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Rethinking Identity and Agency in Minority Education: Preparing Asian American Leaders for a Global Future

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Abstract

Asian Americans' cultural values and their perceived collective identity as passive model minorities have been cited as double barriers to their leadership development trajectory. In this article, we argue that accumulation of leadership capital must begin in K-12 schools and must address both learner identity transformation and learner agency in reconfiguring power structures that often exclude them from leadership roles. We argue for replacing the fixed, singular definition of Asian American students as model minorities who lack mainstream leadership skills with a plural consciousness toward identity and difference that is central to the transformation of the power hierarchy in the increasingly complex transnational milieu. We highlight the role of agency in fostering this plural consciousness and breaking the binary opposition in the existing power hierarchy. Finally we call for a form of education that emphasizes a critical awareness of identity construction and a proactive stance that is essential to Asian Americans to enact their agency and accumulate leadership capital critical to their everyday life and career advancement.

Introduction

In a provocative article appeared in New York Magazine on May 8, 2011, Wesley Yang asks, "What happens to all the Asian-American overachievers when the test-taking ends?" The answer is: many of the high achieving Asian Americans who performed well in top schools are facing career obstacles and few assume leadership positions. According to Yang (2011), though Asian-Americans comprise about 5% of the U.S. population, they make up only 0.3% of corporate officers, fewer than 1% of board members, and 2% of college presidents (see also The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2008). Yang (2011) attributes the obstacles to the self-identities of Asian children who grow up with cultural values that include filial piety, deference to authority, humility, hard work, harmony and sacrificing for the future; and therefore they do not develop the agency they need to assume a leadership role in most workplaces. Asian Americans' lack of mainstream cultural lessons and skills in leadership or "leadership capital" is further compounded by a general discriminatory perception of Asian Americans as competent and hard working model minorities who lack leadership skills. As a result, Asian Americans have been largely kept out of leadership positions including higher educational institutions (The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2008). These two-pronged barriers to leadership development and success suggest a need to reconsider Asian Americans' development of self-identity and agency and the current racial and structural relations in the educational contexts and

beyond. In this article, we argue that such reconsideration must begin in K-12 schools and that the current narrow-minded definition of good education as measured by standardized test scores is not enough to prepare Asian Americans for a successful global future. Rather, they must be equipped with critical skills to accumulate leadership capital to ensure social success in life after school. Such reconsideration must address both learner identity transformation and learner agency in reconfiguring power structures that often exclude them from leadership roles.

The subjects of self-identity (one's conception of oneself) and agency (the ability to exert power) have long been one of the foci in the fields of philosophy and sociology and social psychology (Cerulo, 1997; Côté & Levine, 2002; Holland, Lachicotte Jr., Skinner, & Cain, 1998). In the field of education, these issues have gained increasing attentions, but due to the influence of multicultural education, they are, more often than not, framed in a (racial) minority versus majority lens. Minority refers to the socially, politically, economically subordinated group (versus the dominate group which has higher social status and holds more power). In the context of multiculturalism, minority as a term often refers to racial minority even though it has been expanded to other social categories such as ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, and disability. In this article, we question the minority/majority binary through complicating the storylines of racial identity and reclaiming Asian American students' agency, especially contextualized in a transnational, global society. We draw on readings of multicultural education, sociology, anthropology, and psychology as we engage educational debates and discuss the education of Asian American students as leaders in an increasingly complex globalized context.

Research on multicultural education has either focused on mainly socio-political and socio-cultural issues or developed culturally specific curriculum design and teaching strategies. Neo-Marxism oriented critical approaches systematically examine the institutional and structural constraints concerning minority education (Giroux, 1991, 1992; McLaren, Macrine, & Hill, 2010). Similarly, research on minority students have generally focused on their groups' collective cultures (Schetcher & Bayley, 2002; Valdes, 1996; Li, 2002, 2006a), rather than their individual identity and agency. The construct of agency highlights the actions and choices made by the students within certain contexts (Forbes, 2008) and lack of attention to individuals' identity and agency often leads to silenced voices. There is also a tendency to teach about different racial and ethnic groups in order to help students know about "other" cultures in the U.S. classroom (Wang & Olson, 2009). What is missing between the macro-structural critique and the micro-teaching/learning method is the central concern about students' subjectivity and how their own sense of personal and cultural beings may impact their learning and their relationships with others. Most studies that examine minority students' identities (e.g., Kanno, 2003; Li, 2000; Yeh, Carter, & Pieterse, 2004) focus on their linguistic and/or cultural identities and do not touch upon their self identity and agency. This lack of attention to minority students' subjectivity and personhood and their capacity runs the risk of reducing students' capacity to authoring and co-authoring their own educational scripts (i.e., in their development of leadership skills). It may even imply a stigma that renders minority students such as Asian Americans as passive, incapable of being assertive, taking personal initiative, or making a change to the very system that marginalizes them.

Such a passive and victimized status in which minority students such as Asian Americans are implicated is dangerous in the current globalized world. Embedded in increasingly complex transnational social and economic structures, as the racial and ethnic faces of our nation are constantly changing, minority students will be constantly put in a disadvantaged position if they are seen or see themselves as fixed and powerless within the social hierarchies. Minority students' agency must be situated in the interaction between the individual aspect and cultural aspect of

identity wherein they negotiate their own personhood and make informed decisions about self and other. Therefore, minority students' identity must be mobilized rather than fixed in the transnational context (McLaren, Macrine, & Hill, 2010). We challenge the traditional racial minority/majority binary opposition, which has been problematic to our understanding of the education of minority (i.e., Asian American) students placed at a subordinate position. We argue for a plural consciousness toward identity and difference that is central to the transformation of the power hierarchy in the transnational educational milieu. We posit that our identity at any point of time is very much based on the context and situation. Any singular, decontextualized definition of a person as a minority or a majority or as dominant or subordinate must be questioned. In this ever shifting environment, agency is of special significance—that is, how we define ourselves in negotiation with cultural, institutional expectations and with others make a big difference in fostering a plural consciousness and breaking the binary opposition in the power hierarchy. This recognition calls for a form of education that emphasizes a critical awareness of identity construction and a proactive stance that is essential to students of disadvantaged positions to assume a power position and initiate change.

In the sections that follow, we re-examine the concepts of self-identity and agency in a broad sense, and then discuss the importance of agency for forming a constructive self-identity among racial minority students. We use Asian Americans as an example to complicate racial identity and highlight the educational role of agency in developing the sense of power and accumulating leadership capital. We conclude with the implications of such understanding for preparing Asian American leaders.

Identity: What It Is and How It Works

Identity is a complex concept that can be understood differently in different disciplines. For example, in social anthropology, the term is a synonymy of ethnic identity; in psychology sometimes it means personality (Sökefeld, 1999). In this article, we use the term "identity" to refer to one's conception of who they are and their relationship to the world. It is a concept that "figuratively combines the intimate or personal world with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations" (Holland et al. 1998, p. 5). In this sense, identity is not only personal but also socio-cultural and socio-historical.

Kanno (2003) points out that many aspects of our "selves" contribute to our understanding of who we are: race, class, gender, occupation, sexual orientation, and age. According to Sedikides and Brewer (2001), the concept of self consists of three fundamental self-representations: the individual self (the I-ness, ego identity), the relational self (personal identity), and the collective self (the we-ness, the social identity). The individual self is related to one's unique traits and characteristics that differentiate the person from others within his or her social context. The relational self contains those aspects of the self-concept that are shared with relationship partners and define the person's role or position within significant relationships such as between parent-child, teacher-student, friends, and husband-wife. The collective self is in turn based on impersonal bonds to others derived from common (often symbolic) identification with group in contrast with the out-group. These three aspects of self-representations coexist among the same individual and are interactional and interrelated. The interplay and integration of these components determines that identity is inevitably fluid and multiple or "kaleidoscopic" in that the different components of self sometimes overlap and form multi-faceted perspectives (Deaux & Perkins, 2001, p. 299).

Since the self is developed in relation to other individuals and social groups, it is inherently social (Deaux & Perkins, 2001; Holstein & Gubrrium, 2000; Sedikides & Brewer, 2001). Many

researchers have come to the consensus that the process of identity formation is socially situated and constructed (Goffman, 1959; Holland et al., 1998; Holstein & Gubrrium, 2000). The self arises in the process of social experiences and activity and is dependent on social interaction and context (Mead, 1923; Vygotsky, 1978). Identity is circumstantially realized in that it develops from and responds to others in the course of daily living and takes shape within the various social situations of everyday life (Holstein & Gubrrium, 2000). The social construction of self identity is also shaped by cultural logic, subject positioning, and social interaction. According to Holland et al (1998), cultural logic concerns with cultural identities in relation to ethnicity, gender, race, nationality and sexual orientation. Subject positioning is related to interpersonal and institutional power relations within the social discourses and categories inscribed upon people in various social interactions. Selves are socially constructed through the mediation of powerful discourses and their artifacts.

Côté & Levine (2002) extends the socio-constructivist theory to suggest that identity formation is shaped by identity capital (as problematic as the term "capital" can be), that is, various resources deployable on an individual basis that represent how people most effectively define themselves and have others define them in various contexts. These resources include both those psychological resources and an ability to reflexively evaluate and maneuver through a variety of social contexts. Côté & Levine (2002) describe how identity capital works:

> A resource is an asset that people can "cash in," literally or metaphorically. In so doing, *identity exchanges* take place—pragmatically, symbolically, or emotionally—during contextually specific interactions, as part of a quid pro quo negotiated by the parties involved. If successful, these identity exchanges involve mutual acceptance with another individual, an informal group, a community, or an institution. And with this acceptance, the incumbent gains *identity capital*—there has been an increase in some aspect of "who they are." (Italics original, p. 143)

According to Côté & Levine (2002), identity capital consist two types of assets: tangible and intangible. Tangible asset are things that are socially visible things such as degree credentials or club memberships. Intangible asset involves ego strengths that give people certain vitalities and capacities with which to develop and use available resources. These are reflexive-agentic capacities that essential to self identity including an internal locus of control, self-esteem, a sense of purpose in life, the ability to self-actualize and critical thinking abilities. Côté & Levine (2002) further emphasize that the development and use of both assets need to be understood in their particular contexts, as they believe that "the resources have an inoculation quality that can enable individuals to reflexively *resist and/or act back on* the social forces impinging on them" (p. 145, italics original). If successful, such an individualization process will empower the person to develop a sense of authorship over their own biographies (Côté & Levine, 2002). If not, it will lead a conforming self, one that loses its autonomy and gives itself over to other's values (Holestein & Gubrium, 2000). These selves tend to internalize "the kind of character which makes them *want* to act in the way they *have to* act as members of the society or of a special class within it" (Reisman, 1950, p. 5, italics original). Therefore, what an individual does in relation to the social environments is of critical importance to identity development, especially for Asian Americans who are often considered as "having a particular talent for bitter labor" but lacking the leadership qualities such as being assertive and self-promoting (Adams, 2011; The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2008; Yang, 2011).

These discussions about the concept of identity suggest that identity is a fluid concept. It is not only socially and subjectively constructed but also it constructs itself through the active role of the

individual (Wang, 2004). When identity is bifurcated into minority versus majority, the constructive potential of identity is largely limited. The implication is that minority identity is based upon the negation of the majority. It is dangerous to found one's identity upon the negation of the other—what Whites have been doing historically in excluding the racial other but such a negation is detrimental not only to the other but also to the self (Giroux, 1997). Politically, sometimes it is necessary to assert minority identity for self-affirmation and emptying out the mainstream assumptions and control, so we are not advocating the negation of (contextualized) minority/majority distinction per se, but we want to point out the limitations of basing minority education upon an oppositional identity politics, and we argue for the importance of identity mobility in enabling students to cross borders in a transnational society. As Said (1991) points out, "A single overmastering identity at the core of the academic enterprise, whether that identity be Western, African, or Asian, is a confinement, a deprivation" (p. 17). Such a confinement is reflected in the U.S. racial identity politics and its educational manifestations. Beyond the confinement, minority students need to cultivate their intercultural and transnational ability to exert influence in individual and collection identity and to claim agency in their own education.

Agency in the Reconstruction of Self Identity

Agency, the capacity to exercise influence in the quality of one's life, is the essence of humanness (Harris, 1989). According to Harris (1989), human agency is characterized by a number of core features that operate through phenomenal and functional consciousness. These include the temporal extension of agency through intentionality and forethought, self-regulation by self-reactive influence, and self-reflectiveness about one's capabilities, quality of functioning, and the meaning and purpose of one's life pursuits. Related to the three levels of self representation, there are three modes of agency: direct personal agency (individual self), proxy agency (relational self) that relies on others to act on one's behest to secure desired outcomes, and collective agency (collective self) exercised through socially coordinative and interdependent effort.

Like self-identity, agency is also inherently social. Emirbayer & Mische (1998) conceptualize human agency as:

> A temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect) but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment). (p. 963)

Central to the social dimension of human agency are intentional attitude of a person and his/her contextualized action as agency is often influenced by the interplay of habit, imagination and judgment as well as the external situations/contexts (Gallagher & Marcel, 1999). The transactions between the self (intentions) and external context often lead to accepting, reproducing, or active attempts to change an existing set of presuppositions that are concerned primarily with the creation of stable boundaries and hierarchies, between subject and object, and between self and other. Different from the concept of self-identity, human agency is often linked to structure as it often operates within a broad network of socio-structural influences (Côté & Levine, 2002; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Harris, 1989). Côté & Levine (2002) explain that while engaging in concrete day-to-day behavior, people generally look to institutionalized norms and conventions to structure their behavior, thereby giving it meaning and justification. But along with this internalization process, they also actively define situations and construct social reality. Individuals are not passive beings in the structure, as they can resort to the network of socio-cultural influences for affirmation, advice, inspiration, and personal decision making. In this sense, agency modifies or changes social

structure. This is especially true during extremely difficult times when people resort to themselves (individual self), to family and community (relational self), or to their cultural traditions in general (collective self), to make effective efforts to change the situations and environments in order to survive and prosper. Of these sources that provide strength, individual's personal motivation and resilience plays a central role.

In sum, agency is not just about identity formation, it also interacts with different structural environments responding to the problem posed by changing historical situations. That is, in the agentic transactions, people are producers as well as products of social systems (Bandura, 2001; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Harris, 1989). In this sense, agency makes the personal political (Calhoun, 1994).

Agency in classical critical theory is formulated as either reproductive or resistant (Pinar, et al, 1995; Zine, 2000). Such an either/or formulation, originally class-based, is closely related to the binary of racial minority versus Whites in multicultural education theory and practice. As we understand the notion of identity not as bifurcated but fluid, our notion of agency is also fluid and we locate its transformative power in negotiating with multiple identities and cultural contexts beyond the confinement of reproduction and resistance split. In mediating different layers of identity, racial minority students can rely on productive sources—both individual and collective—to make informed choices in their participation in social action, even though they cannot be free from social constraints. Their critical capacity may not be enhanced by oppositional acts which usually ends up being consumed by the more powerful institutional mechanism (Zine, 2000), but their improvised interactions with others and society, embodying both cultural critique and self-critique, can contribute to the transformation of both their subjectivity and institutional contexts in which they are situated (Foucault, 1978, 1997). In a transnational and global society, plural locations of agency must be acknowledged and used in order to make contextualized responses to situations where multiplicity, intersections, contestations co-exist. Personal and cultural transformations need to follow specific, situational, and improvised lines of change. If the goal of minority education is to improve students' quality of life and transform the dominant unequal social structure, then minority/majority relationships must be re-conceptualized in education. This is reconceptualization is especially important for Asian Americans who are often seen through a collective cultural lens such as model minorities who are perceived as quiet, "unassertive, team players more than leaders, and lacking self-promotion" (The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2008).

Identity Reconstruction, Leadership Capital, and Asian American Education in the Globalized Context

As discussed above, our identity is very much based on the context and locations in a given time and place. Cultural values/beliefs and personal experiences interact with the environment to negotiate a niche for an individual. As part of identity construction, agency involves both self transformation and negotiation with power hierarchy in the increasingly complex educational milieu. In the age of globalization, on the one hand, as Bandura (2001) notes, an individual's agency is influenced by more complicated socio-cultural networks as "transnational embeddedness and interdependence are placing a premium on collective efficacy to exercise control over personal destinies and national life" (p. 1). On the other hand, the embeddedness and interdependence in transnational networks can become "identity capital" that one can use to produce new forms of personhood. As the transnational landscapes become increasingly kaleidoscopic, identity construction becomes increasingly fluid.

During the past decade critical studies to understanding the complexity of identity and education in the context of globalization, cosmopolitanism, and internationalization (Trueit et al, 2003; Gough, 2004; McCarthy et al., 2003; Pinar, 2009; Smith, 2003) have emerged. Responding to the challenges of immigration, migration, cross-cultural Diasporas, and the proliferation of virtual reality, various authors (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bhabha, 1990; Giroux, 1991; Lam, 2009; Papastergiadis, 2005; Valdivia, 2005; Wang, 2004) from different racial and ethnic locations, influenced by post-colonial and post-structural discourses, speak about the notion of borderland and the third space which disrupts the logic of any cultural dualism. It is in this fluid, ever-shifting multiplicity and difference that minority students' identities are situated. Therefore, while encountering such a complexity, we no longer can rely on a binary model of reproduction and resistance but must elaborate a more fluid, nonlinear, and flexible notion of agency that does not necessarily speak the language of the oppositional (even though we do not avoid it when demanded by political situations) but decenter the racial hierarchy in multiple directions from specific locations. More often than not, reproduction and resistance coexist in a transnational context and we must be aware of the complexity of power relationships. Transformative power of education for minority students is situated not only in the contestations against the mainstream status quo but also in the critiques of one's own cultures to decenter any possible fixed self-identity. In this way, we are not split off from the mainstream to reproduce the mechanism of the racial exclusion in an opposite direction, but to interact with the mainstream to change the direction of its flow through a networking effect while seeking different paths to generate more branches of waterway eroding the rocklike system of racism.

In this new conceptualized notion of identity and agency, what is privileged is the ability to negotiate with the multiple rather than staying with a static category, to weave an intricate web that is beneficial for all rather than defending provincial interests, and to pave meandering paths rather than cutting through oppositional paths. The hard edge of critique is not given up here, but such a critique is organic and aims at enabling the mobility of identity to engage a communal project of healing the trauma of racism collectively experienced. When the binary logic is challenged, it is more likely that minority educators can build alliance with progressive White majority educators for the shared commitment to social equality and equity. Such a critical consciousness does not set up a fixed boundary between the oppressed and the oppressor but combine structural critique with self-critique and remain open-minded to more emergent possibilities of creating a more humane world for all.

In multiculturalism, minority education is often formulated according to different racial groups, such as African American education, Native American education, Latino/Latina education, Asian American education, Middle Eastern American education, although sometimes the ethnic groups within racial divisions are also independently studied. On the other hand, the intersection between and among race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, language, and other social constructs is much more recognized now than the early era of multiculturalism. Especially in today's global society, our multiple, multidimensional identities are more readily acknowledged. Information technology has resulted in compression of time and space, and we communicate with people across many landscapes, which Appadurai (1996) calls "ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes" (p. 33). Though multiple identities are more accepted in different manifestations of diversity and multiculturalism, as Steinberg & Kincheloe (2009) argue, contemporary power blocs associated with race, class and gender privileges are present in all human relationships and constantly align and realign themselves in different contexts. For example, while multiplicity of identities increasingly draws critical attentions, there is still a prevalent

tendency to cling to the category of race as the foundational identity block that pushes all other social constructs to the sideline.

In order to illuminate our arguments, we attempt to engage the discussions about race and education from within wherein the complexity, plurality and fluidity of identity and agency lie to question identity politics, rather than using other social constructs to mobilize racial identity. Therefore we focus on a third group outside of dominant or prevailing White/Black binary within the U.S. racial politics to understand Asian American students' agency, a third position also shared by other racial groups that cannot be defined by such a binary.

Along with the binary of minority/majority and the binary of reproduction/resistance, the binary of White/Black frames the racial politics in the U.S. To its extreme, sometimes in the public imagination, African Americans become the representative of minority and when "diversity" is mentioned, the inclusion of Black voice becomes the banner for racial equality. (This logic is ironic if we consider that the group who first suffered from the racial genocides at the founding of this nation was Native Americans.) Along the clear-cut racial divide, Asian Americans stay on an uneasy boundary and become an excluded third "alien" who cannot become "natural" American citizens, the third that cannot be accepted and welcomed by both the conservative and the left.

We argue that in the debates about Asian Americans as the model minority in education, what is missing in the oppositions between the conservative and the neo-Marxist viewpoints is the consideration of Asian American students' own personhood and their agency in drawing upon cultural, intercultural, family, and individual resources to struggle against the second class citizen status. To uphold Asian Americans as having strong family values, hard work ethics, and high regard for education in contrast to other minority racial groups, the conservatives assimilate Asian American values and beliefs into the mainstream of the American dream in order to deny the role of racism in society and to ignore the protesting voices of racial minorities. As a part of colonization legacy, "divide and conquer" tactics play out in the domestic realm to pick one racial group against other racial groups for intensifying the tensions within racial minority groups. Critical studies of the model minority stereotype insightfully point out that the binary between the high-achieving Asian Americans and the low-achieving African Americans "erases the experiences of Asian Americans who do not achieve and also the experiences of African Americans, Latinas/Latinos, and Native Americans who do achieve" (Ng, Lee & Pak, 2007, p. 99). Such an overgeneralization of Asian American as the model minority politically promotes the agenda of conservative educational policies through competition, aggression, and accountability and disregards the structural and systematic issues that underlie unequal educational opportunities and disadvantaged positions of minority students (Lee, 2005; Yu, 2007). After all, the rhetoric does not stand on its own: Are not family and community value, working hard, and respecting education shared by many groups including Native Americans, African Americans, Latinas/Latinos, Arabic Americans, and others? In contrast to the mainstream value of individualism, many racial minority cultures emphasize more on the role of family and community in personal achievement and well-being.

While it is well-documented that African American students' resistance of the White culture can take the form of refusing to achieve academically so as to avoid "acting White," resisting schooling is not equivalent to not valuing education. Native Americans, due to the historical legacy of Indian boarding schools that intended to wipe out Native American traditions and heritages, also have strong suspicions about public schooling. But the Cherokee nation in Oklahoma, for instance, opened a female seminary and printed a bilingual newspaper (Cherokee and English) in the aftermath of the Trail of Tears in the 1840s. How can one not admit that they are pioneers in

education regardless of how much scores their children get in standardized tests? In both cases, the notion of education includes an element of resisting cultural assimilation, which certainly does not serve the conservative "educational" agenda (see also Brayboy, McK. & Estrada, 2006).

Upon a closer look, it is not the value on education per se but what the conservative imagines as Asian American's quiet obedience that fits into their fantasy. Asians and Asian Americans are perceived as obedient and hard workers who do not challenge authority, take charge, or promote themselves (Li & Wang, 2008). Such a reduction of another culture into a passive recipient of the Western culture is an ethnocentric fantasy that the political left fails to challenge as they see combativeness and voicing dissent as essential to progressive politics and disregard multiple, fluid ways of working through the cracks of the system and assuming leadership roles. As a result, under the ethnocentric links between self-expression with explicit verbal communication, the presence of subjectivity with voicing opinions, and unreserved expansion and progress, reflective quietude is seen as equal to passiveness, non-competition to weaknesses, and non-confrontation to obedience. While voice is privileged as a way of self-representation, Asian and Asian American cultural codes of expression and action are ignored as lack of self-assertiveness or lack of presence or leadership skills (The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2008).

High academic achievement does not necessarily mean being culturally assimilated into the U.S. racial politics, but in the debates about the model minority this link is assumed by both conservatives and leftists. As a result, the binary of conservative/left politics also renders Asian Americans and Asian immigrant students passive and incapable of taking charge of their own destiny or that of their workplace as leaders. Few have asked the question: Why is it inherently positive or empowering in speaking one's mind to occupy public space, often only serving self or small group interest in the name of democracy? Are there different ways of activism than direct confrontation? Asian philosophical, social, and cultural viewpoints have different assumptions and many times Asian American students and Asian immigrant children draw upon their own diverse—not unified—cultural resources to deal with difficulties. For many Asian Americans, this agency also means that they draw upon more than one culture and are reflective and critical of both the mainstream culture and the culture of their grand/parents or ancestry to negotiating a power space for themselves at home, in school, and in the work place.

In only focusing what has been excluded by the model minority myth in the structural analysis of neo-Marxism oriented critical theory, the difficult negotiation of Asian Americans and Asian immigrant children using personal, cultural, and intercultural strength to deal with racism is neglected. Research has revealed that Asian Americans and Asian immigrant students have suffered the cultural and social alienation due to their minority and "foreign" status and have to mediate through intercultural conflicts regardless of whether or not they are academically achieved (Ng, Lee, and Pak, 2007; Tung, 2000). While intergenerational tension within the immigrant family is "without a single exception" (Tung, 2000, p. 85), many Asian immigrants and their Asian American children have overcome racial, linguistic, and cultural obstacles through enduring efforts and sacrifices. Their painstaking success in negotiating with multiple identities and in dealing with the racist climate challenges both the conservative assumption that Asian American students' academic achievement (though narrowly defined) is a natural result of their culture (albeit a culture that still testifies the White culture's superiority as these students passively follow the advancement of Western science and technology) and the multicultural leftist uneasiness with a minority group's academic success which does not fit into their structural analysis. Both assumptions neglect Asian American students and Asian immigrant children's own resilience and inner strength to achieve academically and change structurally (or not achieve—the external

outcome is not the measure of internal agency) despite the alienating social and cultural climate of educational institutions. Their agency, not necessarily militant and combative, present more complicated modes of agency that cannot be confined by any either/or rationale, and have a permeating impact on their career trajectory and their potential as leaders and shakers of organizations as these learners enter the workforce.

The complicated identity storylines of Asian American students and Asian immigrant children are good examples for transforming identity and agency into leadership capital (i.e., various resources deployable to help assume a power/leadership position in schools and organizations) in a transnational society. As one of the groups that includes recent immigrants in the new wave of scientific and technological immigration along with the earlier labor immigration—which still exist today, Asian Americans and Asian immigrants are hardly a unified group even within any specific ethnic group such as Japanese, Indian, Pilipino, Singapore, etc. They don't fit into the binary of White/Black, or the binary of high-achieving majority/the low-achieving minority, and as a result, their existence and negotiation challenge the philosophical, cultural, and social dualism that operates in the U.S. education. With the constantly changing face of this nation and the intertwining of the local, national, and the global, however, this example of not fitting in speaks to possibilities of new transnational identity construction with new modes of agency. Perhaps this uneasiness between Asian-ness and racial politics in the U.S. is not accidental as it is generally acknowledged that race is a Western construct, specifically linked with the Western colonization. While we do not intend to abandon the political concept of race considering the U.S. racial history and the unfinished political works for dismantling racism, we question the binary of minority and majority in order to highlight the need for agency in raising critical awareness and accumulating "leadership capital" for Asian Americans.

Conclusions

In conclusion, we position that to prepare minority students such as Asian Americans as leaders and change agents, they should not be boxed into any category or seen as carriers of stigmas and "deficits" who lack leadership skills. Rather, they must be recognized as carrying both potentials and disadvantages situated in specific contexts; and if they have a strong sense of agency, they can transcend racist stereotypes and seek opportunities to connect and learn and to accumulate skills necessary to assume a power position in different contexts in the globalizing world. Here agency is not perceived as a traditional rebellious refusal of the mainstream culture, but as multiple ways of interacting with both the mainstream and minority cultures and expectations in self-affirmation and self-creativity. While resisting to be fully assimilated into the dominant cultural codes for leadership, agency empowers students to seek multiple, intersecting, or even contradictory modes of negotiation to transform both the personal and the social resources into leadership capital.

We argue that in a globalized context, the very term of "minority" becomes problematic for preparing future leaders and power changers. Minority as an identity is an external construction which can be changed in a new context, but there is an inner dimension—subjective agency—to the construction of identity that cannot be confined by external criteria, which gives individuals aspiration, motivation and resilience to take charge and make change. As Yang (2011) powerfully illustrates, academic achievement, as measured in test scores, is a very narrow-minded definition of good education that may not be enough to prepare Asian Americans for a successful life after school. For Asian Americans, they cannot just become "paper tigers" who achieve intellectually but are ill-equipped with leadership capital critical to their success in the work place. It is more important to cultivate in them strong self-confidence in their ability to transcend the cultural

stereotypes, critical awareness of the power blocs at work, and useful skills to gain leadership capital. Certainly power relationships still define the transnational realm and Asian Americans are still marginalized in most cases so we don't have a romantic notion about globalization and the transnational, but our point is that a traditional demarcation between minority and majority no longer has its confining hold. We need to see both obstacles and opportunities in such an unsettling time and space. Without such a critical lens of examining the transnational world, we as educators cannot effectively encourage students to cultivate their agency and shape them as leaders and change agents.

Therefore, minority students must be seen as active agents who are capable of making positive changes to their lives and the organizations in which they are situated. They can be co-changers with teachers if teachers see them as being capable of changes. Even in the most difficult situations, teachers of minority students must help them gain this critical consciousness and personal empowerment. Affirming the value of each and every student as an equal and active being, engaging students in exploring what they have and what they can accomplish, and proactively contribute to their mutual process of learning and life, the teacher has a unique role in encouraging student's agency to acquire critical leadership skills, dispositions, and resources that complement their academic achievement. On the part of the students, inner transformation must take place within them to expand their life horizons.

Thus, minority education must encourage students to gain ability in building connections, forming bridges of understanding, developing mutuality in respect, and fostering capability to forgive and embrace, or in Said's (1991) words, "to transform what might be conflict, contest, or assertion into reconciliation, mutuality, recognition, and creative interaction" (p. 53–54). To cultivate agency and leadership potential, we propose that students need to undergo the following processes with the guidance of their teacher:

1) affirming one's history and background and questioning social inequality;
2) affirming one's dignity and right as a valuable human being;
3) engaging self-formation and self-creation by drawing upon cultural and intercultural resources;
4) seeking opportunities and relying on persistence and endurance to reach a goal or goals even in difficult situations;
5) developing intercultural and transnational capacities for global awareness and interaction; and
6) cultivating awareness of and commitment to the well being of others and of the world. These processes require students to construct personal identity not only through self-affirmation but also beyond just the self and aim for the common good as their ultimate motivation, which will help minority students pick up links and connections in their lives that have been severed, and rebuild them through one's cultivation of ability to care for themselves and for others, to serve, to create, and to lead.

Finally, we reiterate that schools, universities, and educators must acknowledge the multiple identities of students, and the different identity "capital" students have in each context and what they can do to be an active agent of change for themselves and others. Hence, we argue that we must go beyond the racial binary in understanding students' identity construction and promoting their agency development in a global context. To do so, we need to forgo the stigmatic label of "minority" students in order to foster their proactive capacities for taking charge, making positive changes in the school, work place, and the society. Here activating students' agency in developing their leadership potential must be linked with current critical social, ecological, transnational challenges so that individual and social transformation can go hand in hand, acknowledging but transcending the social definition of the self by race, gender, class, ethnicity, and citizenship. In

short, to prepare future leaders or real tigers, minority education must pay attention to students' inner dimension of self development and affirmation, to the creation of an embracive environment, and to the development of proactive attitudes and courage for change.

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