THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURAL ORIENTATION AND SELF-ESTEEM AMONG SECOND-GENERATION CHINESE AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS

A Thesis

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Department of Graduate and Professional Studies in Education
Abstract

of

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURAL ORIENTATION AND SELF-ESTEEM AMONG SECOND-GENERATION CHINESE AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS

by

Thomas Ruan

This quantitative study examines the relationship between the cultural orientation and self-esteem of second-generation Chinese American adolescents. The sample contained 25 second-generation adolescents living in Northern California. Participants were asked to self-report level of Chinese cultural orientation, U.S. cultural orientation, and self-esteem. Pearson correlations were run between self-esteem and both cultural orientation scores (Chinese and U.S.). Results indicated no significant relationship between self-esteem and either cultural orientation. However, inconsistent with past literature, individuals who reported high U.S. cultural orientation reported lower Chinese cultural orientation. This could be an influence of parents’ length of residence in the U.S. through its significant relationship with adolescent American cultural orientation. Nonsignificant results may be due to small sample size and other cultural influences such as the ethnic density of the community. Future research needs to further examine how the
unique cultural orientation of second-generation Chinese Americans can facilitate positive influences in self-esteem.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Low self-esteem has long been associated with mental health problems such as depressive symptoms, high anxiety, poor school performance, and delinquent behaviors (Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt, & Caspi, 2005; Li, Chan, Chung, & Chui, 2010; Orth, Robins, Widaman, & Conger, 2014). Self-esteem refers to one’s perception and evaluation of one’s own self-worth (Orth & Robins, 2014). Many empirical studies have attempted to identify associations between levels of self-esteem and individual developmental variations such as age, gender, and social class (Phinney, DuPont, Espinosa, Revill, & Sanders, 1994; Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell, 1999; Twenge & Crocker, 2002; Bachman, O’Malley, Freedman-Doan, Trzesniewski, & Donnellan, 2011). However, few studies have examined the relationship between cultural influences and self-esteem. The current study addressed this gap in literature by investigating the relationship between Chinese American cultural orientation and self-esteem.

Empirical research on self-esteem suggests that Asian Americans possess the lowest average levels of self-esteem among all other American ethnic groups (Bachman et al., 2011). This puts Asian Americans at high risk for developing mental health problems associated with low self-esteem. An emerging body of literature suggests that the cultural orientation of Asian Americans has a strong influence on the development of self-esteem (Tsai, Ying, & Lee, 2001; Schnittker, 2002; Rhee, Chang, & Rhee, 2003).
Cultural orientation refers to the degree an individual is influenced by a specific culture through engagement in culturally relevant activities (Tsai & Chentsova-Dutton, 2002).

Raised within the context of two different cultures, children of Chinese American immigrant families will likely be oriented towards both United States (U.S.) and Chinese cultures (Tsai & Chentsova-Dutton, 2002). These children are expected to learn and value their heritage (Chinese culture) while simultaneously learning and adapting to the host (U.S.) culture. Recent studies on the cultural orientation of Asian Americans found that higher U.S. orientation directly related to higher social competence among young children 6-9 years old (Chen, Hua, Zhou, Tao, Lee, Ly & Main, 2014), while lower heritage orientation was associated with poorer psychological adjustment among adolescents (Suinn, 2010). These studies strongly suggest cultural orientation is important to Chinese American children’s development.

Although there is sufficient evidence illustrating the impact of cultural orientation on Asian Americans, there is a paucity of past research concerning cultural orientation and its relationship to self-esteem. Researchers have argued conflict between native and host cultures may lead to negative changes in self-esteem (Schnittker, 2002). Some studies on Asian Americans have found evidence of significant relationships between cultural orientation and self-esteem (Tsai et al., 2001; Schnittker, 2002; Rhee et al., 2003), supporting the notion that cultural orientation may lead to changes in self-esteem.

However, most of the studies on Asian American cultural orientation and self-esteem fail to make any reference to the unique cultural orientation of second-generation Chinese Americans. Second-generation Chinese Americans, individuals born in the U.S.
and living with immigrant parents, may have a unique cultural orientation distinctively different from their first-generation counterparts in terms of levels of orientation and overall model of cultural orientation as a result of differences in cultural experiences (Tsai & Chentsova-Dutton, 2002). These differences in cultural orientation may result in a different relationship with self-esteem.

Moreover, studies on Asian American cultural orientation and self-esteem have focused primarily on adults, rather than adolescents. Research and theory suggests adolescence as a period in life that brings dramatic changes in both self-esteem and cultural orientation. For example, during adolescence, self-esteem is commonly believed to decline due to problems linked with puberty (Robins & Trzesniewski, 2005). Additionally, during adolescence, cultural orientations become more prominent due to cognitive maturation and increased engagement with environments outside of home (Ying & Lee, 1999). Research also suggests that adolescent self-esteem has strong associations with mental and physical health problems (Donnellan et al., 2005; Li et al., 2010; Orth et al., 2014) that potentially carry on into adulthood (Trzesniewski, Donnellan, Moffitt, Robins, Poulton, & Caspi, 2006). Due to the strong influences of self-esteem on mental health (Trzesniewski et al., 2006) and the developmental variations of cultural orientation during adolescence (Ying & Lee, 1999; Ying, Han, & Wong, 2008), a focus on Chinese American adolescents is needed.

Aiming to address these gaps in literature, the present study examined the unique cultural orientation model of second-generation Chinese American adolescents and its relationship to self-esteem. The results of this study may be useful in helping Chinese
American families reduce the challenges of cultural adaptation and decrease the risk for low self-esteem.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and cultural orientation of second-generation Chinese American adolescents. To examine this relationship, both U.S. and Chinese cultural orientation were assessed. Specifically, this study examined the relation of adolescent self-esteem with overall levels of cultural orientation as well as specific domains of cultural orientation including: (a) cultural pride, (b) language proficiency, (c) social affiliation, (d) food preference, (e) cultural exposure, and (f) recreational activities. Self-report questionnaires were collected to answer the main research question: Does cultural orientation significantly relate to levels of self-esteem? Based on previous research, this study hypothesized that cultural orientation does have a significant relationship with self-esteem. More specifically, U.S. cultural orientation will significantly relate to high levels of self-esteem while Chinese cultural orientation will significantly relate to low levels of self-esteem.

**Methods**

Using a quantitative survey design, the present study examined the relationship between cultural orientation and self-esteem among second-generation Chinese American
adolescents. The self-reported survey for this study was split into 3 sections including U.S. cultural orientation (Appendix D), Chinese cultural orientation (Appendix E), and self-esteem (Appendix F). Correlational relationships between cultural orientation and self-esteem will then be examined.

**Participants**

Participants included 25 adolescent children from a Chinese language afterschool program in Northern California. Participants were recruited at the program, after class sessions.

**Data Collection and Measures**

Data collection took place after class sessions of a Chinese language school outside of nearby classrooms. At the beginning of the class session, parents and adolescents were invited to a free pizza social after class. Adolescents accompanied by at least one parent that attended the social were asked if they were interested in participating in the research, informing them that participation is completely optional. Parents interested in participation received a survey packet that includes letter of consent (Appendix A), letter of assent (Appendix B), demographic survey (Appendix C), and the research survey (Appendix D, E, & F). One parent read the consent form and completed the demographic survey while their child read the assent form and completed the research survey. Survey packets were the returned to the researcher. All packets were completed and returned during the pizza social. The demographic surveys of each packet were
reviewed to locate participants that met all qualifications of the research. Data from families meeting qualifying criteria were included in the study. Analytical methods for the current study included descriptive analysis and correlational analysis between variables.

**Organization of the Thesis**

Chapter one contained an overview of the current study, providing information on the purpose of the study and its significance to the Asian American population and professionals working with Asian American children, as well as an overview of the methods employed in the study. Chapter two presents a literature review including definitions of terminology and a review of the following five areas: (a) second-generation Chinese Americans, (b) cultural orientation, (c) theoretical framework related to adolescent cultural orientation, (d) adolescent self-esteem, and (e) cultural orientation and self-esteem. Chapter three details the methodology used in the current study. Chapter four presents the results of the current study. Chapter five provides discussion of the results and suggestions for future directions for research on this topic.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study examined Chinese American adolescents’ orientation toward mainstream U.S. culture and ethnic Chinese culture, and its relationship to self-esteem, focusing on the unique cultural orientation model of second-generation Chinese Americans. The following section will review existing literature on second-generation Chinese Americans, adolescence, cultural orientation, and self-esteem.

Second-Generation Chinese Americans

The United States is a culturally and ethnically diverse nation, housing a wide range of ethnic minority groups. Asian Americans represent one of the largest and fastest growing ethnic minority groups in the United States (Lee & Thai, 2015). With the increase of immigration in the United States in recent decades (Schnittker, 2002), the Asian American population has become extremely diverse, consisting of individuals and families from various Asian countries of origin (Park, 2008). Among these various subgroups of Asian Americans are Chinese Americans, the largest and fastest growing Asian ethnic group in the United States (Grieco & Trevelyan, 2010). According to the 2015 U.S. Census, Chinese Americans contribute over 22 percent of the total Asian American population, with the majority residing in California. While Asian American subgroups share many relatively similar cultural values and beliefs, the current study
focused exclusively on the largest subgroup, Chinese Americans, to increase homogeneity of the sample. More specifically, this study examined the Asian American subgroup of second-generation Chinese American adolescents.

Second-generation Chinese Americans refer to individuals born in the United States to Chinese immigrant parents while first-generation Chinese Americans refer to individuals who immigrated to the U.S. from China. The cultural experiences and development of second-generation Chinese Americans may bedistinctively different compared to their first-generation counterparts due to length of residence in the U.S. (Perkins, Wiley, & Deaux, 2014), and acculturation factors, the adaptation of elements of a new mainstream culture (Chen et al., 2014). Research on this unique subgroup of Asian Americans may further our understanding of development in this fast growing, yet understudied minority group.

Cultural Orientation

Tsai and Chentsova-Dutton (2002) defined cultural orientation as the “degree to which individuals are influenced by and actively engage in the traditions, norms, and practices of a specific culture” (p. 95). In other words, cultural orientation refers to individuals’ feelings towards their level of participation in culturally relevant activities. Research has discovered variations in cultural orientation between American-born Asian Americans and foreign-born Asian Americans. For example, Tsai et al. (2000) found that immigrant (foreign-born) Chinese American college students engaged in more Chinese
cultural activities while American-born Chinese Americans engaged in more U.S. cultural activities, resulting in different levels of cultural orientation. Because the current study focuses on individuals living in the United States, the terms U.S. and American will be used synonymously.

Cultural Orientation Model of Second-Generation Chinese Americans

Varying degrees of orientation is not the only distinction between the cultural orientations of first- and second-generation Chinese Americans. Second-generation Chinese Americans may encounter different cultural experiences, in terms of acculturation, compared to their first-generation counterparts, resulting in two distinct models of cultural orientation (Tsai & Chentsova-Dutton, 2002).

As first-generation Chinese Americans immigrate from their heritage culture (China) to the new host culture (U.S), they are faced with the task of acculturation, adopting elements of the new host culture while maintaining or relinquishing elements of their heritage culture (Berry, Trimble, & Olmedo, 1986). However, second-generation Chinese Americans, being born and raised in the U.S., may encounter a slightly different cultural experience. While second-generation Chinese Americans adopt elements of U.S. culture through acculturation, they may also adopt the family’s Chinese culture through enculturation, the process of adopting elements of heritage culture (Kim & Omizo, 2006). In other words, instead of maintaining or relinquishing elements of Chinese culture while adopting U.S. culture, second-generation Chinese Americans may adopt both cultures simultaneously through acculturation and enculturation.
Previous studies have defined acculturation as the degree of individual change that occurs when embracing a new mainstream culture (Rhee et al., 2003). For example, Rhee et al. (2003) measured levels of acculturation and self-esteem in Asian and Caucasian American adolescents. While the authors’ definition of acculturation is similar to the current study’s definition of cultural orientation, it is important to note that they are not the same. That is, cultural orientation characterizes both acculturation and enculturation, thus, more accurately describing the cultural experiences of second-generation Chinese Americans. Due to the current study’s focus on a second-generation Chinese Americans, and to avoid confusion, I use the term cultural orientation instead of acculturation.

The differences in acculturation experiences between first- and second-generation Chinese Americans may produce distinctively different models of cultural orientation (Tsai & Chentsova-Dutton, 2002). The unidimensional and bidimensional models are the two most commonly studied models of cultural orientation. The unidimensional model describes orientation to ethnic and host cultures as having a co-dependent relationship (Tsai & Chentsova-Dutton, 2002). This means that when an individual becomes more oriented towards one culture, that individual becomes less oriented towards the other. The bidimensional model considers orientation to native and host cultures as “separate processes that develop independently” (Tsai & Chentsova-Dutton 2002, p. 98). More specifically, becoming more oriented to one culture does not require becoming less oriented to the other. The maintenance or relinquishment of Chinese culture experienced by first-generation Chinese Americans during acculturation suggests a unidimensional
model of cultural orientation (Tsai & Chentsova-Dutton, 2002). For example, as first-generation Chinese Americans become more oriented towards U.S. culture through acculturation, they may become less oriented towards Chinese culture through relinquishment, resulting in a unidimensional model. Conversely, second-generation Chinese Americans increase orientations towards both cultures through acculturation and enculturation simultaneously, thus, implying a bidimensional model of cultural orientation (Tsai & Chentsova-Dutton, 2002). Past research has yet to examine the relationship between the unique bidimensional model of cultural orientation of second-generation Chinese Americans and self-esteem. A distinctively different model of cultural orientation may result in a distinctively different relationship to other outcomes such as self-esteem. The current study reflects adoption of a bidimensional model of cultural orientation.

**Measuring Cultural Orientation**

Researchers have traditionally measured cultural orientation by self-report questionnaires. Participants rate their level of engagement in culturally specific behaviors, such as “I was raised in a way that was Chinese” and “I am proud of American culture.” The Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale (Suin, Rickard-Figueroa, Lew, & Vigil, 1987) has been a popular instrument in past studies for measuring cultural orientation of Asian Americans. However, this instrument measures Asian and Western culture interdependently, that is, individuals who scored high indicated high Western cultural orientation while individuals who scored low indicated
high Asian orientation. This makes the Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale primarily unidimensional, thus, unable to accurately measure bidimensional models of cultural orientation, such as the cultural orientation of second-generation Chinese Americans. In response, the General Ethnicity Questionnaire (GEQ) was created (Tsai et al., 2000), and is designed to measure both unidimensional and bidimensional models of cultural orientation. That is, two of the same versions of the questionnaire were created (GEQ Chinese & GEQ American), referencing two different cultures, allowing participants to identify their level of cultural orientation towards Chinese and American cultures independently.

Past literature has revealed that cultural orientation is domain specific (Ying, 1995; Tsai et al., 2000; Tsai & Chentsova-Dutton, 2001; Ying et al., 2008). More specifically, an individual may be strongly oriented in one life domain and less oriented in another life domain of the same culture. For example, a Chinese American individual may have high English language proficiency (language domain) but rarely interacts with non-Chinese Americans peers (social domain).

Unlike the Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale, the GEQ examines multiple cultural domains, sampled from popular cultural orientation instruments such as the Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale and the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans (Tsai et al., 2000). The GEQ revealed six key domains relevant to Asian Americans including language proficiency, social affiliation, cultural pride, recreational activities, cultural exposure, and food preference.
The cultural pride domain refers to individual’s attitude and endorsement towards ethnic or mainstream cultures (Tsai & Chentsova-Dutton, 2002). The language proficiency domain refers to linguistic preferences of individuals and is widely considered as a crucial behavior display of cultural orientation (Ying, 1995). The social affiliation domain refers to the type of people an individual associates with. Food preference domain and recreational activities domain refers to the types of food and activities individuals choose on a daily basis and suggests validation of ethnic or mainstream cultures (Tsai et al., 2000).

The current study aimed to examine second-generation Chinese American adolescents’ bidimensional model of cultural orientation. Therefore, the General Ethnicity Questionnaire Chinese and American versions (abridged) were used to assess cultural orientation in this sample. To achieve the most accurate measurement of cultural orientation, this study examined cultural orientation across all six culturally specific life domains revealed by the GEQ. In addition, the current study chose to measure the cultural orientation of adolescents due to the high levels of change and influence in cultural orientation during this life stage.

Theoretical Framework Related to Adolescent Cultural Orientation

Erikson’s psychosocial development theory lays the theoretical framework for the dramatic variations and change in levels of cultural orientation during adolescence. These changes in cultural orientation during adolescence may result in a different relationship between cultural orientation and self-esteem. According to Erikson’s psychosocial
development theory, adolescents, approximately 12-18 years of age, experience drastic rises in physiological and cognitive maturation due to the onset of puberty (Erikson, 1968). Interactions with the world outside the family also increase significantly during adolescence due to changes in their social world such as transitioning from elementary school to middle school. According to Erikson’s psychosocial development theory, as adolescents interact more with the outside world, they are confronted with the task of forging an identity; defining who one is, and how one fits into society (Shaffer, 2009, p. 193). Along with identity formation, adolescents of ethnic minority groups, such as Chinese Americans, begin establishing an ethnic identity, meaning a “sense of belonging to an ethnic group and committing oneself to that group’s traditions or cultures” (Shaffer, 2009). In other words, adolescents of ethnic backgrounds begin to recognize cultural differences within society and must figure out how to fit in.

Although similar, it is important to note that ethnic identity is not synonymous to cultural orientation. Ethnic identity commonly refers to the level to which individuals consciously identify with an ethnic group while cultural orientation refers to individuals’ degree of participation in ethnic and host culture (Ying, Han, & Wong, 2008). For example, a preschooler may be able to actively engage in culturally relevant behaviors and activities (cultural orientation), yet, may lack the cognitive tools to associate those behaviors and activities to an ethnic label (ethnic identity). However, if ethnic identity is associated with commitment to that group’s traditions or cultures, then it is reasonable to assume that cultural orientation becomes increasingly more salient as adolescents attempt to establish an ethnic identity. More specifically, their internal drive to forge an ethnic
identity combined with the exposure to a multicultural environment may lead to a state of disequilibrium concerning individual ethnic identity (Giang, & Wittig, 2006). Adolescents may attempt to resolve this crisis by exploring their ethnic identity through increased interactions with different people and engagement in different activities (Berry et al., 1986), potentially increasing or altering their cultural orientations.

Past research on the development of adolescents of ethnic minorities has provided empirical data supporting the notion of drastic changes in cultural orientation during adolescence (Ying & Lee, 1999; Ying et al., 2008). For example, Ying and Lee (1999) examined Asian American adolescents (ages 12-22) cultural orientation towards ethnic Asian and mainstream American cultures. Utilizing a qualitative research design, Ying and Lee (1999) coded essays written by Asian American adolescents based on their feelings towards Asian and American cultures. The researchers found that younger adolescents displayed stronger orientation towards Asian culture, while older adolescents displayed high levels in both Asian and American cultures.

Similarly, Ying et al. (2008) investigated variations of cultural orientation by age among Asian American adolescents’ ages 13-17 years old. Utilizing a quantitative design, researchers found that levels of cultural orientation varied throughout the course of adolescence. Implementing the GEQ on a sample of Asian American high school students residing in Northern California, the researchers discovered changes in several domains of cultural orientation between ages 13 and 17. Specifically, ethnic cultural orientation domains of social affiliation and recreation activities increased, while U.S.
cultural orientation domains of food preference and language proficiency decreased through ages 13 to 17 years.

Ying and Lee (1999), and Ying et al. (2008) both found variations in cultural orientation throughout adolescence among Asian Americans and explained that these changes in cultural orientation during adolescence are due to the growing understanding of cultural differences made possible by cognitive advancements associated with puberty, and increased interactions with the environment outside the family. The changes in cultural orientation during adolescence demonstrated by these studies and the explanation to these changes proposed the researchers are consistent with Erikson’s developmental theory. While past studies have compared variations in cultural orientation of early and late adolescence, little is known about the relationship between early adolescent cultural orientation and self-esteem.

Erikson’s psychosocial development theory explains the drastic changes in cultural orientation during adolescence as a result of puberty and increased social interactions, making adolescence a crucial stage to investigate. However, it is important to note that adolescent cultural orientation is not only crucial for investigation because of the changes that occur, but also for its strong influence on developmental outcomes such as mental health.

**Influence of Adolescent Cultural Orientation**

Past studies have demonstrated the dramatic influence of cultural orientation on aspects of psychological well-being during adolescence such as depression and
delinquency. Early research findings on cultural orientation and psychological health in Chinese Americans suggest that individuals who embrace both cultures in domains of cultural activities and social affiliations reported better psychological well-being (Ying, 1995). Researchers explain that embracing American culture may promote feelings of comfort towards the environment while embracing Chinese culture provided protection from cultural differences. However, Ying (1995) focused on an adult sample. The influence of adolescent cultural orientation may be different from the cultural orientation of adults due to the variations and changes in cultural orientation during adolescence explained by Erikson’s development theory.

Recent research on Chinese and American cultural orientation and psychological health has expanded to include adolescence. Shell, Newman, and Xiaoyi (2009) investigated the influence of adolescents’ cultural orientations and adolescent drinking behavior. The researchers examined over 1000 Chinese high school students living in Beijing, using the Chinese Cultural Orientation Questionnaire. Results from this study indicated that higher levels of Western cultural orientation increase the likelihood of Chinese adolescent drinking. These results suggest Western cultural orientation increases delinquent behaviors, such as adolescent drinking, among Chinese adolescents. Shell et al. (2009) examined a Chinese adolescent sample rather than a Chinese American adolescent sample like the present study; however, these findings help illustrate the developmental influence of adolescent cultural orientation to psychological well-being.

Unlike Shell et al. (2009) who investigated Chinese adolescents living in China, Deng, Kim, Vaughan, and Li (2009) studied Chinese American adolescents living in
Northern California. In addition, Deng et al. (2009) examined the relationships between cultural orientations, discrimination experiences, and delinquent behaviors. Utilizing a sample of 311 Chinese American adolescents ranging from 12 to 15 years, the researchers used the Vancouver Index of Acculturation to measure individual levels of orientation towards Western and Chinese cultures. Using a 4-point Likert scale, five items were used to measure adolescent discrimination experiences, and the Child Behavior Checklist was used to examine delinquent behaviors such as stealing and lying. Researchers found significant negative influences of discrimination experiences on delinquent behaviors, mediated by cultural orientation. That is, high levels of Chinese cultural orientation increased the negative influences of discriminatory experiences on delinquent behaviors while high levels of orientation towards Western culture decreased these negative influences. The researchers suggest that high levels of Western cultural orientation decreased the negative influences of discriminatory experiences due to a higher familiarity with the mainstream culture that may assist individuals in appropriately responding to discrimination.

The empirical findings of Deng et al. (2009) suggest that Western cultural orientation decreases delinquent behaviors among Chinese American adolescents, while Shell et al. (2009) suggests Western cultural orientation increases delinquent behaviors among Chinese adolescents. These empirical findings highlight potential negative and positive influences on psychological health and well-being associated with cultural factors during adolescence, illustrating the developmental importance of adolescent cultural orientation. Nevertheless, few studies have considered the association of cultural
orientation and self-esteem, a central indicator of psychological well-being (Tsai et al. 2001). The current study expanded on these findings by investigating Chinese American adolescent cultural orientation and its association to self-esteem.

**Self-Esteem**

Low self-esteem has been frequently associated with a wide range of psychological disorders (Donnellan et al., 2005; Li et al., 2010; Orth et al., 2014) and is commonly regarded as a crucial indicator of psychological health (Tsai, et al., 2001). Self-esteem refers to an individual’s self-evaluated perception of his or her value and importance (Orth & Robins, 2014). Moreover, adolescence is a critical life stage to examine self-esteem due to the dramatic changes in self-esteem that occur (Block & Robins, 1993). The current study investigated the relationship between cultural orientation and self-esteem during adolescence.

**Adolescent Self-Esteem**

A large body of research has attempted to track the development of self-esteem during adolescence, however, these studies have concluded with inconsistent results. Some studies have suggested that self-esteem declines during adolescence (Robins, Trzesniewski, Tracy, Gosling, & Potter, 2002) while others have suggested self-esteem increases during adolescence (Orth, Robins, & Widaman, 2012). Using a cross-sectional research design, Robins et al. (2002) explored age differences in self-esteem among a
large ethnically and nationally diverse sample of individuals ranging from 9 to 90 years of age. Measuring self-esteem with the Single-Item Self-Esteem Scale, Robins et al. (2002) results suggest that self-esteem begins to dramatically decrease from ages 9-12 years and continues to decrease into early adulthood (17-22 years of age). The researchers explain that the drop in self-esteem during adolescence may be caused by stress associated with puberty such as changes in the environment and pressures of school transitions.

The empirical findings of Robins et al. (2002) are slightly inconsistent with longitudinal studies on self-esteem development. In a longitudinal study, Block and Robins (1993) examined age-related changes in mean levels of self-esteem in a sample of 92 American high school students. Using the Self-Descriptive Q-Set, the researchers measured self-esteem at ages 14, 18, and 23. While results indicated males slightly increase in self-esteem while females slightly decrease in self-esteem throughout adolescence, the researchers were unable to demonstrate age related changes in mean levels of self-esteem during adolescence, contradictory to the findings of Robins et al. (2002). Based on the results, Block and Robins (1993) concluded that self-esteem is relatively stable across time.

In a more recent longitudinal study on life-span development of self-esteem, Orth et al. (2012) investigated the self-esteem of a large, predominately Caucasian American sample, ranging from 16 to 97 years of age. Measuring self-esteem with the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, Orth et al. (2012) found that self-esteem increased from age 16 to early adulthood, and continued to increase into middle adulthood, contradicting the
findings of both Robins et al. (2002) and Block and Robins (1993). Although these inconsistencies in research findings may be a result of differences in instruments and design in measuring self-esteem (Orth & Robins, 2014), these studies indicate variations in adolescent self-esteem, making adolescence a prime period to investigate self-esteem as well as individual differences in self-esteem.

While these studies have failed to agree on a specific developmental trajectory of adolescent self-esteem, the results of these studies all agree that self-esteem is relatively stable over time. That is, individuals with relatively low or high self-esteem during adolescence will likely have relatively low or high self-esteem during adulthood respectively.

Apart from examining the trajectory and stability of adolescent self-esteem, many studies have demonstrated the strong link between adolescent self-esteem and psychological well-being. Trzesniewski et al. (2006) examined the long-term outcomes of low self-esteem during adolescence. Using a longitudinal design, the researchers assessed a large sample of New Zealand born adolescents. Self-esteem was measured with the Rosenberg Self-esteem scale at ages 11, 13, and 15. Long-term outcomes such as physical and mental health, and criminal behaviors were measured at age 26 using self-report scales. Results suggest that adolescents with low self-esteem had poorer physical and mental health as well as higher levels of criminal behaviors during adulthood, illustrating the significant influence of adolescent self-esteem on psychological health. However, Trzesniewski et al. (2006) did not examine an American population. A
population that includes large variations in cultural groups, such as Americans, may vary in levels of self-esteem as well as its relationship with mental health.

Utilizing a large sample of European American, Asian American, Hispanic American, and African American adolescents between 11 and 14 years old, Donnellan et al. (2005) investigated the relation between self-esteem and delinquency. Using self-reports of self-esteem and delinquency, the researchers’ findings suggest that individuals with low self-esteem during adolescence were negatively related to levels of delinquency. The results support a negative relationship between low adolescent self-esteem and psychological health outcomes among American cultural groups.

Orth, Robins, Widaman, and Conger (2014) conducted a longitudinal study examining low self-esteem as a risk factor for depression among Mexican-American adolescents at age 10 and 12 years old. The results were successful in suggesting low self-esteem as a potential risk factor for depression. While the study did not examine Asian American self-esteem, the results of the study demonstrate the negative effects of low self-esteem among ethnic minority and immigrant populations.

These studies have suggested low adolescent self-esteem has a relationship with multiple long-term consequences in psychological health, illustrating the negative consequences of low adolescent self-esteem among Americans. In addition, research has suggested that adolescent self-esteem remains relatively stable through adolescence and adulthood and that Asian Americans have commonly reported the lowest levels of self-esteem compared to all other ethnic groups in the United States (Twenge & Crocker, 2002; Bachman et al., 2011) Thus, Asian Americans may be highly susceptible to
associated developmental consequences in adolescence and later life. However, studies have not specifically focused on Asian American self-esteem and research on Asian American self-esteem has been inconsistent with research on other American cultural groups (Bachman et al., 2011).

**Asian American Self-Esteem**

The commonly reported low levels of Asian American adolescent self-esteem may be a hindrance on their chances of life success and well-being. Past literature has demonstrated Chinese American adolescents’ high risk for developing low self-esteem, which means they may be at high risk for developing the associated mental health problems. The current study attempted to address low Chinese American self-esteem by examining cultural influences on self-esteem.

Given the crucial developmental importance of self-esteem, numerous researchers have attempted to locate individual variations that are associated to varying levels of self-esteem such as social class, ethnicity, and academic performance. The question is: what factors are associated with different levels of self-esteem? Using longitudinal data from a large group of white adolescents residing in the Midwest, Falci (2011) discovered that adolescents with high social economic status gain significantly higher levels of self-esteem throughout high school compared to adolescents with low social economic status. Studies also indicate individuals with high academic performance will typically have higher levels of self-esteem (Wiggins, Schatz, & West, 1994; Lane, Lane, & Kyprianou,
2004). However, these results are not consistent with self-esteem research on Asian Americans, and more specifically, Chinese Americans.

In a study on adolescent self-esteem, Bachman et al. (2011) found that Asian Americans scored the lowest on self-esteem reports compared to Whites, Hispanics, and African-Americans. Yet, the same study also found that Asian Americans had the highest average academic performance and social economic status, factors that past studies have associated with high self-esteem. This inconsistency implies there are other factors influencing self-esteem that are exclusive to the Asian American population, such as cultural differences within the Asian American population.

Researchers have suspected cultural factors as an influence to the self-esteem of Asian Americans. Past researchers have presumed the relatively low levels of Asian American self-esteem compared with other American cultural groups is due to differences in cultural norms such as self-enhancement and self-effacement (Tsai et al., 2001). Formed from the Western cultural value of individualism (independence), self-enhancement operates as a way for individuals to optimistically distinguish themselves from others (O’Mara, Gaertner, Sedikides, Zhou, & Liu, 2012). Referring to the preference for positive self-regard, self-enhancement is typically favored by Western cultures and associated with high self-esteem. Conversely, self-effacement is a product of the Asian cultural embrace of collectivism (interdependence) and is a way for individuals to encourage and preserve social relationships. Referring to the preference for self-criticism and negative self-regard, self-effacement is typically favored by Asian cultures and associated with low self-esteem (O’Mara et al., 2012).

In a longitudinal study on self-enhancement and psychological well-being, O’Mara et al. (2012) examined the influence of self-enhancement and self-effacement among U.S. and Chinese college students. The authors found that self-enhancement significantly increased psychological well-being. While the researchers did not examine the influence of self-enhancement and self-effacement to self-esteem specifically, the results provide support for Twenge and Crocker’s (2002) explanation that low Asian American self-esteem is due to the differences in cultural norms discussed above.

However, cultural influences on the self-esteem of Asian Americans may be more complicated than the explanation provided by Twenge and Crocker (2002). Because Asian Americans are bicultural individuals, meaning they are influenced by both the Asian cultural norm of self-effacement and the U.S. cultural norm of self-enhancement. More research is needed to reveal the complexities of cultural influences on Asian American self-esteem. The current study addressed this issue by examining the relationship of cultural orientation and self-esteem.

**Cultural Orientation and Self-Esteem**

The current study investigated the relationship between self-esteem and the orientation of both Chinese and U.S. culture in second-generation Chinese American adolescents across multiple domains. Few studies have explored the relationship between
cultural orientation and self-esteem of Chinese Americans. Even less is known about this relationship in second-generation Chinese American adolescents.

Defining acculturation synonymously to the current study’s definition of cultural orientation, Rhee et al. (2003) examined acculturation and self-esteem among Asian and Caucasian American adolescents between the ages of 13 to 18 years. The authors utilized the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) and the Acculturation Behavioral Scale for Adolescents (Chae, 1990) to measure self-esteem and acculturation, respectively. Results suggested Asian Americans with higher acculturation levels reported higher self-esteem, supporting a positive relationship between U.S. cultural orientation and self-esteem. More specifically, Asian Americans who were more oriented to U.S. culture reported higher self-esteem. Rhee et al. (2003) included first- and second-generation Asian Americans but made no distinction between the unidimensional and bidimensional models of acculturation of the two groups. That is, first-generation Asian Americans may have a unidimensional model of acculturation while second-generation Asian Americans may have a bidimensional model (Tsai et al., 2000). The instrument used to measure acculturation (Acculturation Behavioral Scale for Adolescents) was strictly unidimensional, and did not allow researchers to examine the bidimensional models of acculturation within their sample (second-generation Asian Americans).

The current study expanded on Rhee et al.’s (2003) study by examining the bidimensional model of cultural orientation, thus, focusing exclusively on second-generation Asian Americans. Cultural orientation is used in favor of acculturation because it is a variable that more accurately describes the experiences of second-
generation Asian Americans. Levels of cultural orientation may have a different relationship with self-esteem than levels of acculturation. To improve the consistency and homogeneity of the research sample, the current study only included Chinese Americans, the largest Asian American group in the United States.

Previous studies have examined self-esteem and cultural orientation among Chinese Americans across multiple domains, but like Rhee et al. (2003), did not focus on the bidimensional cultural orientation model of second-generation adolescents. Schnittker (2002) and Tsai et al. (2001) both measured specific domains of Chinese and U.S. cultural orientation and explored its relationship to self-esteem among Chinese American adults. Utilizing a large sample of first-generation Chinese American adults, Schnittker (2002) investigated self-esteem and its relations to three cultural orientation domains: English language use, Chinese cultural participation, and neighborhood Chinese composition. Schnittker (2002) found that Chinese Americans who scored high in the cultural orientation domain of English language use also had higher self-esteem. That is, participants who primarily used English had higher self-esteem than those who primarily used Chinese. However, Schnittker (2002) focused exclusively on foreign-born Chinese Americans and applied a unidimensional measure of cultural orientation, meaning he did not measure U.S. orientation and Chinese orientation independently. Conversely, the current study expanded on Schnittker’s (2002) research by focusing exclusively on U.S.-born Chinese Americans (second-generation) and utilizing the General Ethnicity Questionnaire to measure bidimensional models of cultural orientation.
Unlike Schnittker (2002), Tsai et al. (2001) included both foreign-born and U.S.-born participants in their sample, with a bidimensional measure of cultural orientation, meaning U.S and Chinese were measured independently. Using a large sample of Chinese American college students, Tsai et al. (2001) investigated the relationship between self-esteem and three specific domains of cultural orientation: language proficiency, cultural pride, and social affiliations. The authors found evidence supporting cultural orientation as a strong predictor for self-esteem. Using the GEQ to measure domains in both U.S and Chinese cultural orientation independently, the authors found that language proficiency in both English and Chinese were positively related with self-esteem while social affiliations with Chinese people was negatively related with self-esteem.

Tsai et al. (2001) utilized both versions of the GEQ (American and Chinese version) for a bidimensional measure of cultural orientation. However, less than 34% of the research sample was second-generation. This means the majority of the sample may have had a unidimensional model of cultural orientation. Like Rhee et al. (2003), Tsai et al. (2001) included both first- and second-generation Chinese Americans but made no distinction between the different models of cultural orientation within their samples when measuring cultural orientation.

Furthermore, both Schnittker (2002) and Tsai et al. (2001) focused on Chinese American adults and late adolescents. Research has commonly suggested self-esteem to decrease during adolescence while Erikson’s developmental theory implies the increasing salience and change of cultural orientation during adolescence. Due to the extreme
developmental changes in self-esteem and cultural orientation during this stage of life, this study will only focus on early adolescents.

Finally, Rhee et al. (2003), Schnittker (2000), and Tsai et al. (2001) all failed to examine the unique cultural orientation model of U.S.-born Chinese Americans. The bidimensional cultural orientation model of U.S.-born Chinese Americans may have a different relationship with self-esteem compared to the unidimensional cultural orientation model of foreign-born Chinese Americans. For example, second-generation Chinese Americans with strong orientations towards both cultures may have different cultural influences towards self-esteem.

The relationship between self-esteem and the unique cultural orientation model of second-generation Chinese American adolescents across multiple domains is extremely sparse. Thus, this current study investigated the relationship of domain specific cultural orientations with self-esteem in Chinese American adolescents.

The Present Study

In summary, low self-esteem has been frequently associated with a variety of mental health problems (Donnellan et al., 2005; Li et al., 2010; Orth et al., 2014). Asian Americans have consistently reported the lowest self-esteem among all ethnic groups in the United States (Robins et al., 2002; Twenge & Crocker, 2002; Rhee et al., 2003; Bachman et al., 2011), putting them at high risk for developing the mental health problems associated with low self-esteem. To better understand this phenomenon,
researchers must investigate cultural influences on self-esteem. A few past studies have successfully demonstrated the relationship between cultural orientation and self-esteem among Asian Americans. However, most of these studies have been conducted on adults rather than adolescents. Furthermore, research has yet to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and the unique cultural orientation model of second-generation Chinese American adolescents. Chinese Americans make up the largest percent of the Asian American population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015), thus, adding significance to the research.

The current study attempted to answer whether or not cultural orientations have significant influences on self-esteem. Based upon the American cultural norm of self-enhancement and the Asian cultural norm of self-effacement (O’Mara et al., 2012, Twenge & Crocker, 2002), two hypotheses are tested in the current study: 1) U.S. cultural orientation will have a positive relationship with self-esteem among second-generation Chinese American adolescents, and 2) Chinese cultural orientation will have a negative relationship with self-esteem among second-generation Chinese American adolescents.
Chapter 3

METHODS

The current quantitative study focused on the cultural orientation of second-generation Chinese American adolescents and its relation to levels of self-esteem. Specifically, this study examined the relation of adolescent self-esteem with overall levels of cultural orientation as well as specific domains of cultural orientation including: (a) cultural pride, (b) language proficiency, (c) social affiliation, (d) food preference, (e) cultural exposure, and (f) recreational activities. To investigate this relationship, descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were conducted.

Early adolescents self-reported surveys provided data for the current study. The self-reported survey was split into 3 sections, measuring for 3 different variables: Chinese cultural orientation, U.S. cultural orientation, and self-esteem. Chinese and U.S. cultural orientations were measured by adolescents’ self-reported responses on the General Ethnicity Questionnaire – Chinese (GEQC) and General Ethnicity Questionnaire – American (GEQA) respectively (Tsai et al., 2000). Levels of self-esteem were measured by adolescents’ self-reported responses on the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Adolescents’ age, place of birth, and parents’ place of birth were provided using a short demographic survey completed by parents.
Participants

Twenty-five second-generation Chinese American adolescents from an afterschool Chinese language program in a Northern California city participated in the study. All participants of the sample were second-generation Chinese American adolescents living with both biological parents, ranging from 11 to 16 years of age with a mean age of 12.64 years old (standard deviation of 1.58). The parents’ length of residence in the United States ranged from 11 to 34 years with a mean of 18.96 years (standard deviation of 6.13).

Recruitment

Families were recruited through visits to an afterschool Chinese language program at a local high school in Northern California. After gaining approval from the program principal and board members, the researcher visited three class sessions at the site to introduce the study to parents, adolescents, and program teachers. During these visits, the researcher introduced himself as a graduate student at a nearby California State University campus, and explained his role as a researcher for the current study. The research further informed parents and adolescents of his participation with the afterschool Chinese language program as a child and early adolescent. This helped build a trusting relationship with potential participants.

Parents and adolescents were invited to a free pizza party after class sessions at a later date where they would have an opportunity to participate in the study if they choose.
Parents and adolescents were invited to a pizza party was held after the next week’s class sessions. Parents and adolescents were also informed that they were welcomed to the party regardless of whether they chose to participate in the study. Teachers at the site aided the recruitment processes by sending mass emails to families of the program, informing them of the study and inviting them to the after class pizza party, during which questionnaire data for the study were collected.

**Measures**

**Demographic Data**

One parent from each family completed a short demographic survey (Appendix C) requesting basic demographic information including adolescents’ age, adolescents’ place of birth, both parents’ place of birth, and both parents’ length of residence in the United States. The primary purpose of this demographic survey was to verify that the participating child was second generation. The demographic survey was attached to the letter of consent. Before given the letter of consent and survey, parents were informed that completing the demographic survey would also provide parental consent for their child’s participation.

**Cultural Orientation**

The General Ethnicity Questionnaire (GEQ; Appendix D & E) is a widely used instrument that measures different types of cultural orientation separately, supporting
second-generation Chinese American’s bidimensional model of cultural orientation. Previous research has demonstrated high reliability and supported validity for both GEQ surveys (Tsai et al., 2000). The GEQ includes 38 items measuring for cultural orientation across multiple life domains including language proficiency, social affiliation, cultural pride, cultural exposure, recreational activities and food preference. Two identical versions of the GEQ were used to measure Chinese cultural orientation (GEQC) and U.S. cultural orientation (GEQA) independently. The only difference between the GEQC and GEQA is the cultured being referenced. Similar to Tsai et al. (2001), participants of the current study were asked to complete both surveys (see Appendix D) in order to collect a bidimensional measure of cultural orientation to account for both overlap in and differences in cultures among bicultural individuals.

Using a 5-point Likert scale format ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, participants were asked to indicate how strongly they agree with items such as “Overall, I am Chinese” and “Overall, I am American.” Item 5 on both GEQC and GEQC, “I am embarrassed/ashamed of Chinese/American culture”, was reverse coded during analysis. Items regarding language proficiency such as “how much do you speak Chinese at home?” and “how much do you speak English at home?” were answered using a different 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = not at all to 5 = very much. For the current study, four items in the GEQ were inappropriate due to the age of the sample and were removed from the survey. Examples of these items include “I relate to my partner or spouse in a way that is Chinese/American” and “The people I date are Chinese/American.” Thus, the final GEQ surveys resulted in 34 total items each.
The GEQ measured cultural orientation across six key life domains: cultural exposure, cultural pride, recreational activities, food preference, social affiliation, and language proficiency. These domains were measured according to the specific items in the survey. The first three items measured cultural orientation within the cultural exposure domain, including items such as “Now, I am exposed to Chinese/American culture.” Ten items measured cultural orientation within the cultural pride domain; an example would be “I admire Chinese/American people.” Four items measured cultural orientation in the recreational activities domain such as “I listen to Chinese/American music.” Five items measured food preference and social affiliation with items including “At home, I eat Chinese/American food” and “My friends are Chinese/American.” Items referring to the language proficiency domain were located on a separate page, and as mentioned above, measured with a different Likert scale. Language proficiency totaled twelve items after removing the age inappropriate item “How much do you speak Chinese/English at work?” The items in each GEQ survey were summed to calculate the degree of orientation towards the respective culture.

Data Collection Procedures

All data were collected during the planned after-session pizza parties. Two separate pizza parties were held on two separate Sunday afternoons to collect data. Both pizza parties were held directly outside the classrooms after class sessions. The researcher provided pizza, soda, and chips for the party. Parents and adolescents were
once again informed at the pizza party that all were welcomed to the party even if they did not wish to participate in the study. At the second pizza party, parents and adolescents attending the party were told to not fill out the survey if they had already completed the survey at the previous pizza party.

During the party, survey packets were hand-delivered to adolescents interested in participating in the study. Presented in simple English, survey packets included a copy of the letter of informed consent (Appendix A), letter of informed assent (Appendix B), demographic survey (Appendix C), and research survey (Appendix D). Survey packets were only given to adolescents who were accompanied by at least one parent. The accompanied parent read the letter of consent and completed the demographic survey while the adolescent read the letter of assent and filled out the research survey that included the GEQC, GEQA, and the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale. Participants were informed that they could skip any question they did not feel like answering and that they could stop the survey and leave at any time. For purposes of convenience, parents and adolescents were encouraged to complete and return the survey packets to the researcher before leaving the party. Families were thanked for their participation upon completing and returning the surveys.

**Data Analysis**

Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were conducted to answer whether or not cultural orientations have significant influences on self-esteem among second-
generation Chinese American adolescents. Cultural orientation and self-esteem ratings were summed respectively to obtain adolescents’ self-reported levels of cultural orientation and self-esteem. Descriptive statistics (Means and Standard deviations) were computed for overall cultural orientation and self-esteem, as well as each cultural orientation domain. Pearson correlation analyses were conducted examining relations between self-esteem and each cultural orientation variable (Chinese and American) to describe the relationship between self-esteem and both cultural orientations.
Chapter 4
RESULTS

A total of 25 participants completed the survey. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations were run on self-esteem, Chinese cultural orientation, and U.S. cultural orientation measures. Mean scores, standard deviations, and paired t tests were also conducted on Chinese and U.S. cultural orientation domains, including language proficiency, recreational activities, food preference, cultural exposure, cultural pride, and social affiliation.

Ratings were made on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Chinese language proficiency had a mean score of 2.95 (SD = .87), while English language proficiency had a mean score of 4.61 (SD = .43), and a paired t-test revealed that this difference was statistically significant (t (24) = -7.08). Chinese recreational activities had a mean of 3.21 with a standard deviation of 0.92 while American recreational activities had a mean of 4.00 (SD = .62). Chinese food preference had a mean score of 4.36 (SD = .64), and American food preference had a mean score of 2.98 (SD = .97). Chinese cultural exposure showed a mean score of 3.96 (SD = .73), while American cultural exposure showed a mean score of 3.74 (SD = .71). Chinese cultural pride had a mean of 3.31 (SD = .73), and American cultural pride had a mean score of 3.74 (SD = .56). And finally, Chinese social affiliation revealed a mean of 3.65 (SD = .86), while American social affiliation revealed a mean of 3.81 (SD = .90). Other than the language proficiency domains, paired t tests found no difference between reported levels
of cultural orientation towards American and Chinese domains. This means that while participants reported being significantly more proficient in English language than Chinese language, participants did not report being significantly more oriented towards one cultural domain over the other.

Next bivariate Pearson correlations were conducted to test for associations between self-esteem and both cultural orientation variables (Chinese cultural orientation and U.S. cultural orientation). Parents’ length of residence in the United States was also included in the correlation analyses to test whether parents’ length of residence might account for the relationship between self-esteem and cultural orientation.

Results indicated no significant relationship between self-esteem and both cultural orientation variables. More specifically, second-generation Chinese American adolescents who reported more orientation to Chinese culture tended to have no significant relationship between Chinese cultural orientation and self-esteem $r(24) = 0.01$, $p = 0.49$, one-tailed. This means that variations and changes in Chinese cultural orientation did predict variation in self-esteem. Further, there was no significant relationship between American cultural orientation and self-esteem $r(24) = 0.24$, $p = 0.12$, one-tailed. This means that variations and changes in American cultural orientation do not necessarily relate to variations and changes in self-esteem.

Although the current study did not explicitly focus on the relationship between Chinese and American cultural orientations, the results indicate a significant negative correlation between the two variables. More specifically, second-generation Chinese American adolescents who reported high levels of American cultural orientation reported
lower levels of Chinese cultural orientation $r(24) = -0.41, \ p = 0.02$, one-tailed. This means that as American cultural orientation goes up, Chinese cultural orientation goes down.

Results also indicated that parents’ length of residence in the United States was significantly associated with self-esteem and American cultural orientation. More specifically, adolescents with parents who reported longer lengths of residency in the United States tended to report higher self-esteem $r(24) = .398, \ p = .049$, one-tailed, and higher American cultural orientation $r(24) = .458, \ p = .021$, one-tailed. This means that the longer parents have resided in the U.S., the higher self-esteem and American cultural orientation reported by adolescents. Descriptive statistics and correlations between self-esteem and cultural orientation are reported in Table 1.
Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Self-Esteem and Cultural Orientations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self-Esteem</th>
<th>Chinese Cultural Orientation</th>
<th>American Cultural Orientation</th>
<th>Parent Length of Residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Esteem</strong></td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chinese Cultural Orientation</strong></td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>American Cultural Orientation</strong></td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>-.41*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Length of Residence</strong></td>
<td>.40*</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.46*</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean</strong></td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>18.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard Deviation</strong></td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>6.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 25, **p<.001, *p<.05**
The current study adds to understanding of the relationship between cultural orientation and self-esteem in second-generation Chinese American adolescents. Self-reported data on cultural orientation and self-esteem were collected to answer the main research question: Does cultural orientation significantly relate to levels of self-esteem? Based on previous research, this study hypothesized that cultural orientation does have a significant relationship with self-esteem. More specifically, U.S. cultural orientation will significantly relate to high levels of self-esteem while Chinese cultural orientation will significantly relate to low levels of self-esteem.

The current study failed to find significant relationships between self-esteem and cultural orientations. However, results suggest significant relationships between parent length of residence in the United States to both adolescent self-esteem and American cultural orientation, along with a significant relationship between adolescent Chinese and American cultural orientation. While these findings were not the specific aim of the current study, they may reveal important information on self-esteem and cultural orientation. Findings of the current study are discussed in the following section.
Relationship between Cultural Orientation and Self-Esteem

Inconsistent with the hypothesis, the current study revealed no significant relationship between cultural orientation and self-esteem. That is, both Chinese and U.S. cultural orientation did not predict levels of self-esteem. This finding is inconsistent with previous research findings (Tsai et al., 2001; Schnittker, 2002; Rhee et al., 2003). The lack of significant findings may be a result of a low sample size from a single middle-class community. A larger sample size with families from multiple locations may yield significant results. The lack of significant findings may also be a result of parents’ length of residency in the U.S. serving as a confounding variable in the relationships between adolescent self-esteem and cultural orientation. That is, parents’ length of residency in the U.S. may influence parent cultural orientations, which in turn, may influence the relationship between self-esteem and cultural orientation of adolescents.

While the primary focus of the current research was to investigate the relationship between cultural orientation and self-esteem, additional results indicated several other correlational relationships that may provide further insight on the second-generation Chinese American adolescent population. First, the results of this study found strong positive relationships between parents’ length of residence in the U.S. and adolescent American cultural orientation. This suggests that the longer parents reside in the U.S., the higher the reported American cultural orientation of the adolescent. The positive relationship between parents’ length of residence in the U.S. and adolescent American
cultural orientation may be explained by previous research on acculturation. Ying (1995) suggested that Chinese cultural orientation decreases while American cultural orientation increases the longer an individual resides in the United States due to longer lengths of acculturation. This implies that parents who reported longer residency in the United States may have higher levels of American cultural orientation and lower levels of Chinese cultural orientation. Adolescents of these parents may have more opportunities to acculturate American culture and fewer opportunities to enculturate Chinese culture at home, thus, explaining the positive relationship between length or parent residence and adolescent American cultural orientation found in the current study.

Second, the results of the current study found a significant positive relationship between parents’ length of residence in the U.S. and adolescent self-esteem. This means the longer parents reside in the U.S., the higher the reported self-esteem of the adolescent. Parent-child cultural orientation gaps refer to the difference in levels of cultural orientation between the parent and the child, and may explain the positive relationship between length of parents’ residence in the United States and adolescent self-esteem as well as the lack of significant findings between self-esteem and cultural orientation.

Typically, second-generation Chinese Americans adopt elements of American culture faster than their immigrant parents and become more American oriented than their parents, while parents are more oriented to Chinese culture (Kim, Chen, Wang, Shen, Orozco-Lapray, 2013), creating a gap in cultural orientations. Chen et al. (2014) suggested that larger gaps in cultural orientation between parents and child might lead to greater child behavioral problems and lower self-esteem. As previously mentioned,
parents who reported longer lengths of residence in the United States might have higher orientation towards American culture and lower orientation towards Chinese culture. Adolescents of parents with higher American cultural orientation and lower Chinese cultural orientation will likely have smaller parent-child cultural orientation gaps, therefore, less behavioral problems and possibly higher self-esteem. This is consistent with the positive relationship between parents’ length of residence in the U.S and adolescent self-esteem found in the current study. However, Chen et al. (2014) examined young children rather than adolescents, hence, more research on the role of parents’ cultural orientation on adolescents is required.

The significant relationship between parents’ length of residence in the U.S may have been a confounding variable on the non-significant relationship between adolescent cultural orientation and adolescent self-esteem found in the current study through its relationship with both adolescent self-esteem and adolescent American cultural orientation.

Lastly, a negative correlational relationship between Chinese cultural orientation and U.S. cultural orientation was found, meaning as one cultural orientation increases, the other cultural orientation decreases. The current study examined only second-generation Chinese Americans due to their unique bidimensional model of cultural orientation as suggested by Tsai and Chentsova-Dutton (2002). However, the findings of this study suggest a unidimensional model of cultural orientation for second-generation Chinese Americans, inconsistent with previous literature. This inconsistency may be a result of the significance parents’ length of residence in the U.S.. As previously mentioned in the
literature review, second-generation Chinese Americans may have a bidimensional model of cultural orientation because they simultaneously adopt elements of American culture through acculturation and elements of Chinese culture through enculturation. The unidimensional model found in the current study may be a result of fewer opportunities for enculturation at home due to parents’ length of residence in the U.S. That is, parents residing longer in the U.S. may have lower Chinese cultural orientation, which may lead to higher adolescent American cultural orientation and lower adolescent Chinese cultural orientation due to lower levels of enculturation at home with parents, resembling a unidimensional model.

**Limitations and Future Research**

There were several limitations to this study. The first limitation was the relatively low sample size, consisting of only 25 participants total, from only one Northern California afterschool program, located in a community of middle class families. This may limit power as well as the generalizability of the current study’s findings. Although all participants met the requirements of the study, future research should include a larger sample from various locations so that findings may be more generalizable across Chinese Americans and other American cultural groups.

While the research sample included both males and females, gender differences were not examined. Past research has revealed that the relationship between cultural orientation and self-esteem differ for Chinese American males and females (Tsai et al.,
Future studies should bring attention to possible gender differences in cultural orientation and self-esteem among second-generation Chinese Americans.

Another limitation of the study was the use of self-reported measures of self-esteem and cultural orientation. Individuals reporting how they feel about themselves may be different from how they truly feel about themselves. Future studies should utilize more accurate measures in evaluating self-esteem. In addition, examining self-esteem among Chinese Americans may be a limitation due to the possible variation of meaning to individuals with Chinese cultural backgrounds. That is, self-esteem was a concept initially created by Western culture. It is possible that the concept of self-esteem may be perceived differently within Chinese culture. Since Chinese Americans are influenced by both Western and Chinese cultures, it may be difficult to understand how they perceive self-esteem and what it means to them. Future studies should examine exactly how self-esteem is perceived by Chinese Americans by investigating other correlational relationships with self-esteem among Chinese Americans.

The current study revealed no significant relationships between cultural orientation and self-esteem as well as a unidimensional model of cultural orientation in a second-generation Chinese American adolescent sample, both inconsistent with previous studies. To my knowledge, this study was the first to examine the relationship between cultural orientation and self-esteem of an exclusively second-generation Chinese American adolescent population. Therefore, this study needs to be replicated with a larger sample size to enhance the accuracy and validity of the results.
Although the current study failed to support its hypotheses, the findings demonstrate the complexities of Chinese American cultural orientations that may help direct future research on the relationship between cultural orientation and self-esteem. For example, the research sample of the current study was recruited from a Chinese afterschool program in a Northern California city with a large population of Chinese Americans. Participants of the current study were most likely members of a dense Chinese community and subject to the influence of ethnic density. Environmental context has a significant influence on development, and likely on cultural orientation and self-esteem (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Ying, 1995; Schnittker, 2002). Ying et al. (2008) found that Chinese American adolescents reported higher Chinese cultural orientation when living in an ethnically dense community, explaining that the high Chinese density reinforced the preference for Chinese language and Chinese food. Similarly, Schnittker (2002) found that high levels of Chinese cultural participation had a positive relationship with self-esteem in neighborhoods with dense Chinese populations, and low levels of Chinese cultural participation had a positive relationship with self-esteem in neighborhoods with low Chinese population.

Schnittker (2002) and Ying et al. (2008) demonstrated the profound influence of ethnic density on Chinese American cultural orientation and self-esteem. Future studies on cultural orientation and self-esteem should recognize and expand on the influence of ethnic density, and exactly how the immediate environment may influence cultural orientation and self-esteem.
Future studies on cultural orientation should also include longitudinal designs. Longitudinal studies may advance our current understanding of how cultural orientation changes and develops over time. Empirical findings on the trajectory of cultural orientation development over time may help families of ethnic backgrounds better understand the relationships and influences of their cultural orientation.

The results of the current study suggested a significant influence of parents’ length of residence in the United States on adolescent self-esteem and American cultural orientation. The current study suggests that parents’ length of residence in the United States mediates the level of American cultural orientation of parents, which in turn, influences adolescent self-esteem and adolescent American cultural orientation. However, the current study did not collect data on levels of parent cultural orientation, or other parenting variables. Future studies should further examine the role of the parent in cultural orientation and its influence on adolescent cultural orientation and self-esteem as well as the influence parent-child cultural orientation gaps among second generation Chinese American adolescents.

Lastly, the current research should be expanded to different ethnic American populations. Generational differences in cultural orientation and models of cultural orientation may be present in other ethnic groups, but its development and influence may differ due to differences in culture. More research on different ethnic American populations will help us better understand the experiences of immigrants and ethnic minorities in America.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A
Introduction And Letter Of Consent

The relationship of cultural orientation and self-esteem among second-generation Chinese American adolescents

Your child is invited to participate in a research study which will involve cultural orientation and self-esteem. My name is Thomas Ruan, and I am a Child Development graduate student at California State University, Sacramento.

Your child’s participation in this project is entirely voluntary. Even after you agree to allow your child to participate, you may decide to stop their participation in the study at any time.

Your child was selected as a possible participant in this study because of age and ethnic background. The purpose of this research is to examine the relationship of cultural orientation and self-esteem. If you decide to allow your child to participate, he or she will be asked to complete a survey measuring for cultural orientation and self-esteem. His or her participation in this study will last 15-20 minutes.

There are some possible risks involved for your child. These are feelings of anxiety or stress while answering questions regarding their self perception and/or cultural background. There are some benefits to this research, particularly that your child may gain a higher and more mature understanding in how they view themselves.

No names will be used in the study. Any information collected during the study will remain completely anonymous. An identification number will be assigned to all participants to insure your child’s confidentiality. The data obtained will be maintained in a safe, locked location and will be destroyed after a period of three years after the study is completed.

If you have any questions about the research at any time, please call me at (408)888-7690, or Dr. Amber Gonzalez at (916)278-6117, or email me at 2thomasruan@gmail.com. If you have any questions about your child’s rights as a participant in a research project please call the Office of Research Affairs, California State University, Sacramento, (916) 278-5674, or email irb@csus.edu.

Completing the demographic survey below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to your child’s participation, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue your child’s participation at any time, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.
APPENDIX B
Child Assent Form

The relationship of cultural orientation and self-esteem among second-generation Chinese American Adolescents

I am interested in culture and how children feel about themselves. I would like you to take a few minutes to fill out a survey as honestly as possible.

If you want to rest, or stop completely, just tell us. You won't get into any trouble! In fact, if you don't want to fill out the survey, you don't have to. Just say so. Also, if you have any questions about what you'll be doing, or if you can't decide whether to do it or not, just ask us if there is anything you'd like us to explain.

If you do want to try it, please complete the survey below. Your parent(s) have already told us that it is alright with them if you want to fill out these surveys. Remember, you don't have to, and once you start you can rest or stop whenever you like.
APPENDIX C
Demographic Survey

Demographic Variables Survey

How old is your child?

Where is your child’s place of birth?

Does your child live with both biological parents?

Where is the place of birth for your child’s biological parents?

Mother __________
Father __________

How long have you resided in the United States?
APPENDIX D
General Ethnicity Questionnaire-Chinese Version (abridged)

Please use the following scale to indicate how much you agree with the following statements. Circle your response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. I was raised in a way that was Chinese. 1 2 3 4 5
2. When I was growing up, I was exposed to Chinese culture. 1 2 3 4 5
3. Now, I am exposed to Chinese culture. 1 2 3 4 5
4. Compared to how much I negatively criticize other cultures, I criticize Chinese culture less. 1 2 3 4 5
5. I am embarrassed/ashamed of Chinese culture. 1 2 3 4 5
6. I am proud of Chinese culture. 1 2 3 4 5
7. Chinese culture has had a positive impact on my life. 1 2 3 4 5
8. I believe that my children should read, write, and speak Chinese. 1 2 3 4 5
9. I have a strong belief that my children should have Chinese names only. 1 2 3 4 5
10. I go to places where people are Chinese. 1 2 3 4 5
11. I am familiar with Chinese cultural practices and customs. 1 2 3 4 5
12. I admire people who are Chinese. 1 2 3 4 5
13. I would prefer to live in a Chinese community. 1 2 3 4 5
14. I listen to Chinese music. 1 2 3 4 5
15. I perform Chinese dance. 1 2 3 4 5
16. I engage in Chinese forms of recreation. 1 2 3 4 5
17. I celebrate Chinese holidays. 1 2 3 4 5
18. At home, I eat Chinese food. 1 2 3 4 5
19. At restaurants, I eat Chinese food. 1 2 3 4 5
20. My friends are Chinese.  
21. I wish to be accepted by Chinese.  
22. Overall, I am Chinese.  

Please use the following scale to answer the following questions. Circle your response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very much</td>
<td>Much</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>A little</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

23. How much do you speak Chinese at home?  
24. How much do you speak Chinese at school?  
25. How much do you speak Chinese at prayer?  
26. How much do you speak Chinese with friends?  
27. How much do you view, read, or listen to Chinese on TV?  
28. How much do you view, read, or listen to Chinese in film?  
29. How much do you view, read, or listen to Chinese on the radio?  
30. How much do you view, read, or listen to Chinese in literature?  
31. How fluently do you speak Chinese?  
32. How fluently do you read Chinese?  
33. How fluently do you write Chinese?  
34. How fluently do you understand Chinese?
APPENDIX E
General Ethnicity Questionnaire-American Version (abridged)

Please use the following scale to indicate how much you agree with the following statements. Circle your response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. I was raised in way that was American. 1 2 3 4 5
2. When I was growing up, I was exposed to American culture. 1 2 3 4 5
3. Now, I am exposed to American culture. 1 2 3 4 5
4. Compared to how much I negatively criticize other cultures, I criticize American culture less. 1 2 3 4 5
5. I am embarrassed/ashamed of American culture. 1 2 3 4 5
6. I am proud of American culture. 1 2 3 4 5
7. American culture has had a positive impact on my life. 1 2 3 4 5
8. I believe that my children should read, write, and speak American. 1 2 3 4 5
9. I have a strong belief that my children should have American names only. 1 2 3 4 5
10. I go to places where people are American. 1 2 3 4 5
11. I am familiar with American cultural practices and customs. 1 2 3 4 5
12. I admire people who are American. 1 2 3 4 5
13. I would prefer to live in an American community. 1 2 3 4 5
14. I listen to American music. 1 2 3 4 5
15. I perform American dance. 1 2 3 4 5
16. I engage in American forms of recreation. 1 2 3 4 5
17. I celebrate American holidays. 1 2 3 4 5
18. At home, I eat American food. 1 2 3 4 5
19. At restaurants, I eat American food. 1 2 3 4 5
20. My friends are American.
21. I wish to be accepted by Americans.
22. Overall, I am American.

Please use the following scale to answer the following questions. Circle your response.

<table>
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<th></th>
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<th>4</th>
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<td>Much</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>A little</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

23. How much do you speak English *at home*? 1 2 3 4 5
24. How much do you speak English *at school*? 1 2 3 4 5
25. How much do you speak English *at prayer*? 1 2 3 4 5
26. How much do you speak English *with friends*? 1 2 3 4 5
27. How much do you view, read, or listen to English *on TV*? 1 2 3 4 5
28. How much do you view, read, or listen to English *in film*? 1 2 3 4 5
29. How much do you view, read, or listen to English *on the radio*? 1 2 3 4 5
30. How much do you view, read, or listen to English *in literature*? 1 2 3 4 5
31. How fluently do you *speak* English? 1 2 3 4 5
32. How fluently do you *read* English? 1 2 3 4 5
33. How fluently do you *write* English? 1 2 3 4 5
34. How fluently do you *understand* English? 1 2 3 4 5
APPENDIX F
Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

Instructions
Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
   Strongly Agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

2. At times I think I am no good at all.
   Strongly Agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
   Strongly Agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
   Strongly Agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
   Strongly Agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

6. I certainly feel useless at times.
   Strongly Agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
   Strongly Agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.
   Strongly Agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.
   Strongly Agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.
    Strongly Agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
REFERENCES


