper, not aggressive, easily controlled, and so on—uncovers a power relationship, a hierarchy between people above and people below within the family. For the parents, a woman does not automatically become one of us when she marries their son, whom they think is forever us. This hierarchical kinship relationship is best captured by Susan’s own words: “in our times, a wife shall do whatever her husband says.” This implicitly means that a wife shall do whatever her parents-in-law say given that traditionally a filial son ought to do whatever their parents say.

A once unmarriageable non-Chinese wife can become a good daughter-in-law once she plays the role of “surrogate us” well, a role designed to glue previously existed kinship and newly established nuclear families. Steve Chu and his wife praised their Korean daughter-in-law unceasingly, because she perfectly displayed the desirable moral traits: respectful personality, “frequent calls and visits, plans of family trip, and adjustment of eating habits,” even after their son died because of cancer:

Me: Do you like your daughter-in-law?

Mrs. Chu: I think she is very great, very respectful.

Mr. Chu: She calls us a lot. We see each other a lot, too. She lives in Claremont Mesa and we live in Oceanside.

Mrs. Chu: We had a phone chat yesterday. She said, ‘Mom, let’s go to zoo during the long weekend.’ So, we plan to go to zoo [with her and our grandchildren] for two days.

Me: She calls you ‘Mom’?

Mrs. Chu: Of course, she calls me Mom. We very much appreciate it, especially now my son is gone.

Me: Is there any conflicts between you and her?

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Mrs. Chu: No. She is great. She is not a person doing sweet talk. But she is practical, hard-working. She manages her household very well every way.

Mr. Chu: At the beginning her meal habits were different from ours. She didn’t want to eat what we had. But after twenty years, she has adopted our way. And now we frequently eat together.

Mrs. Chu: Now when we go visit her, she would say, ‘Mom, you don’t have to bring anything this time. Let me do all the things.’

In contrast, an ideal wife — coethnic with a similar middle or upper-class background—does not make her necessary a good daughter-in-law. The following narrative of Susan, who originally hoped her in-laws were “one of us,” best captured the nuanced difference:

I now find out [Taiwanese] do not necessarily make good daughters-in-law. Because not all second-generation members understand Taiwanese (the Holo language). I also feel they are no different from Americans, no difference. Instead [they are] more spoiled and bossy…. I heard several [daughters-in-law], either from our Taiwan [or second generation-Taiwanese], they are not better off! I have one friend, two friends. Their daughters-in-law are from Taiwan, they were both born in Taiwan. It is natural that kids like to eat mom’s food. She (the daughter-in-law of Susan’s friend) took my friend's food back and threw it away!

“How did she find out the food was thrown away?” I asked.

“Her daughter lives nearby their house. She (the daughter-in-law) turned out to be fine when she (Susan’s friend) gave her dishes to her son through her daughter!” Susan continued, “Another [friend’s daughter-in-law] is filing a divorce. Her son’s wife, her daughter-in-law, is very bad-tempered. And she lied. She was also from Taiwan. I know many cases like this. Today’s girls in Taiwan are different now.”

Susan’s change in evaluations of co-ethnic wife/daughter-in-law suggests that these two roles require differently desirable moral traits and that the two traits are coming from different
sources. Choosing a right wife is related to one’s place of birth, whereas being a good daughter-in-law is more about if her performance of being “surrogate us” fits to filial piety ideology.

6.5 What Makes Good Sons-in-Law?

The immigrants’ evaluation standards toward in-laws are gendered. Although the immigrants expect their daughters-in-law to serve their kinship family as people below, their expectation on their sons-in-law is lighter. Larry Liu expressed his gendered expectation:

  We don’t lay heavy expectation on our daughter-in-law. We only hope the two families can stay in touch. This is very light expectation. Do you know how many people here are not welcome to visit their sons and their grandchildren? It is less difficult to visit daughters’ [children]. My expectation on my son-in-law is similar; it is better if the two families are closer. But for the son-in-law, I don’t dare to expect that much. Because, based on what I see, it is usually daughters that are closer to us. Look around, this is common. Parents and daughters tend to be closer.

  In addition, the immigrants’ expectations are not only gendered but also stereotyped. A daughter-in-law is good when she is doing well in the private sphere of family, whereas a son-in-law is good when he is a great breadwinner. More important, this gendered expectation is independent from one’s racial and ethnic background. Andy Cheung’s two daughters married to a white person and a 1.5 generation Cambodian respectively, but he holds similar attitude toward the two. For the white son-law, he commented:

    I get along well with him because we do not live together. I speak to him in English. We both are very polite to each other. I don’t see him a lot. I neither like nor dislike him. I am fine as long as my daughter likes him.”

  For the Cambodian in-law, Andy also showed a neutral attitude:
I am also okay with the Cambodian. They live here but we don’t live together. We have no problem to get along. I feel he is fine. He is hard-working. My daughter takes more advantage of this partnership because he is usually the one who is doing things, yard, cooking, and so on. He does everything; he contributes more than my daughter does.

Moreover, he is close to perfect if his behaviors can occasionally cross the line, reversing traditional gender roles. The Chu couple’s praise of their white son-in-law revealed this difference:

Mrs. Chu: He cares his family a lot. It is his wife that is doing filial duties for us. He hardly calls us; usually [my] daughter makes phone calls.

Mr. Chu: Men don’t call!

Mrs. Chu: He focuses on his job, but he also takes care of their kids since they are very little. My daughter is a professor in a college. She has no time, so he must be responsible to take care of kids. He helps a lot like dropping off the kids, changing their clothes, and so on. We sometimes think that he is doing too much!

Mr. Chu: He was twenty-something at that time, so he had much more time.

Mrs. Chu: He is genuinely a family-centered person.

Mr. Chu: We get along well. He likes to eat our food very much. So, there is no conflict.

Likewise, Susan ceaselessly praised her son-in-law, because he had postponed his study in law school and become a Mr. Mom to help her eldest daughter finish her medical school training:

In fact, this son-in-law is very great. They were twenty-five years old when getting married. My daughter then went to medical school. And, because his father is a lawyer, I asked him, ‘if you want to go to law school, why don’t you start it now?’ He answered, ‘one needs to take care of another.’ When my daughter received her medical education, he was the one who cooked and ran errands…. He did not go to law school until my daughter graduated. After graduation, my daughter had to fulfill her residency duty…she spent total six years in
her residency. At that time, I told her, ‘he took care of you when you were studying in medical school. But now you are not taking care of him when he is in law school.’ She told me, ‘I have to be on call! I don’t sleep for the whole night, I’m very tired.’ My son-in-law is great. Even now he is still responsible for cooking and cleaning. He is the main caregiver of the kids, too. He changes their diapers and feeds them. He is a good father and good husband. He does housework, he has a sense of humor, and he laughs whatever we say...He is truly a great son-in-law.

Although this white son-in-law is close to perfect as a husband, father, and son-in-law, to Susan, his family position is always the other. This can be illustrated by his misunderstanding of the proper title of a mother-in-law in the family. Susan brought up this story with still a bit of bewilderment:

After several years of their marriage, they had a baby. Then he asked me, ‘what do you want me to call you?’ I said, ‘in our culture, you have to follow your wife to call me.’ Then he immediately said, ‘Okay, Mom.’ He right away called me ‘Mom.’ What I wanted to say was that in our culture, you can’t call me Mom or call my first name. You shall call me Mrs. Wu to show your respect for elderly people. But before I finished my sentence he interrupted and said, ‘That’s good, you are my Mom.’

6.6 Raising the Next Generation of Us

In the minds of the immigrants, a daughter-in-law also fails to play her role when she cannot sustain the upper-class status of the family. Put differently, the immigrants would detect their daughter-in-law’s undesirable racial/ethnic and/ or class differences when observing her raising the next “us” different from theirs. The story about parenting and a piano lesson I heard from the
Deng couple best reveals this “from us to them” process during which gender trumps other categorical differences.

The couple proudly told me that the daughter-in-law, who made efforts to understand cross-strait issues, once wore a T-shirt with a mark of “Independent Taiwan” on it walking on streets. To the couple, their white daughter-in-law has doubtlessly crossed the racial line, becoming one of us.

The couple, like other Chinese-speaking immigrant, told me that they do not expect any filial behavior from the in-law, because they have been Americanized:

Phase 1: Race Trumps “Culture”

Me: Is your daughter-in-law filial to you?

Mrs. Deng: Is my daughter-in-law filial? I don't know if she understands this concept, the meaning of filial piety. But we don’t have any expectation.

Mr. Deng: Because it’s the young couple’s own choice. They know each other by themselves, they make their own decision, and they must take the responsibility of their choice. We don’t expect anything from them.

Mrs. Deng: Yeah. Being filial is rare here. Since settling down in the United States, we have been changed by the American education we received and by the environment with which we are surrounded. Most of us came here as international students. This means that we have lived here since twenty-something. Our thoughts are more American now.

Likewise, when talking about what makes a good daughter-in-law, the couple attached family values and parenting duty to this family position. They continued praising their daughter-in-law for her American style, suggesting the superiority of American-ness over traditionally family ideology.

Mr. Deng: The most important thing for being a daughter-in-law is family. It is very important.

Then it is about how to educate children. [Frank turned to his wife] Our daughter-in-law is
doing great, right? [Linda did not respond, and Frank continued] Their American way of parenting is different from our Taiwanese’s. Sometimes there are some conflicts. We Taiwanese parents ask you (meaning children) to do whatever we want you to do and tell you what you shouldn’t do.

Mrs. Deng: We manage them to obey when they are little; their way is to communicate.

Mr. Deng: When they (American children) are kids, they (American parents) always explain to them why you can’t do this or that. They explain until their kids understand it. She (his daughter-in-law) emphasizes two-way communication. Her parenting style is totally different. I think this type of education is very great. The kid, I mean my grandkid, has already known what should do and what you should not do. Here is an interesting story. He sometimes makes mistakes. When he did, he would secretly come over and told me, “Grandpa, I made a mistake.” I asked him, “What mistake?” Then I told him to correct it next time. See, he already has the courage to admit his mistake!

Mr. Deng: I told her that education is a problem in Taiwan. Early childhood education is the most important thing here. She is doing very great in her parenting work.

Me: What did she do?

Mrs. Deng: She is very open-minded. She doesn’t think kids have to do homework from the moment they wake up. She lets them grow up naturally. She spends time going out with the kids. She plays with them, does exercise with them every day.

In this first phase, the white in-law’s Americanness is still a desirable trait in opposition to traditional Chinese culture in the eyes of the Deng couple. The in-law is good because she is open-minded, democratic, patient, and spending time with kids in terms of parenting style. But in the next phase her racial difference started emerging when Mrs. Deng began to compare the in-law’s parenting style with her.

Phase 2: Gender Trumps Race
Mrs. Deng: The thing I feel different is that she has her own circle with white people, her own circle of friends. When she hangs out with friends, I feel that she ignores kids. The kids play games by themselves while the adults are chatting with each other. One time she didn’t realize that it was already mid-night, and it was time to bring the kids to bed. We feel that you can’t forget to discipline kids for your adults’ own fun. I told her, “You have to let the kids establish a regular schedule.” They must have not slept enough when they go to school the next morning.

Mr. Deng: It happens only on weekends!

Mrs. Deng: Yeah, she said that it happens on weekends and that the kids have their own party. The parents bring their kids here every time. Kids play with kids and adults with adults. Such a thing happens but I don’t tell her [how I feel].

Mr. Deng: She figured it out herself.

Mrs. Deng: Yeah, she figured it out herself. Because I told her, the next day, I told her that the kids were too tired. They didn’t want to eat breakfast. I said, “Of course they don’t want to eat because they didn’t have enough sleep. They didn’t rest well.” I told her indirectly. I didn’t directly point out that you let them go to bed too late yesterday. I just said, indirectly, that the kids had no appetite because they were too tired.

The above conversation shows that the white in-law’s American traits, such as individualistic and leading a balanced life, become disadvantages. A good daughter-in-law shall invest all her efforts in raising the next us. Here the institutional logic of family replaces the marriage one. Playing the role of “surrogate us” is so important that desirable whiteness turns to undesirable.

Phase 3: Class Trumps Race

The racial difference then was replaced by class one when Mrs. Deng started to demonstrate how she would cultivate her grandchildren’s patience and concentration via piano
lessons. In this way, the source of in-law’s otherness changed from race to class origin in the guise of the so-called mother and daughter-in-law issue.

Mrs. Deng: I think my way of educating children is somewhat different from my daughter-in-law’s. She lets kids develop naturally, but when I was raising my kid, I think the best way to teach him concentration was through piano practice and let him play when it was a play time. You can’t let him practice for only five or ten minutes and then just let him leave. You must build up the time slowly. I have communicated this matter to my daughter-in-law—

(interrupted by the husband)

Mr. Deng: Here the conflicts come...

Mrs. Deng: I told her, and I mentioned it many, many times. I told her that when you let the kids practice the piano, you, as parents— surely I don’t mean that the kids must become musicians in the future, because it is really a hard job— but what I am saying is that practicing piano is not to lead him to go this way, but I always feel it is the best method to let them learn to concentrate. Because your eyes must read, your ears must listen, your brain must beat time, and then your hands have to move. All has to focus on one thing. It is impossible to do this if not all senses are concentrating on it. But you cannot have your concentration in a short time and without training.

Me: Did your daughter-in-law listen to you?

Mrs. Deng: She listened. Like playing games, she let him play alone. But I showed her how I would do. I told her, “see, you have to encourage him and play with him.” She said, “The kid only plays for a while, then he feels frustrated and gives up.” But I told her, “This is why focus is needed. Be the kid’s company. You sit next to him and build up his concentration step by step.” Whenever my grandkid comes back, I will sit next to him and play with him, we play games and toys together. He likes to play the game of catching a flight. I sit next to
him and let him concentrate on only this thing. When the play time ends, I say, “Okay, that’s enough.” Then we finish the play.

I did not realize that the two families did not live together until the end of the conversation. Although Mr. Deng remained silent when Mrs. Deng demonstrated the art of parenting, he actively brought up the fact that the in-law was not good at cooking. This reveals their assumption that women are natural caregivers.

Me: Does your daughter-in-law live with you?

Mr. Deng: She did. We had been living together, but around one year ago they moved to Rancho Santa Fe.

Mrs. Deng: She found a job there. She was a writer but has become a teacher of special education.

Mr. Deng: When we lived together, she (meaning Mrs. Deng) was still the one who prepared everyday meals. She (the in-law) couldn’t cook. She knows nothing about cooking, neither Chinese food nor Western ones.

Mrs. Deng: She knows a little but is not good at it. When she married to my son, my son is the one who prepare food. She appreciated it when I was in the charge of food preparation. Besides, the kids loved it!

The above process of transforming us into them reveals the sufficient power of gender to overcome previous boundaries. During the process, the in-law’s whiteness has changed from being an advantage to a disadvantage, suggesting the loosening relationship between racial/ethnic difference and family position difference.
6.7 Conclusion: Gender Trumps

Highly achieving Chinese-speaking immigrants hoped that their children marry along ethnic lines and/or marry up along class lines, because having an in-law that is one of us would make the two families closer, as Larry Liu and other interviewees expressed. Yet, growing up in America, most of their children marry out. Nevertheless, the immigrants are generally pleased with their children’s marital decisions. This is because their non-Chinese in-law were either born to “good” families (ascribed status) or have worked their way into the middle or upper class (achieved status). This “gap” between “parental talk” and “children’s choice” suggests that undesirable racial and ethnic traits can be out-weighed by class status.

If perception is reality, the immigrants would express a racial preference for their daughters’ spousal choice, given that Asian females are twice as likely than their male counterparts to have an interracial partner. Yet, the immigrants hardly brought up gender in their talk about who is marriageable. Yet if gender is a neutral factor, what made the gender gap in intermarriage? Some argue it is a matter of the gendered pattern of racial mobility, suggesting that Asian females’ achieved status is higher than that of Asian males in the eyes of non-immigrant Americans (Lee 2016). Some point to the ubiquity of Asian female sexuality, suggesting that Asian women were born to be objects of male gaze. Others maintain that minority women’s high rate of out-marriage is a demonstration of their agency. For example, Latinas would prefer a non-Latino because they are consciously choosing a spouse who is unlike their patriarchal father, suggesting the potential of intermarriage for improving gender inequality (Vasquez-Tokos 2017). Each approach confirms the significant role of immigrant women in changing the racial demography of the United States. But while it may be true that Asian females are more racially mobile, sexually desirable, and more aware of patriarchy than their male counterparts, can we make a conclusion without reference to other group-based differences and inequalities?

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I argue that gender asymmetry in intermarriage among Chinese Americans is an unintended consequence of institutionalizing the pairing between family positions and group differences. Chinese-speaking immigrants transmit son preference ideology, explicitly and implicitly, to their families, which tightens the connection between we-ness and the daughter-in-law position. As a result, maternal daughters have more freedom to choose their spouse on their will because "we-ness" is not firmly attached to the son-in-law position. Put differently, although it may be true that growing up in this patriarchal environment has long pushed daughters of immigrants to consciously decide to marry out, it is the same familial ideology that contributes to their higher degree of freedom to choose whom to marry. Their male siblings, especially the eldest son, have less freedom for making such a decision. Agency is not limitless; it is structurally conditioned.
Conclusion and Discussion: Towards a Morality Approach to Marriageability

1. What’s Love Got to Do with it? And how about Love?

In this dissertation, I have been building a case for the multidimensionality of marriageability. In making this argument, I have proceeded by attempting to bridge immigration research and intersectionality theory to examine immigrants’ making and unmaking of marital boundaries. Although immigrants’ preference in mate-selection might merely be a projection of their identity choice, I show that the ideas about what makes a group of people more marriageable than others is also an instance of identity politics involving race/ethnicity, class, and gender.

First, I took up the question of the particularism of immigrant marriage. I argue that immigrants’ marital preference is neither the mirror of their identity formation nor the destiny of their assimilation path, partly because historical events continue to impact their us/them distinctions and partly because there are so many pre-migration factors (changes in emigration related policies in sending countries, international affairs, and visa status) that pave the way for their post-migration upward mobility. Immigrants’ degrees of Americanization and upward assimilation are no doubt highly correlated to their marital preferences and decisions, but it is also true that a certain percentage of group difference in intermarriage cannot be not fully explained by immigration research. Thus, this was partly an argument about how immigrant identify matters for the racial demography of the United States and partly an argument about how conditions other than race should be assessed to examine the multi-dimensionality of marriage.

Second, I discussed the relationship between marrying out and marrying up, between homogamy and hypergamy. Class is itself a complicated concept and much of the immigrants’ interpretation of people above/below them is generated by social origins involving both achieved
status (educational attainment, occupation prestige, etc.) and ascribed status (color of skin, parental education, and so on). Put differently, racial and class boundaries overlap to some degree. The power of globalization/ Americanization has led the immigrants to equate whiteness with superiority and symbolically added the hypergamy effect to interracial unions with white people. But my point is not to argue about the insignificance of race or about the perpetuation of black exceptionalism, but to address the question of how the meanings attached to class are intertwined with the concept of race to affect the construction of marriageability.

Finally, I addressed the question of why intermarriage may have little power to advance gender equality. The problem is not one of marital preference/ decision itself but how the preference/ decision is legitimated. To the immigrants, a group of people’s marriageability does not necessary translate them into good in-laws. While marriageability is shaped by the interaction effect among race, ethnicity, and class, filial ideology gives rise to gendered expectations for in-laws. “Given sources of legitimation are different, changes in marriage patterns do not necessary lead to advancement of social equality. In sum, “demography is not destiny,” as McCall and Orloff concluded in a recent paper on the formation of white women trump voters, if we really want to better understand “the multidimensionality of identity politics” as well as “women’s positioning in systems of complex inequality” (McCall and Orloff forthcoming).

2. Victor’s Tears

On a Sunday afternoon in March, Victor, 31, an American-born Chinese and patent lawyer, started to weep when I asked him why he decided to marry a Chinese native the preceding August one whom he had only seen twice before the wedding ceremony. He refused my offer to take a break, and instead started telling me about his not-unusual love-hate relationship with his
father, who had passed away two years before. Arriving in his “dream land” with few resources in the early 1980s, his father started his personal American dream by doing menial jobs in a San Francisco restaurant. Victor was born soon after his parents settled down in the Bay area, the home of his father’s wealthy brother, who helped with the application process for a family reunification visa. Victor’s remembered his father as a stern figure who was always working to support a family of four (including a brother one year younger than Victor). Possessing a bad temper and high standards, his father often scolded Victor for small wrongdoings, with Meiyon—“useless”—a word he heard many times a day. Victor told me, “Even in his last few days lying in the hospital, he still scolded me that way.” In contrast, Victor’s mother treated him as her “lifeblood”—Mingenzi—for taking out a loan to pay for his college tuition when his father refused to pay the bill, preferring instead that Victor support himself. According to Victor, “She knew education was important!” When Victor graduated from UC Davis with a degree in electrical engineering, it was his mother who encouraged him to apply for a J.D. program—“She always hoped her children could be doctors or lawyers.” He proudly told me, “I paid off all my debts when I was just an intern!” Once Victor started to prove his “usefulness,” his father suffered a fatal heart attack while doing yard work. Not long afterwards, Victor decided to try an arranged marriage, in great part due to his mother’s insistence that it would be un-filial if both his father and mother died without having grandsons. Victor’s wife is the daughter of an old friend of his mother’s in Shanghai. Victor said, “I told my wife that she has to listen to everything that my mother says when she moved here. She would not be allowed to show any disrespect to my mother. In my house, my mother ranks first, my kids second, me third, and she, the last one.” When I asked him how he planned to raise his children, his answer surprised me: “Now I think that what my father did is right. I am grateful for that. It made me humble. When I have kids, if they are boys, I will raise them like my father.”
Victor’s story offers a glimpse into immigration theories that sit on two sides of a debate on the applicability of an assimilation framework—straight-line assimilationists on the one side and segmented assimilationists on the other. Straight-liners unifies upward, racial, and marital assimilation by asserting that upward assimilation is the only outcome, and that fully assimilated individuals are very likely to desire white identities and intermarriage as an entryway into the mainstream (Park 1928; Gordon 1964; Alba and Nee 1997). Segmented assimilationists are less strict about unification, preferring instead to underscore the positive effects of ethnicity of origin on integration and the possibility of downward assimilation among the children of immigrants (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

Victor’s story demonstrates validity of both straight-line and segmented assimilation theories. As predicted, he is more Americanized than his parents; his fluency in English and Tanshai dialect—his parents’ native language—showed his adoption of the path of selective acculturation with bilingualism to mobility. But his tears reveal some puzzles that left unanswered. The “outcome” of his path to mobility is as predicted, but the process seems more complicated.

Victor’s tears suggest his story was not a typical case of straight-line assimilation theory. First, although he identified with Asian American, his interpretation of what Chinese ethnicity meant to him was more meaningful than just symbolic. Second, he had never dated any white girl, and had no intention to enter an interracial relationship, either.

Likewise, Victor’s situation does not seamlessly fit the segmented model, whose supporters have mapped out three probable assimilation routes—downward, upward, and bicultural upward—whose processes are conditioned by three types of intergenerational acculturation: consonant, dissonant, and selective. Downward assimilation is paired with dissonant acculturation, in which the pace of children’s acculturation is much faster than that of their parents in terms of learning English and American values. Upward assimilation entails similar
paces of acculturation between immigrant parents and their children. Bicultural upward assimilation is driven by a selective acculturation process in which both parents and children are not only accustomed to American norms but are also involved in their ethnic community (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). Victor does not fit with either one of the two upward assimilation routes due to the presence of intergenerational acculturation. According to the segmented assimilationist framework, to achieve upward social mobility both Victor and his parents would have to show either consonant acculturation or selective acculturation—that is, they would all need to speak English well and be familiar with American values whether they were involved in their ethnic community. However, given his parents’ lack of command in English and lack of membership in any ethnic organizations, they serve as an example of dissonant acculturation. According to Portes’s and Rumbaut’s (2001) ideal types, Victor and his parents exemplify the second type of dissonant acculturation, which is characterized by loss of parental language, role reversal, and intergenerational conflicts. However, the segmented model cannot fully explain Victor’s story—how he achieved upward assimilation with dissonant acculturation, and why he has decided to take on an Asian identity but insisting on not marrying an American, including hyphenated Americans.

Victor’s story represents the second generation in the United States, American-born children with at least one immigrant parent. This group of people is transforming the face of the United States. As of 2010, its population is estimated at 35.7 million, approximately 12% of all U.S. residents of foreign origin, and is predicted to reach 80.6 million by 2050. Over one-half (55%) of this group of people (19.7 million) are adults, with a median age of 38; 42% are married. In terms of race and ethnicity, 46% of the adult children of immigrants currently residing in the U.S. are Whites, followed by Hispanics (35%), Asians (12%), and African Americans (4%). For the most part, their demographic characteristics (e.g., median household income, percentage of college students, homeownership rate) are higher than those of their immigrant parents.
Politically, they are more likely to identify themselves with the Democratic Party (Pew Research Center 2013). In addition, this group of people shows significant heterogeneity due to differences in the geographic origins of their immigrant parents and their respective histories, dialects, and levels of assimilation.

Victor’s story, their fellows and parents alike, is a paradox. To what extent can this paradox be explained by immigration theories focusing on immigrant conditions?

3. Reconsidering Immigrant Conditions

Premising mobility as a marital assimilation engine, assimilation theorists, particularly segmented assimilationists, hold a strong assumption about the relationship between parental mobility and children’s acculturation. In their groundbreaking book, Portes and Rumbaut (2001: 283) charted three paths of mobility across first to third generations. The first path shows that immigrant parents’ achievement of middle-class status would facilitate their children’s structural assimilation and their grandchildren’s complete integration, whereas the second and the third paths suggests the working-class background of the first generation can lead to either upward or downward assimilation, depending on the immigrant parents’ connection to ethnic communities. Given that the three paths entail an assumption that the parents are starting their American dream with a working-class background, segmented assimilation theory, straight-line assimilation one alike, displays an evolutionary viewpoint on the effect of time on immigrant integration.

There is a great deal of truth to this generational mobility argument. But middle and upper-class immigrants’ paths to mobility are missing in terms of first generation's background determinants, in the words of Portes and Rumbaut. Given the interviewees in this research are
high achievers, my research showcases a fourth way characterized by historical contexts and intersectionality effects, complement assimilationists’ mobility model.

For example, the Chinese interviewees in my research show how turning point events affect one’s chances of success. The 1989 Beijing Student Movement not only plays a push factor for several of their decision to emigrate, but also impacts their physical and societal mobility afterwards. After the movement, Chinese government set harsher rules for studying abroad, including political examination, two to five years of working prerequisites, and years of program completion (Zhao 1996: 155-159). Many students were forced to make extra stops before arriving to the U.S. destination.

Before landing in the dreamland, Peter was forced to stay in Hong Kong because that was the only place he could receive sponsorship from his relatives. Afterwards, he first stopped in Oklahoma, then Houston before settling down in San Diego. He recalled the obstacles facing him during his preparation for studying abroad after the Incident:

When I graduated from China, they didn’t allow me to go abroad and ordered me to pay for the money they invested in me. The money was called “training expense”. That was a requirement set up for everybody who wanted to go abroad for studying. If you didn’t work for five years, full time, you got to pay ten thousand dollars one year. I was earning one hundred and twenty dollars a month at that time. That was a lot of money. I had to pay it, or I couldn’t get my passport. Of course, the situation has changed today. People make more and think that that’s not a big deal, and that everybody can make it.

Sean considered himself a victim of the movement for its unintended consequence on his studying abroad plan.

I am a victim of June 4th Incident (laughing out loud). It had a direct effect on me. In fact, I already received an admission in 1990— I graduated in 1989 and I applied for schools in the United States as soon as I graduated. At that time, in 1990, a school had already given me
an admission. We had to be awarded a full scholarship to study abroad. It was Yale that
gave me an admission. I was admitted by many schools; Yale was one of them. But it came
the June 4th. Chinese government changed its study abroad policy and made you
impossible to get a passport. I couldn’t [go abroad] not because of visa but because of
passport. It changed its policy. It said that it would not accept your application for a passport
unless you have a relative in the U.S. — outside of the country, not necessarily in the U.S.
Thus, I said I was a direct victim of the June 4th (laughing out loud again). Many people
were out of there once they were graduated from college. Many of my classmates made it
that way. It had little effect on them. I was not in rush when in college. So, when many
people already started to apply in their third or fourth year, I didn’t do it. It is said that there
are many factors affecting one’s life. Some things are out of your control. Diligence decides
one’s success. But many times, it also depends on many external factors. You are
happened to be at the right place on the right time, and you succeed.

To those who eventually “got out,” being able to settle down in the United States was
sufficient to define what “made it” meant. Peter considered himself a successful immigrant. He
told me that the wealth he has accumulated has enabled him to retire anytime he wants. He was
very proud of his ability of bringing his parents to live their retirement life under the same sky.
The only “bug” in his current happy life is the wealth of his younger brother left behind: “He
called my name, not call me brother, when we were on the phone last time. He might be
unaware of it, but I noticed that. He is very wealthy now, so he thinks he can call my name.”

This situation, transnationally downward mobility, is collectively facing Chinese immigrants
who have generally moved upward along a class ladder. Since China began its economic
reform in 1978, it has demonstrated to the world the miracle of the Communist version of
capitalism. China’s economic boom has created China dream that the Chinese immigrants had
missed. As a result, several thought that they are economically falling behind their counterparts left behind in China. Sean expressed some regret for deciding to emigrate:

I was poor, so I wanted to study abroad. But it never occurred to me that China would have developed so rapidly. Among my classmates, some didn’t go abroad. They live well now. If you ask me if I would still choose to go out if I could see what it is now, my answer is no. I was living well at that time. My advisor was the chair of the graduate school I studied. My wife, my father-in-law was its vice chair. I was a straight-A student. If I stayed there, I would live very well. I had a friend with whom I shared a dorm room. Today he’s become a deputy-director of a Land Administration Bureau. It’s a state-level Bureau. He is one-year senior than me. We were close. Many people I know have become either directors or chiefs.

Transnational downward mobility and the bamboo ceiling together give rise to Sean’s low self-esteem. When asked if he considered himself a successful immigrant, he gave a negative answer after a long pause, regardless of his achievement in structural assimilation:

Am I a successful immigrant? [Pause 16 seconds]. To me [pause 5 seconds], let’s put this way, I feel my ability— I feel I could have made it better. But because of several reasons I didn’t. So, I don’t consider myself a successful immigrant. Maybe it’s about the road I chose. Many reasons caused many changes along the way. […] Many classmates of my cohort finished their Ph.D. and found a better job than mine. Many of them got promoted easily. [Pause 5 seconds] It is all about my own choices. Looking back, when I was preparing TOEFL and GRE exams, I was a straight-A student in my class. I was successful when I was in the mainland. But now those who chose to stay are more successful if success is defined by status. That was the time when Shenzhen was undergoing economic reform. Many people went there after graduation. I instead went to pursue a Ph.D. I know a friend who’s been playing futures and the stock market. Now he is a consultant for the Hong Kong Stock
Exchange. He is also the chief of a Continental Division. He is doing very well now, but he was [pause]. Maybe people just walked on difference paths (laugh embarrassedly).

The above discussion, especially Sean’s story, reveals that the immigrants’ path to, and feelings of, upward mobility, are shaped by pre-migration conditions. In addition to the historical context of mobility, my research also shows that visa type matters.

4. Mobility by Design

Which type of visa that an immigrant holds when entering the U.S. borders paves the way for his/her upward mobility. Most of my interviewees are student-turned immigrants and their spouses, so their path to assimilation is significantly different than marriage migrants’. This research defines student immigration as a process in which international students who study and stay experience multiple transitions in both public and private spheres. Their visa status changes from F1/student, through H1/employee, to permanent resident; they are expected to play different family roles (husband/wife, children-in-law, parents, and grandparents) as time goes by. More important, after graduation, international students are usually channeled through immigration policies to work and settle down in the country where they study due to the talent hunting in the global era, suggesting that paths to mobility are structured by broader forces. Most contemporary international students are self-funded, and tend to be born to middle and upper-class families that can financially support their pursuit of graduate degrees overseas. This privileged status works as a specific immigrant condition that enables them to secure a foothold in both the sending and receiving countries. They were elite students before emigration and are expected and helped to maintain and upgrade their elite status after emigration. In short, it is upward mobility by design.

*Theorizing Study and Stay*
It is not until recently that scholars started to call for defining international students in the global era as a unique field. Advocates (King and Raghuram 2013; Findlay 2011) suggest that it is necessary to establish a new line of research— the so-called international student migration/mobility (ISM) research (Madge et al. 2009)— to study this group of people, because its “slipperiness” reveals new tensions between international migration and higher education, as well as between inclusion and exclusion.” Here mobility is broadly defined. It refers to not only the ability of physical movement but also the capability to accumulate and converse a variety of capitals: economic, human, cultural, and social.

Although scholars agree that international students deserve a special attention, they have little consensus about what to study and how to do it. Giving a name to this emerging field of research itself is a challenge. This group of people can be defined in so many ways that each definition indicates a specific research interest. While one may choose to call this group “overseas students” to emphasize its student nature, others may prefer “student overseas” to highlight their crossing-border mobility. In addition, given a significant proportion of this group of people would either intentionally and unintentionally follow a study and stay mode, it is difficult to set a definite time point of their immigration. Thus, scholars are uncertain about which category is more appropriate for this group of people among student migrants, student emigrants, or student immigrants.

Given its interdisciplinary nature, theorizing this group of people is a challenge, too. There is an ongoing debate over which theoretical approach is more valid to examining this new phenomenon (King and Raghuram 2013: 128). As King and Raghuram (2013) pointed out, this phenomenon can be framed either as a case of international migration (see Findlay et al. 2012) or higher educational (see Sidhu 2007 or Coates 2009). Either way shall recognize that students are commonly faced with a “contradictory policy landscape” (p.130). More important, to advance the theorization of this phenomenon, they suggested that scholars of future studies should ask
such questions as “how students migrate,” instead of “why they migrate,” pay attention to the students’ mobility, racialization, and life course within their receiving countries contexts, and explore the role of “exilic intellectuals” they play in nationalist projects of their homelands (Sidhu and Coates 2009: 132-133).

4. The Case of Chinese Student Immigrants

Although pre-modern Chinese students tended to “study but return,” they had been long symbolically and legally identified as whites rather than yellow peril. They were treated not as an ethnic group as their labor and marriage counterparts were, but a privileged class of people who were free to enter the U.S. borders during the Exclusion era from 1882 to 1943. According to Hsu (1993: 107-108), the list of exemption included students, diplomats, teachers, merchants, and their family and servants. In 1917, the Barred Zone Act added some categories of people to the list, including government officers, ministers or religious teachers, missionaries, lawyers, physicians, chemists, civil engineers, authors, artists, travelers for curiosity or pleasure, and their legal wives and children under sixteen years old. The 1924 Immigration Act further assigned the status of “non-quota immigrants” to Chinese students. In 1952, the McCarran–Walter Act granted this category of Chinese top preference for applying for the adjustment of immigration status to permanent residency. This citizenship right of naturalization was only given to free white persons since the passage of 1790 Nationality Law.

Chinese students were not only privileged elites but also cultural bridges between China and the United States at that time. Chinese students were entitled “to go and come of their own free will and accord, and ... be accorded all the rights, privileges, immunities, and exemptions which are accorded to the citizens and subjects of the most favored nation” (Treaty Nov. 17, 1880: 826–827; cited from Hsu 2009: 107). This welcoming atmosphere toward Chinese students was
best shown by an advertisement from a brochure published in 1935, Handbook of Chinese Students in the U.S.A.:

Continue your American sojourn until you step ashore in China! The good opinion of American institutions that you have gained during your stay in America will continue as you return to China on one of the world-famous President Liners sailing from Seattle. It is an ideal and a pleasure to show our Chinese passengers true shipboard courtesy—an inviolable company rule. (Cited from Hsu 1993/2009: 119)

According to Chinese Ministry of Education, the number of Chinese students studying abroad increased from less 100 to 180,000 in just three decades. The year of 2001 witnessed the first peak of contemporary Chinese student emigration. This peak seemed to be associated with the 1989 Beijing Student Movement.

Chinese student immigrants' intention of returning to their homeland is changing, too. This change is partly due to two changes in international migration policy in China. One is the passage of the Chinese Student Protection Act in 1992, which sustains a “study and stay” model among Chinese international students. Another change is the “Serve the Nation” policy initiated in 2001. This policy has reversed the pattern of Chinese student migration. Since then, returning has become a rule, rather than exception, for Chinese students in the United States. Once back to China, these returnees are treated as a privileged category of people and entitled numerous privileges and rights. On local levels, they tend to establish closed social circles that distinguish them from non-goers. This characteristic suggests that immigration policy is part of nationalist projects. As a result, changes in immigration law set natural time points for histories of international migration, impacting quantity and nature of people moving across borders.

Yet, although today’s Chinese student immigrants are different from pre-modern ones in many ways, they share similarities in class background and immigration trajectory. Most them were elite students before going abroad. This privileged status grants them default upward
mobility and a head start in the race toward integration. Overwhelmingly choosing STEM majors is another commonality they share. Considering these factors, it was not that surprising to see their smooth and successful transition from elite students to model minority. As a result, it is reasonable to conclude that student immigrants have developed a class-first intersectionality before and after immigration, which has the power to make their racial and ethnic differences less visible to the eyes of out-group people.

Student immigrants reveal a unique connection between mobility and identity that is fundamentally different from that of labor and marriage immigrants. One study found that physically transnational mobility of student-turned immigrants in Europe facilitates the formation of their panethnic identity (Van Mol 2013). Nevertheless, for those who are exile-intellectuals, their immobility may either sustain their homeland identity (Madge et al 2009) or turn them into “restless, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others (Said 1994: 34).”

Put differently, student immigrants’ loyalty toward their homeland is conditioned by different expectations their homeland put on them. Before emigration, they may be scripted to play the role of colonial elites, nationalists, and intellectuals. When studying abroad, their role changes from overseas students to student overseas and national overseas. They may voluntarily become return migrants in the later phase of their life by answering their homeland’s call to serve the country. It is this transition of national roles that differentiates student immigrants from labor and marriage ones, making them a good case exploring the interactive effects among nationalism, race, class, and gender.

5. **The Moral Background for Moral Boundaries**

When discussing racial and ethnic preferences for their children’s potential spouses, the immigrants I interviewed—all socioeconomically successful and structurally assimilated—
generally preferred Japanese people to Chinese ones. Unlike their mainlander counterparts, who were either born in China or born to parents who moved to Taiwan from China in 1949, the islander immigrants I spoke with took on “Taiwanese-first” identities and went out of their way to avoid being identified as Chinese. Taiwanese nationalism accepts Japanese culture as an inseparable part of Taiwanese ethnicity, thereby invalidating Chinese claims of “owning” Taiwan. This form of nationalism provides a foundation for developing marital boundaries that emphasize morality over race—that is, “moral us = marriageable us.” Yet although the immigrants show variance in what it means by marrying-in, their marrying out pattern are identical. They both hold ideologies of white supremacy manifested by their approval of working-class white in-laws. In addition, they both see black people as conditionally marriageable, suggesting middle or upper-class background can mask undesirable racial difference.

The picture I have presented is admittedly incomplete, since it only addresses the marriageability perceptions of islander Taiwanese immigrants living in one American city. Analyses of opinions held by mainlander Taiwanese, intermarried immigrants, Asian immigrants from other nations, second- and third-generation individuals influenced by American nationalism, and those in other family positions (e.g., sons- or daughters-in-law) are required to more fully assess the influences of perceived morality on immigrant marriage patterns. Further, additional effort is required to apply comparative approaches to explain within- and between-group differences in the marital boundary-making process, as well as their consequences in terms of social mobility and inequality.

More important is the need to challenge the groupist shortcomings of many immigration studies (Brubaker 2004). This requires analyses of how different types of identity categories (including race, class, gender, and religiosity, among others) work together to sustain or change dominant racial and ethnic marriageability perceptions, with intermarriage patterns across class boundaries just one of several possible starting points. In addition to considering how people
interpret class differently, scholars interested in this topic must acknowledge the potential effect of immigrant type on mobility and integration. For instance, Hsu (1993) found that Chinese students were not only allowed to enter the U.S. during the Chinese exclusion era but were treated as whites and allowed to become naturalized U.S. citizens. A fuller understanding of marriageability perceptions among Asian Americans also requires gender-focused analyses, since the daughters of Asian immigrants are twice as likely as sons to marry out (Fryer 2007; Pew Research Center 2017). There have been some attempts to adopt a gendered racialization perspective to investigate intermarriage differences between Asian females and males (Feliciano et al. 2009; Rodríguez-García 2006; Song 2009), but one unanswered question is whether this phenomenon only exists in the U.S. It is also necessary to examine this idea through the lenses of American nationalism, colonialism, and imperialism. In religiosity, Bohra-Mishra and Massey (2015) suggest that Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist religious beliefs are influential factors in intermarriage decisions made by East Asian, South Asian, and Southeast Asian Americans. In short, an analytical framework other than the mobility model is needed to clarify intersectional differences (racial, ethnic, class, gender, religious, etc.) in the contexts of Asian marriages inside and outside the United States.

The moral approach considered in this paper makes a specific contribution to the literature on immigrant marriage and a general contribution to the sociology of morality. Whereas previous researchers have identified alternative paths to Asian American marital assimilation, I examined how countries of origin and associated nationalist feelings affect the distinctions they make between marriageable-us and undesirable-them. My findings for the process of transforming “one of us” into “unmarriageable them” suggest a weak association between upward mobility/structural assimilation and white desirability/marital assimilation among the immigrants I interviewed. Further, while past researchers have explored the effects of culture on a marriageability construct (Moran 2001; Lee and Bean 2010), the culture concept is somewhat
misleading because it is frequently used interchangeably with race and ethnicity. By shifting the focus from culture to morality, I identified dynamic movement between moral, marital, and ethnic boundaries. Thus, this study highlights the relationship between thick and thin concepts of morality, as well as between first (normative and behavioral) and second (conceptual) orders of morality (Abend 2014). By emphasizing the historical origins of what Abend calls “the moral background,” this study reveals the enduring power of national identity on social actor identifications of individuals who are and are not considered marriageable.
References


## Appendix

### Interviewee Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth of Place</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Partner race/ethnicity</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Interview Recorded</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
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