Attitudes of Assimilation:
The Effects of Asian American Migration on Response to Racialization in the United States

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Introduction

The term “Asian American” is a phrase with an ever-changing definition. One thing is for certain; the Asian American identity is not formed by shared culture, language, or national origin. Instead, it is formed by migration histories and racialization that groups Asian ethnicities together in the United States. With various waves of immigration to America and a general categorization of Asians, there are many people with diverse experiences that fall under this term. Through the memoir *A Man of Two Faces* by Vietnamese refugee and author Viet Thanh Nguyen and the interview I conducted with naturalized Chinese-French immigrant Nikole Hong, I will examine the various factors that shaped migration and assimilation into America. The assimilation trajectories of both Hong and Nguyen diverge sharply due to the global forces that shaped their migration, the racialization they experienced before and after arrival, and the autonomy involved in their migration. Hong navigated a layered, transnational identity shaped by racialization and voluntary mobility, while Nguyen forged an identity through displacement, trauma, and a deliberation of being both “the killer and killed”. Being both the killer and killed, as Nguyen mentions in his memoir, is the effect of being both American and Vietnamese on his identity. Together, their stories reveal how childhood migration, racial hierarchy, and geopolitical history intersect to produce profoundly different Asian American identities. Although Asians are frequently racialized as a monolithic “Oriental” group, the migration histories and lived experiences of Asian subgroups define how they navigate and respond to this flattening.

1975: Forced vs. Voluntary Migration

First, one must understand how the lived experiences of Nguyen and Hong are shaped by global events and policies. Highly influential to the formation of a multifaceted Asian American identity are the root causes of immigration. In 1975, Hong’s family immigrated to the United States voluntarily, whereas Nguyen was forcefully relocated due to a threat to personal safety and livelihood.[1]

After America relinquished its military support in 1973, Saigon, the southern capital of Vietnam, fell. The war had ravaged the country, destroyed the economy, and turned neighbor against neighbor. Aside from economic instability, personal safety became a top fear for citizens. In post-1975 South Vietnam, Vietnamese citizens had severely limited say in treason sentences that often resulted in death or long-term imprisonment for "attempting to overthrow the government." The New York Times archives documents one such case where 20+ people were charged with various degrees of espionage, often with foreign backing, and sentenced to life and/or death sentences.[2] The combination of economic instability and a risk to personal security

[1] Nguyen, Viet Thanh. 2023. A Man of Two Faces: A Memoir, a History, a Memorial. New York: Grove Press. 33.
[2] The New York Times. 1985. “HANOI COMMUTES SENTENCE FOR 2 IN TREASON CASE.” January 5. https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1985/01/05/195459.html?pageNumber=4. Accessed May 4, 2026.

sparked a mass exodus of Vietnamese people in the 1970s and 1980s in droves of refugees known as the boat people.[3] Vietnamese migration in 1975 was predominantly driven by the Vietnam War. According to a USC interview conducted, Nguyen considers himself one of the millions of boat people who fled by boat in the years after the fall of Saigon in 1975.[4]

On the other hand, in France during the 1970s, there was a rising anti-immigrant sentiment. Following World War II, France experienced 30 years of glorious economic growth, also known as "Les Trente Glorieuses".[5] These 30 years of growth began to see a decline in the 1970s. Rising unemployment led the government to try to protect jobs for French citizens. For instance, in 1974, the French government restricted the immigration of foreign workers, as reported by the New York Times.[6] The restriction of foreign workers demonstrated the anti-immigrant/foreigner sentiments in France. Emigration from France in the 1970s was largely due to economic instability. The time at which Hong's family emigrates from France coincides with this timeline.

With the timeline of events in the 1970s acting as push factors, the United States also implemented specialized pull factors that encouraged immigration. The refugee policy of 1975, known as The Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act, allocated $455,000,000 to the relief of Southeast Asian refugees, specifically from Vietnam or Cambodia.[7] This act included emergency airlifts, the repurposing of military bases as refugee centers, and resettlement strategies that actively involved both public and private organizations. Another pull factor that incentivized immigration into the United States was the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. Signed by Lyndon B. Johnson with the purpose of eliminating the discriminatory national quota system, this act prioritized the reunification of families and eased the process of immigration into the United States.[8] It was this combination of geopolitical push factors and pull factors through the establishment of new policies that favored immigration to the United States from Vietnam and Cambodia. However, not just Vietnam or Cambodia, the Asian American collective includes immigrants from many different countries in Asia that found their way to the United States. The formation of Asian American identity would begin after arrival in the United States and the different circumstances of their arrival shape individual experiences.

The global environment in 1975 heavily impacted the shaping of Asian American identity for immigrants. Immigrants could find their way to America as a refugee or as a voluntary immigrant. Being a forced migrant rather than a voluntary migrant was a fundamentally different experience. As a refugee, resettlement is government-directed, so the formation of one's identity begins with displacement and is not on one's terms and by one's choice. Refugees do not have control over the timing, destination, or conditions of their displacement. In his memoir, Nguyen

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[3] Vo, Nghia M. 2006. The Vietnamese Boat People, 1954–1975 and 1975–1992

[4] Ng, Rachel. "Pulitzer Prize Winner Reflects on Misconceptions About Refugees." USC Today, August 30, 2016. https://today.usc.edu/pulitzer-prize-winner-viet-nguyen-reflects-on-misconceptions-about-refugees/.

[5] Lynch, Frances M. B. 2021. The French Economy. Agenda Publishing. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1wgvb8d.

[6] The New York Times. 1974. "FRANCE RESTRICTS FOREIGN WORKERS." July 5. https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1974/07/05/79335260.html?pageNumber=4. Accessed May 4, 2026.

[7] U.S. Congress. 1975. "H.R.6755 - 94th Congress (1975-1976): The Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975." Congress.gov, May 23. https://www.congress.gov/bill/94th-congress/house-bill/6755/summary/00. Accessed May 4, 2026.

[8] Hu, Kevin. 2020. "Seeing the Transfer of Exclusion in the 1965 Immigration Act: Asian Americans for Collective Liberation." Asian American Writers' Workshop. https://aaww.org/seeing-the-transfer-of-exclusion-in-the-1965-immigration-act/ (aaww.org). Accessed May 4, 2026.

brings up the sister that his parents had left behind.[9] His parents decided to leave a child behind to take care of the house and property in case they were able to return. Decisions like the ones made by his parents are heartbreaking and reluctant, not willing. Forced migration is government-directed, systemic, and standardized. As described in *A Man of Two Faces*, Nguyen and his family were sponsored by public welfare groups like churches and charities. As a result, Nguyen and his family were sponsored separately by various organizations, and Nguyen lived separately from his parents for three years during his childhood.[10] These circumstances exist for a refugee, but not for a voluntary immigrant. The experiences that refugees like Nguyen gained from being separated are the stark opposite of the voluntary immigration that other Asian immigrants like Hong experienced with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. Hong told me about her experiences being reunited with her Mom's side of the family. Her family immigrated to America, pushed by the declining opportunities in France and encouraged by the prospect of reunification with her Mom's family. Hong and her family were able to relocate to the Bay Area near other family members at the time. Voluntary migration is framed as aspirational, and immigrants have more control over timing and destination. Asian American identity is influenced heavily by the ability to choose one's terms of immigration. Forced migration through government programs and assignments roots Asian American identity formation in loss. Voluntary migration paints Asian American identity formation in mobility, not trauma.

For voluntary migrants like Hong, immigrants arrive in the United States with a layered identity. For Vietnamese refugees like Nguyen, they arrive with a fractured identity shaped by war, instability, and refugee camps. There is no intermediate cultural layer before becoming Asian American. The intermediate cultural layer is a set of everyday, optional, and cumulative cultural experiences that sit between a person's origin identity and their adopted identity. [11] These layers are accretive, as people add new practices and affiliations over time rather than being stripped of prior ones overnight. This matters because assimilation after arrival is where the formation of identity truly begins. The presence of an intermediate layer allows for agency where voluntary migrants can choose their own jobs, communities, and cultural practices that let them build identity incrementally. With Vietnamese refugees, where migration is mixed with trauma and poverty, assimilation becomes survival-driven and not elective. Contrasting this with voluntary immigrants like Hong, identity is constructed upon the idea of adding experiences to those already existing.

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[9] Nguyen, Viet Thanh. 2023. A Man of Two Faces: A Memoir, a History, a Memorial. New York: Grove Press. 33.
[10] Nguyen, Viet Thanh. 2023. A Man of Two Faces: A Memoir, a History, a Memorial. New York: Grove Press. 32.
[11] Everhart, Kristen. 2018. "Investigating Layers of Identity and Identity Gaps in Refugee Resettlement Experiences in the Midwestern United States." Western Journal of Communication. https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2018.1552009.

Childhood and Racialization

Despite having childhoods, cultures, and reasons for migrating that could not be more different, the formation of identity for Asians in America continues to be shaped by racialization. The childhood experiences of both Nguyen and Hong are colored by racialization despite being in completely different environments. In America, their identities also converge as Asian Americans.

Hong was a Chinese child born and raised in France. Growing up in a culturally homogenous society that was not her own meant that she interpreted herself as French and not Chinese. She told me in the interview that she did not know she was different, nor did she feel different when she was in school. Hong vividly remembered her inability to speak any language other than French. However, racialization persisted despite her French assimilation mindset. As one of the two Asians in her class, Hong also told me of an interaction she remembers where she was reminded that she was different. Hong was tasked with speaking to a foreign transfer Korean boy, though she only spoke French and was of Chinese descent. As an Asian growing up in a homogenous society that was not Chinese, Hong was not culturally Chinese, but rather culturally French. Yet, she was racialized as Asian in France–seen as foreign and "not just French." In America, she was not seen as French, but as Asian as well. Hong's experiences illustrate that racialization travels across borders and is structural.[12]

Migrating at the age of 4, Nguyen remembered being shuttled to Fort Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania.[13] Nguyen was eventually separated from his family, since each family member was sponsored separately. Relocating to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and living alone with a white host family, he recalled being expected to teach his host family how to use chopsticks.[14] Nguyen lived with the host family for three years until he was reunited with his family in San Jose, California.

Despite differences in homelands, languages, and migration circumstances, refugees and voluntary migrants alike become racialized as Asian, irrespective of being in America or other places like Europe. These experiences shared by Nguyen and Hong are universal to Asians. For the formation of Asian American identities, the U.S. racial system collapses all these differences into a single categorical identity. The Asian American identity is therefore born from the shared racialization of different Asian subgroups imposed by the institutional forces, irrespective of culture.

Assimilation Upon Arrival

Assimilation is not just the process of becoming American. It is the process in which various Asian immigrants wrestle with their experiences to decide what to leave behind and what to represent when faced with racialization as a minority. Asian American experiences defy the traditional assimilation paradigm. It is shaped by circumstances upon arrival, resources available, and how the U.S. racial system receives them.[15] These conditions of assimilation ultimately produce different relationships to Asian American identity and are shaped by how they

[12] Nikole, Hong, interview by Theodore Chen, April 19, 2026.
[13] Nguyen, Viet Thanh. 2023. A Man of Two Faces: A Memoir, a History, a Memorial. New York: Grove Press. 228.
[14] Nguyen, Viet Thanh. 2023. A Man of Two Faces: A Memoir, a History, a Memorial. New York: Grove Press. 42.
[15] Ling, Huping. 2023. Asian American History. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

assimilate. With Vietnamese refugees, trauma becomes identity. With other voluntary migrants at the time, hybridity became identity. Assimilation is not a neutral process.

The formation of Asian American identity is closely tied to circumstance because arrival conditions shape the emotional and practical strategies migrants use to survive and belong. For Vietnamese refugees, identity is associated with loss, rebuilding, and community survival. The Asian American identity becomes a political home through shared refugee histories. Shared struggles and racism develop into solidarity with other Southeast Asian communities as displacement and trauma compress identity work into collective projects. In contrast, voluntary migrants often arrive with the optionality of networks, resources, and choices that allow identity to build upon. Voluntary migrants assimilate by negotiating visibility and cultural practices to resist misrecognition and erasure of previous affiliations. As noted before, Hong stated that upon arrival in the States, she was viewed not as French but as solely Asian. Expected to speak Chinese and not French, she was confronted with the harsh reality of her appearance. Hong continues struggling with her identity to this day, but generally claims to be Asian American instead of European-American because it is a means for her to be seen. Both groups approach the formation of Asian American identity, but assimilation shapes whether Asian American identity is built through survival-oriented solidarity or through reinterpretation and visibility. These differing pathways demonstrate that Asian American identity is not a singular cultural inheritance but a racialized framework that individuals enter through.

Conclusion

When conducting research, I interviewed a cross-cultural Chinese French immigrant whose cultural and racial identities do not neatly overlap. Hong's experience complicates the assumption that race, culture, and national belonging always align, and this complexity shapes the scope of my analysis. One limitation of this paper is that it compares a culturally hybrid migrant like Hong with a Vietnamese refugee whose cultural and racial identities were aligned before migration. This means the comparison highlights asymmetry, where one subject comes from a context where she was racially marked but culturally French, while the other comes from a context where he was culturally and racially Vietnamese. I believe that further research could be done to expand on this comparison by including a Chinese migrant who grew up in a culturally and racially homogenous Asian society before migrating to the United States. Such a case would allow for a more parallel examination of how migrants who share both cultural and racial likeness prior to migration respond to racialization in America. This would offer a different angle on how Asian American identities are formed.

The stories of Nguyen and Hong reveal that Asian American identity is not born from cultural similarity but from the racialization that awaits them upon arrival in the United States. In Strangers From a Different Shore, Takaki states, "They came as refugees of a war that had devastated their homeland".[16] Nguyen entered America with the trauma of forced displacement, while Hong arrived through the mobility of voluntary migration. Despite entering the country through opposite pathways, both children were absorbed into the same racial category that collapsed their distinct histories and languages into the singular label of being "Asian." The racial flattening is not accidental. It is a structural feature of the U.S. racial system, which prioritizes visible difference over cultural specificity. Yet the consequences of this racialization

[16] Takaki, Ronald. 1998. Strangers From a Different Shore. [Place of publication]: Brown and Company.

diverge sharply depending on the circumstances of migration. For Nguyen, Asian American identity became a space for collective survival, community rebuilding, and political solidarity shaped by war and loss. For a voluntary migrant and multifaceted immigrant, like Hong, it became a site of negotiation for visibility. Hong's Frenchness was erased upon arrival in America, and cultural hybridity had to be reassembled within a racial framework that did not account for diverse upbringings like hers. These contrasting responses demonstrate that while racialization imposes a shared category, it does not produce a uniform identity. Instead, Asian American identity emerges as a mosaic of experiences shaped by the conditions of departure, the pressures of assimilation, and the ways different groups navigate being seen before they can define themselves.

Appendix A

Transcript of Interview
Interviewer: Theodore Chen
Interviewee: Nikole Hong

Alrighty, are you ready? Yep. Thank you. Okay. So I have a couple of general questions to start, and um, maybe, Nicole, if you could tell me a little bit about yourself, like if you were to introduce yourself to a random person, uh, what would you introduce yourself as? How would you? Oh, um, I'm Nicole. I live in Auckland. I grew up mainly in Oakland. I love Oakland, I'm a physical therapist assistant. My parents are immigrants. Um, I love sports. I have 2 dogs. Um, like to eat. Yeah, kind of keep it general, like that. Yeah, and have you always, so you said you've grown up in Oakland for the majority of your life? Were you born in Oakland as well? No, I was born in Paris, France. What? I didn't know that. Oh, you did? Oh, sorry? No, that's awesome. I was born, Paris, France, and then my parents immigrated. Uh, we, We immigrate to the U.S. in 1975. Mm, okay. Also, one more thing is, do you mind if I, um, I, uh, I write notes on this as well? Yeah, go for it. Great. Thank you so much. Yeah, mixing these, they won't have to go back and listen. Yeah. Wait, so from Paris to the US in 1975? So around the fall of the Saigon, or fall of Saigon as well. Well, it's the exact same year. Wow. And why is it that you guys moved? Um, so my grandparents, my maternal grandparents, um, Actually, my maternal grandfather, when he was younger, he was detained in um, Angel Island. Mm-hmm. So he worked a few years, saved some money, and you, when he was able to, um, Sponsor his family over. Mm-hmm. Then that's when he, he sponsored his family over, but by the time that it was our time to come to the U.S. my mother had already met my father and they went to France to get married. Oh, so your parents or your mother had met your father in France? In China. Oh. Yeah, so, so my, I'm still trying to get on this straight enough for my cousin. Um, so my father, My father left China when he was young, to find for, look for a big life for himself. And so he kind of travel around the world to find where he want to work. So while he was doing that, when he came back to China, he had met my mother. And so they got to know each other and then he started traveling again. Then he found his way in France. So while he was in France, then he was able to, um, sponsor my mother over, to France, and at that same time, her parents and her siblings have moved to the US. Your mom's siblings? Yes. My mom's siblings. So, um, We have we have to wait for another 10 years for the application to go through before we came to the US. Mm. Or mom siblings. And parents had already moved to. Why is that? Why? Why is it that they took separate, like separate, um, I guess, like immigration waves to to the US? Is it because your mom had gotten married in France, so her application would take a little longer than, than, uh, her relatives who moved directly? Right, right. Initially, she was supposed to go with her family too. Mm. But she ended up marrying my father in France. So then my grandfather had to reapply for, for us to come from France. So meanwhile, the 3 of us were born. Mm-hmm. So that added a little bit more complications to it. First, it was just the parents, now it got 3 little kids come along too. Yeah, I'm sure. Wow. Um, do you think your mom like wanted to stay in France at the time? My father did. My mother did. I see. Because her family, my mother's side, they all came to the U.S. and my father had family in France too. Yeah. It's kind of a homemade. Home is where the people are. Homes where the family is. Yes, yes, yes. Yeah, that makes a lot of sense actually. So, um, in 1975, or I guess, you know, growing up now, more general questions, uh, what was, do you remember uh, the relationship between the China and the US back then? Growing up? Because I know you're like, yeah. Um no, I don't. Okay. No problem. yeah. Yeah, because everything was in French, so... And so how how old were you when you moved to the US then? We were fairly young. Wow, old. I might just turn 9. I just turned nine. I just turned nine, my brother was already, he turned. So we're all 2 years apart. So my brother turned 11. I turned 9 and my sister had just turned 7. Wow. Okay, that's pretty young. Do you think there was any like Vietnamese influence in your life back then? Because I know that there was also a lot of like, I guess you guys would be leaving France when a lot of other people, Vietnamese people would be going. Yeah, so when we went, so when I was in school, the 3 of us were the only Asians in the in our school. Mm. And so, right before we left for the US, um, It was an Asian kid that came to the class. And so they told me to help him out. thinking that we all spoke the same language, which we didn't, because I tried my Chinese and he didn't understand. So he might, so I'm not sure what his nationality was. So I think I had about a week. with him and then I left with the U.S. So he was there to fit for himself. Oh, man. I wonder if that's... Just like I did. yeah. Yeah. I feel he's okay, but yeah. Um, do you think that, like, you drew any distinction? Because, you know, now this makes me really interested in like, um, like you growing up, what you thought yourself as, because I'm sure, you know, your family, you guys speak primarily Cantonese, right? Do you speak Mandarin as well in your family? parents? No, just count Denise. Yeah, so if that's the case, then I wonder like, okay, While you're in France, right, did, did, did you make any distinction to other people that you're Cantonese and not Chinese, or did you grow up thinking that, oh,

I'm Chinese, just because everybody yells in France sees me as Chinese, right? They see all Asian people as Chinese. They see me as Chinese, so what was that like for you? At that age, I didn't see any different. I knew a little different. Yeah. But I didn't feel different because we all spoke the same language. Mm-hmm. Yeah, and then at home, my cousins and I, we all spoke French. Uh, My siblings were spoke French, they were the, with the elderly. We did our best with our with our Chinese. Yeah, but yeah, so I mean, I knew we look different, but I didn't feel any different. And if I feel like I was Chinese, I didn't feel like I was French, I might have been both. Yeah. Yeah. And did you feel like, um, you were, did you draw the line between like, oh, I'm Cantonese instead of Chinese or I'm Cantonese instead of something else or just now? No, no, not just Chinese in general, yeah. Because then back then we're too young to know, you know, Mandarin or Cantonese or Toyson and stuff like that. My mother's from the toysan, so I didn't know toys. I didn't never heard the term toysan until I came to the US when my grandmother started speaking to me, I'm like, I don't understand what you're saying. My aunt was speaking to me. I have no idea what you're talking about. Really? It's different than Cantonese? Yes, yes, yes, yes. Very different. I see. Huh. Then, and your dad then, his side is just Cantonese or? I see. So your mom's from your mom and her family's from Thai China, and then your dad is... Kong, Kong, Kong. Okay, got you. Let me write this down. That's cool. That's really cool, actually. Huh. Okay. Excuse me. Yeah, it's always confusing. I think, you know, when I ask my parents about, like, my family history as well, even they have fragmented in, like, um, memories about their grandparents and stuff like that. So it's like my, when I ask my dad at, at the family meetups, right, the reunions, my aunts and uncles are always fighting about the little details, like, oh, no, he didn't. he wasn't right handed. He was left-handed or like, no, he came in 1989 and not 1991. There's always those little things. Uh-huh, uh-huh. I like it a lot, though. Okay. So then when you came to the US in in 1975 at the age of nine, what you're finishing elementary school, right? At that time, you're just about to start middle school. Did you see yourself as Chinese American? Did you see yourself as French American or how was that for you? So all that confusion didn't start till a little bit later. Mm-hmm. Because when I came to the US, I started in 4th grade, but I was supposed to be in 5th grade, but they helped me back because of my age. Yeah. So in France, I was ready to go to 5th grade, but when I came here, they put me back and forth, but because of my age. Mm-hmm. So, um, Then I was put into an ESL class. So everybody looked like me. And uh, just recently saw my teacher last summer. We had a class reunion and she confronted me and said, you know, you were the hardest one to teach because I didn't know how to communicate with you. You need no Chinese? I didn't know French. You know, so they were trying to teach me English in Chinese, which I didn't know. Like Mandarin Chinese, you mean? Yeah, learn how to speak more Chinese. Uh-huh. In English and vice versa, like it was, it was quite confusing. And then so then, of course, because I didn't know Chinese, then my parents had signed us up for Chinese school in Chinatown. So then, when you say Chinese, do you mean Mandarin or are you speaking about Cantonese? Okay, so at 9 you didn't know Cantonese either because you only knew French. And you French? yeah. And Cantonese was very, um, limited. Yeah, got it. Yeah. So when I came to the US, yeah, so my teacher was saying, I didn't know how to communicate with you. I didn't know how to teach you. I didn't know how to keep you busy because. I was limited in my Cantonese. Yeah. So my friends, even now, they tell me that, oh, yeah, I remember the 1st few months, we were just sitting there reading your book. didn't you say anything? I know what to say. I could communicate. That's honestly really cute, though. So you said those experiences didn't really show up until later. I think that a lot of the times it is like that, even for me. I didn't really realize that it was different for me until I reached middle school where I became a little bit more aware of like, of like social things, like the elfin in the room, right? And the social pressures and the way that you're supposed to act, I don't think I really realized that until middle school. Was that the same for you? Like, when did you realize that, oh, like, you know, maybe I'm not Chinese American, maybe I'm Cantonese American. I'm French American or however, however you identified. That came, yeah, that's so when I went in 7th grade, middle school, right? back then we called it junior high school. Mm-hmm. Um, There, our school had, the school had more non-Asians. Of course. So that's when I realized, oh, wait a minute. Um, I am different. I am different, you know, than they, they were much bigger than I am, so that's when I realized a lot of, um, Uh, social pressure? Yeah. To be Asian or try to be American? Right? Maybe try to have my French side because I didn't look French. I'm supposed to speak English or I'm supposed to speak Chinese. Mm-hmm. Yeah, so yeah, so that was a little bit confusing too. Going into junior high or middle school. Okay. Just seeing other ethnicity and not just your Chinese or the French people that I grew up with. Yeah. Dang. In other languages that people spoke to, Spanish, what is Spanish, you know? Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And so you said you hid your French side? Um, because you were maybe trying to fit into another narrative of either being Chinese American or just American? Was that right? Because at that time, you probably met a lot of, I'm assuming, did you meet a lot of other Asians that were just had family that, um, raised them in the US? Yes. Mm-hmm. Yes. Yeah, there's a lot with, a lot of our classmates that I still keep in touch with, um, They all came to the US when they were younger too. Mm-hmm. Yeah, so we kind of, we kind of stayed together, kind of supported each other along the way too. But then, yeah. Yeah, so we would always, I mean, we're definitely, we're seen as the

different group. They're supposed to be the smarter group because we're Asian. I see, but I thought like it was, oh, because you said at the, at the time it was mostly non-Asian still, right? Mm-hmm, Mm-hmm. I see. Yeah. Is that a good? Yeah, good, good mix of other students at Westlake. Is that an elementary school? Uh, Lincoln was at elementary school. The middle school would be what, like? Okay. Okay, cool. And so, how do you feel about, I mean, how do you feel about being Asian American or specifically Chinese American? And has that definition for you like changed over time from when you're younger to now? Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. most definitely. Now it's like Prouty Beach. Asian American, you know, because there's just a lot of history. I've still got to learn a lot in my family history. But yeah, it's definitely um, Uh, Being proud to show the culture, to know the culture and stuff like that, and also being at the clinic, learning, The history through my patience. Mm-hmm. Because I grew up learning the French Revolution and everything else. Coming to the US, you know, they're not going to teach you the Chinese history, right, the Asian history. You're learning the American history. So hearing it from all the patients firsthand. made me proud of, you know, all the hard work they put in. You know how far the agent has come? to make their, their, their names here in the US, you know, try to put their foot here in the U.S. Hmm. Yeah. So definitely appropriation, too. yeah Okay. Was there a moment that helped you realize that, oh, hey, I'm proud to be Asian American? If Poppy was, but I can't think of it at the moment. No problem. It was it was probably one of the world events that happened too. I think that was one of it, too, when the, But I can't. Like maybe like the 2008 Beijing Olympics or something like that. See, the Olympics is kind of confusing for me, right? which team do I root for? Yeah. Except the Chinese are playing the Americans, right? Americans are playing the French, which seem to root for. So there was a bit of conflict there too. So after a while, you know, I realized, you know, I could root for all 3 teams. I don't have to pick one over the other. Yeah, but I think, yeah, with the Chinese with some, some world event that occurred, I say, hey, you know what? That's my people. You know, we're able to show that to the world that those are our, those are my people. What makes them your people, though? Like the shared experience that you have with them or the way that they look or the languages that they speak and the food that they eat? That's a good question. You know, the question is, because they look like me, right? They look like me and we. No, I guess most of it, most of the people speak Mandarin, but not Cantonese. I mean, they look different from China. Yeah. And they look like me, you know, I think that part of it. Hmm, okay. Um. So, um, kind of bridging off the last question that I asked about, like, oh, how, like, you know, how's your definition of Asian being Asian American, changed over time and how do you feel about it? Um, You said yes, right? And how would you say that's changed? Maybe as a kid you weren't as proud versus now? Is that what you meant? Uh, no, as a kid, I wasn't aware too much that I was Asian. Mm-hmm. My location, but I didn't feel like I was Asian. Because I came from France. Yeah. You know, even though I looked Asian, I spoke Chinese and stuff like that. Yeah. that I didn't feel at the time that I was Asian because I was still trying to find my identity. What am I? You know, in my Chinese and my French, now I'm in the US and then when we became US citizens, you know, we had to give up our French citizenship. When you become a USC and you have to give up your national, your other, um, you cannot be dual citizens. So we had to give up our French citizenship. So that kind of lost identity a little bit too, and also, what am I now? In my Chinese, French, or American? Oh, French, am I American, Chinese, French, or what am I? So that kind of lost the identity back then too. Yeah. Hmm. And so, that changed over time, you're saying, you kind of, you weren't aware before, and then maybe in, you said middle school, junior high, you started becoming aware that, you know, I'm not, not fully American. And so did you end up choosing more so the French side or the Asian side? Part of the Asian side because we, uh, didn't have anybody to speak French for me here. Hmm. So I had to kind of put that on a shelf because the only people that spoke French was my brother and I. And nobody's in school, even the French teacher was trying to, she's, she, she, she was something else, you know, she knew I was French, so then she would have me teach the class, go, no, I'm supposed to be here to learning. So she wanted me to teach the class, so. That was kind of strange. So I requested to take Spanish instead because I already knew French. I didn't need to learn French. Yeah. So they had to ask permission from the Spanish teacher to see if I could join their class and learn. Learn Spanish instead of French. So yeah. So, yeah, so I did try to hide and not hyposuppress the French side. Mm-hmm. Just because it didn't do me any good to complicate things to people, you know, as a location, so you must be Chinese hard. How does a French cycle? You know, how did you become French? Hmm. And then being American, we weren't citizens here, so I couldn't really claim myself as a US citizen. So I didn't see myself as an American until we became US citizens. And that was back in 1984. So that's when I said, okay, well, I am American now. But yet, in my American Chinese or my American, Chinese, French, French, Chinese, American, and all the album mixtures, too. Do I can I claim myself as Chinese? Just because I look Chinese. Look Asian. Interesting. You know, so I know French because I was born there. Now, I'm an American now because I'm a naturalized American. But how can I claim myself as being Asian? When I'm not from there, all I have is the look. Yeah. I guess, I guess what you have is like a hybrid of, you know, your household culture and then your childhood and then, I guess your nationality and where you are now. I guess, see, yeah, that's weird because then your identity really is just like a sum. of your lived

experiences. So that would make you all three. Mhm. No. Yeah. Yeah, so I can really claim one more than the other. And I was like, get orders, like, I'm proud to be French. Yeah. And I'm proud to be Chinese. And then they'll probably be American, but I'm not going to say that too loudly without the political stuff going on right now, but yeah. Yeah. So then, I don't want to make it seem like a repetitive question. Next question I had was like, did you experience any internal struggles being Asian American? Um, so now if we were to put the French side on the shelf, you know, coming into, um, coming into the US at the age of 9, not really looking American, right? Or being Chinese really, right? Like, did you feel like you experienced anything, um, any sort of internal struggle with that? Yeah, in June or high, or Minnesota, I did because, um, Even being even being Chinese, huh? Yeah, yeah, there was a lot of racist comments. Yeah. too. So that's when I realized, go, oh, You know, what, you know, what's wrong with being Chinese? You know, what am I doing wrong? Am I looking? Should I be looking, should I be looking differently than others? Not sure, have you acting differently from others? So that was the struggle there too. You know, the racist comments and, and, and, um, and, Discrimination going on when we're younger. Yeah, yeah. In fact then, I think, no, everybody just didn't know. The education wasn't there. awareness wasn't there, so, you know. So... Yeah. Well, do you think that, like, um, do you think there was like a social pressure on you or an expectation for you to have because of the way that you looked? Because you're saying like, oh, you asked earlier, just should I look or act different than others, right? You said that. So did you feel like there was some sort of pressure for you to be different? Or act different? A little bit, to be more Americanized. So to me, it's like, what is being Americanized? You know, I know I grew up in a white culture when I was younger, right? So is that supposed to be the same growing up, you know? Oh, yeah, that's a really good one point. Because back then, you know, when I was in France, right, there was no discrimination. I was able to be who I am and still be French. I speak my French and be in the culture, but then once I came to the US, it's like, oh, what am I supposed to do? Why do you think that's different in France and here? Can you elaborate more on the differences? There, there, when I was younger, there was no, no difference of being agent, there was no color. In France, friendly, as spoke French, bone, everybody's for French, no problem. But here, you know, it's like, oh, I don't, I'm just learning English and therefore you're different. I see, I see. Because you spoke the language there. Mm-hmm. Yeah, correct. I was more fluent with the language, Jack. Here, you know, I didn't really fit in with the Chinese friends because I didn't speak Chinese that well. Mm-hmm. And then with the Americans, I didn't fit in with them too well because I was part of the ESL class. Mm-hmm. Right? They used to call us FOBs and stuff. Like, oh, you know what? I didn't come from a boat. I flew to America. Yeah. kind of stuff. and it's kind of confusing. like, no, I'm not from China. So I stopped kind of explaining to people, Outside of my, my, my, um, friendship group that, you know, I mean, my friends knew I were French. Mm-hmm. But other people I didn't even bother trying to tell them. Mm-hmm. Because it was confused. why don't you speak Chinese? You look Chinese. And some of the non-Chinese people, why are you speaking English? You're in the USA kind of stuff, you know, a lot of things that a lot of people are experiencing right now too. Yeah. So what was the Asian seerotype then back then? Oh, you have to be smart. You have to be, you know, same, same, same thing, right? Smart, you gotta study. Um, You have to be good. You know, you had to behave, you can't misbehave, and definitely I did not, I did not fit any of the criteria. I wasn't smart in school because I didn't know I didn't know the language. I didn't have any tutor. to help me out. Yeah. With low income. So, you know, so everything else. yeah. So, um, yeah, so I, Think I excelled in sports because sports have been, sport does not discriminate what languages you speak. Yeah, but the, you know, my friend, he's actually, um, he's from Africa. My roommate right now, he's from Africa and he had said something similar, but not about sports, but about math. And so I was wondering, wouldn't you say the same about math, math being a language that can be spoken regardless of national borders? Mhm. Oh, I love math, but they hated me. I just couldn't figure it out. I loved it. I just I was just horrible at it. Yeah, this is, Maxim is more like a puzzle to me. You know, you need to figure out why A and B is able to see, well, I don't know, right? How did they become an apple or an orange, right? So that was, that was intriguing to me, but yeah, it was very confusing too. And frustrating for me, so, that's why I was horrible in math. But I loved it. So I made, I, and math back then, to be an architect, needed to be good in math. Right. Yeah, so nowadays, everything's just punching the numbers and it kicks, kicks the numbers out for you. So, yeah, so that's one thing I want to be an architect, but I couldn't because my mouth was horrible. Hmm. Let me write that. Green, Christmas, that was horrible. Okay, so then got some other stuff. What about, okay, so let's move into like maybe talking about your Oakland Chinatown experience, like in your in your childhood. Like, what ethnicity were like, uh, a question I had was, well, you know, when you moved here, what ethnicity were most of your friends when you were younger? Um, Chinese, because I lived in Chinatown. I see, I see, okay. Do you, Ben, well, so do you think that's the only role that the, that really shaped your friend groups? Because I'm sure that most of your schools were also, like you did mention, not fully Asian, right? Right, yep. Um, yes, because all majority of our, um, we all went, we all, followed each other through elementary, junior high, and high school, so there was a court, and we all lived in Chinatown. So we supported, we walked to school. Almost every day from junior high to high school and walk

back, wrestle. That was, of course. Yeah, I think it was just difficult to find other ethnicity to hang out with because I did look at the time. Hmm. So walk home together a lot. Friends, a friend. Do you think that was an action on, like, your end? Like, maybe you didn't, do you think, like, it was a, was it a both way sort of thing, an effort, or was it like, oh, I knew that I looked different, so I wouldn't even try to be friends with them, or, or, or, was that? No, no, no, I, I, when I was younger, I remember I always wanted to find a white friend to make me more American. Yeah. You know, I was like, Oh, if I have a boyfriend, then maybe that would make me more American and not so Chinese. Yeah, yeah. But then, no, on their end, you know, it's hard just to find somewhere just because they're white, where you find, you find your friends because you like, you like that person, right? Yeah. Yeah. So I think harder on the other end too is because like, oh, you know, I'm hanging out with a Chinese person. What would other people think of me too? How did that make you feel? Um... Kind of, kind of sad too, kind of reject it too, you know, it's like, oh, I'm trying to be American, but yet I'm trying to be friends with a a Caucasian person and they're rejecting me. Hmm. Yeah, so what's so... Yeah, so that kind of question, no. Should I be proud to be Chinese? Yeah, that's also a question that I honestly ask myself a lot. Like, growing up, especially middle school, I was very afraid to, like, take my parents to, um, Like, show and tells and, like, back to school nights because I felt like, oh, you know, I grew up in the culture here. So I'm sure it's similar for you. Maybe your dad and your mom don't speak as well in French. Had you lived that life out there, right? Um, but because you grew up in France, you, you speak French well, right, natively. And that's the same from my experience here. And so when my parents would visit for parent-teacher conferences or for, like, um, back to school nights, I would walk in a little distance in front of my parents, thinking that, oh, if I was maybe half a step or one step further from them, I would look more American and separate from this group of Chinese people, this group of Asians, right? Mhm, uh-huh. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. So my parents never attended any of the stuff because... They would always say, we don't speak their language. You know, we're too busy working. We need to support the family and stuff like that too. So I didn't know when things came, I never, I didn't even bother asking them to come because I knew they would probably be busy. Hmm. Yeah. So, I remember this one time, too, when I was playing basketball, I now want the Western, oh, I was going to the Western Conference for the basketball tournament. My father didn't want to go. Because, you know, it's like, oh, I'm too busy. I need to go work. Yeah. And I somehow convinced him to go because everybody's parents were going too. And I think the other Asian guy, Stephen, his father didn't want to go too, because he didn't know, you know, it was like, oh, where are you taking that? What are we doing here? You know, so for a pressure for both of our fathers, it was difficult for them just to leave work. for a couple days. to watch just compete. Hmm. Yeah, so then, I mean, we stayed in the night at the Queen Mary went to Disneyland and stuff, but that's something that they were not used to. Yeah. to be cable to. It's almost like a treat, like a luxury, even for your parents, I'm sure. Yeah, but he didn't, he didn't. I know he didn't look at that. It was more of a burden that, you know, now you're taking me away from work, that could be working for 3 days instead, you know, that I go to LA for a competition. Yeah. So I saw, being younger and a lot of people, oh, you should join this team. You know, you have the challenge, you do this to go, I can't. I want have any money. I don't have to support. Yeah. I get all the... So I did all the local sports that didn't cost anything. So then, with things like this, right, your parents being too busy to attend stuff, needing to provide for the family, right? Do you ever, as a kid, feel like, oh, like, Uh, well, I want to, I, I guess the question I want to ask is, like, I don't want to make it leading to make you feel like you have to answer certain ways. So, question I want to ask more open-endedly stated is, what was your relationship with, like, with your parents? How did you feel about their affection towards you growing up? Oh, well, I mean, they, they, they loved us because they worked, right? They worked hard, long hours and stuff like that. So it's kind of separate. I feel like um... I grew up on my own. Yeah. But they had, they provided me with a house, and they provided me with meals, but everything else, like learning the rights and wrong and things like that, you know, automoral stuff that I had to learn on my own. And like, that's when I looked for guidance at the rec center, the leaders there. Mm hmm. They would have, I had any questions, I would ask them and not my parents, because my parents were too busy, too busy working. And because, you know, they were younger and they never had any education either. So it was hard for me to ask them certain questions, they never did help with the homework, right? So the relationship kind of. It wasn't much of a relationship. Mm-hmm. You know, like a lot of good communication was in there because I didn't understand a lot of stuff they were trying to tell me. Yeah. Just limited in the language and stuff like that. And then, um, the people at direction had more patience with me, knowing that I didn't know the languages, so they tried to explain things to me slowly and clearly too, and help me out with things. Hmm. So a lot of direct people too, I'm still in contact with them. So, I mean, they pretty much grew up, so... Yeah, these are like, uh, people your seniors, like your, your coaches and stuff? Is that what you mean? Um, just such direct leaders. Yeah. Direct leaders, the one that just, so that's the part that I took, I mean, when I was working in the rec center too. that I was able to, and then when I was able to pay back to the community, help out, you know, some of the younger kids that they couldn't talk to their parents too. Mm-hmm. We'll go to their path with any kind of issues and stuff like that. So, I mean, it, uh, it, It, uh, It felt good working at

the right center, giving back to the community that helped me when I was growing up to when I didn't have the parent. Mhm. The port for social stuff. Yeah. How would you describe like, so you said earlier, like, oh, you knew that they loved you, right? And you said because they worked and they worked long hours. Right? It almost seems like your definition of love is that they provided you with shelter, provided you with, um, meals, right? Food to eat. Yeah. But it doesn't seem like that really includes the guidance that you're looking for in terms of morals and right and wrong. So if you had to stay in one sentence or maybe one or two, how would you describe or define love in your family? Oh. That's a tough one. Yeah. Um. If not in your family, we can talk about maybe generally in the Asian American stereotype. And you can narrow it. Yeah, because no, in the in the Asian culture, right, your parents don't tell you they love you. Yeah. Yeah, so they never say that, but their way, their way of showing their love is providing support when you have a roof over your head. You know, we're feeding you, you have clothes on your back and things like that, you know, where I would pay you for your school. So how do you, I mean, out there, you know, if you even ask them, you know, you do even love people, how dare you ask when I'm able to provide you with all that? Yeah. So I guess when they grew up too, you know, their parents never told them they loved them. Yeah. Right? It was more like, hey, you got a roof, you got food, your clothes. What else do you want? Mm-hmm. Yeah, so yeah, so I mean, I, I don't know, that's a tough one. I think I think that was a great answer. Thank you so much. Um, Hmm, now let's maybe we can move a little bit more into, so I have a lot more culture, but I do want to focus a little bit more on the community aspect. So, how would you describe like Oakland, Chinatown in the 1970s and 80s when you 1st moved there? Like, uh, yeah, go ahead. ahead. Yeah, it was much safer. You know, everybody walked in the streets, really, there was, it was bustling. It was busy. Everybody said hi to each other, you know, and by talking, uh, um, the younger one would ask me, you know, how's your, how's your sister? How's grandma? The older people would ask, how are your parents? Everybody talked to each other. Everybody were friendly and stuff like that. And, you know, whenever when I was younger, I was, I was just talking to somebody else just a couple days ago that, um, I would walk out the street. I'll go play basketball at Lincoln to 10, 1030 and walk back home and nobody, you know, nobody bothered me. I wasn't scared at all when my parents weren't worried at all. Right? So, so back then, with myself, and then I hear that a lot from the patients too, that they say, you know, it was much safer back then. Now I can't even, you know, once it's dark, I should be home. That should stay out too late and stuff like that too. So yeah, it was definitely safer then. Mm-hmm. in Chinatown and there's definitely more elders I was walking around staying up later in the day. A little bit after dark and things like that too. So then, what parts of that environment, Oakland, Chinatown in 1970s and 80s, do you think shaped your childhood the most? Um... Yeah, I kind of got to think about everything, right? Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I think main, I think the rec center, the leaders there. Yeah. They were the ones that were able to help me shake who I am now. What's this rec center called? Lincoln, Lincoln, Lincoln Square. Okay, Lincoln Square Rec Center. Yeah, Lincoln Square Recreation Center, yeah. The leaders there, they, they pretty much became my, uh, my support. Mm-hmm. Seems like a, yeah, they seem to have played a very like influential role in kind of shaping who you are. Mm-hmm, okay. Yeah. Um, so then what messages about being Chinese or maybe did they teach you about being Asian or navigating, being Asian in America? Like, what message is about being Chinese or Asian American? Did you like take in and absorb growing up? It could be at home or in school or in the neighborhood. Did your parents tell you something or did your teacher say something or did these rec center a friend say us of? Not that I could recall, no. Now I can record the moment, no. It might be subtle. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Uh, do you mind if I note down these questions that, uh, uh, you said that maybe take a little bit more thinking and then you can get back to me about those? I can send you a list of those ones. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Got to be amazing. Yeah. Thank you. I really like what you said earlier about like, oh, like, you know, I didn't even come off a boat, I flew through a plane and not knowing about how to like navigate. Yeah. Yeah, no, I'm not FOB. We say that still. A lot of AP sneak, yes, on that effort will be and I'm not ABC, but what am I? You know, so... Ah, that's a good line. Oh, an FOB, oh, ABC. So, what am I? Okay, so then. And then you already answered this one, how interactions with non-Asian communities and Oakland influence how you see yourself, right? I think I'd be. Yeah. They seem like to make you wonder, oh, am I not American enough? Should I be more Asian, right? Because they had the expectation that you were Asian. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Were there moments in childhood when you 1st became more aware of being Asian? You already mentioned that as well, middle school. Right school. Great. This is good because you're already crossing these out before I even get to it. or just talking about things naturally and they're flowing. Okay. So some more about family then. Um, how did your family talk about culture language or heritage when you were growing up? Was that ever a point of conversation? I know in my family it really isn't either. Yeah, no, it wasn't. It wasn't, because... There, my mother would always say, what do you need to know that? You don't need to know that. So, you know, that, the heck? I can see you. Oh, right. That's okay, I'll call her back. Yeah, um, Yeah, no, they're, um. It's just not a priority when the priority is trying to survive and put food on the table, I'm sure. Yeah, yeah. Oops. I used to, yeah. Yeah. So for them, it's a more physical aspect of things, you know, they, they didn't, they weren't, they

weren't available to speak just because of the language barrier too. Hmm. Right, so even now, I know that I struggle with words, because I could feel, but I don't know how to associate the words with the feeling. Let it be in French, in Chinese, or in English too. So, growing up, you know, I had to learn if I was gonna say something or express something, right? So I knew it in French, my friend daddy translated in my head in Chinese to what they were Chinese, I knew, and then in Chinese, translated into English, the best I can. And if somebody said something to me, I would translate the English into Chinese and into French. So it took a while, so I think for me, it was kind of, it was too complicated, so I decided not to say anything, it would be easier for me, to not have to go through my head and do other translations. Yeah, I'm sure that's really hard. I think it's, but I think it's interesting. I guess you were 9 when you 1st started really learning more about Cantonese as well. So, I find myself like a lot of the times, like when I, um, speak Spanish, I do make the translations in my head. But when I speak Mandarin, I think it flows a little bit more naturally for me because I associate it with memories and feelings rather than with words. If you associate the word with another word in a different language, it's a slower process for me, right? But if I'm associating like, oh, when I think of the word red or orange, I think about the color, right? I'm thinking about the idea, the concept, the feeling seems to work better for me or like a memory. Yeah. Hmm. Were there moments when you resisted assimilation or felt the need to hold onto more cultural practices? Uh, maybe more as an adult when I... Not so much when I was younger, but as I started getting older, just having that identity as being Chinese. That's why I said, okay, well, you know, I'm going to try to learn, learn more about the culture, learn more about the language, learn more about my family history and things like that too. Just get to know more, try to be a little bit to identify more as being Chinese. Yeah. Okay. Because even learning my family history through my cousins is still so confusing, because I have no idea what to tell me sometimes. Yeah, I'm sure. They're the ones who, your mom, so I'm assuming also your maternal side, the ones that came with your grandparents and siblings. Um, they, so on my internal side, they don't know much about their history either. So then, which cousins are you learning from? I'm from a Chinese college. The French side. My fraternal side in China. Oh, your dad's side in China? Yeah. Interesting. Yeah, so my cousins came to visit last 2 years ago. I was trying to ask my cousin, and, and, like, the family tree and everything, and it was just too confusing for me. So, I had one, one, one of my cousins that just translated from the other cousin because she was using our the, the, the, the written, the technical, Language. Because of the conversational language, I didn't understand most of the stuff she was telling me. Yeah, there is a very big difference in like when you speak about politics, economics, and things that are more serious than like the everyday household. Correct. Yeah. I call myself a household fluent. Oh, there you go. That's what I say. Okay. Then maybe one last one about family and then we can move on to more comparison stuff. So, um, did your parents or elders, like it doesn't have to be your parents, just elders? Do their experiences shape your understanding of what it means to be American? Or even your own experiences. Um. Not really. Hmm. Not really. I think just being American, I would learn, quote unquote, to be more American by... experience? Yeah. Yeah, but just by experience. By experience? Yeah, just living in America. Mm, okay. You know, just, just living in America, just living, living my life as an American. Kind of doesn't make sense, but, yeah, just... Yeah, how can... Yeah, could you describe that more? You said just being immersed, immersed into the culture? Yeah, just regard, like, American culture, right? You get a, um, kind of have to add certain way sometimes, right? You gotta have certain things. Um. So then what does it mean for you to be American? Oh, good question. Yeah, I'm just here to understand you. Understand the way your brain works. Yeah, because I'm just kind of trying to figure out myself, too, you know? So, lost in words and lost in thoughts. I have no idea at the moment. No problem. I'll note this one down. I'll send you an email with all these questions and maybe think them over again. Okay. Yeah. Um, there should be American. Okay. Great. And then, now moving more into community stuff, as someone who grew up in Oakland, Chinatown, and later worked in healthcare, um, Did your sense of responsibility to the community like change or evolve? I'm asking. Yes, yes, yes. most definitely. Yeah. Learn to be more patient and take care of more of the elders. Hmm. Yeah. The elders, they, because a lot of the elders, their kids, grew up and moved away from Chinatown. Yeah. Well, being here, trying to help them, the best I can, so that they don't have to inconvenience their kids. Yeah. Yeah. So a lot of them just, no, they are, let's, like earlier, I was at my aunt's house because my cousins are all in the suburbs and stuff like that. So I had to go help out my, my, my aunt and uncle certain things. Yeah, so just being there, help try, try to, try to help the elders as much as possible. Yeah. How did your dad like, um, like America compared to France? Seems like he wanted to stay in front of her. I think after a while, he accepted it because he didn't want to leave France because his younger brother or cousin was there. Yeah. And he didn't have any family here. Yeah. The only family you had was on my mother's side. So, additionally, you did not want to leave France because of that. So I think after a while, we got to know, got to know my mother's family, that side that, you know, they're not that bad, and so he accepted it. Does he miss France? Well after he retired, he did go back a few times. So, I'm sure he still speaks French very well. He knew a few words, yeah. Yeah, he knew a few words here and there, so sometimes we're in the public, just, you know, my parents and my siblings or my parents or my brother who would try to get away and speak with a little bit

of friends so that the Chinese won't understand. That's cute. So your friend is still really, really good. I assume? Um, not as, no. No, no, no. But you can understand. I don't understand more than I can speak. Yeah. Yeah, but when I go back and then I immerse myself with my cousins and stuff, then my French air kind of returns, and my French tongue kind of wakes up a little bit. That's really cute, actually. It's like a different part of your brain. Your memory is being stimulated. Okay. Hmm, what other questions do I have? What changes have you seen? I have said you figure out? Oh this is a good one. Do you think so? You said that Chinatown used to be more safe, right? Um, then it is now. Now I'm asking more broadly, what changes have you seen in Chinatown's community dynamics? And over the decades over this time? Have any of these changes affected your own identity? So have these, have the community, has the community's changes affected your identity? Uh... No? No, right? No, no, no, no, because I am still Chinese. I'm still Chinese, and then they're coming working back in Chinatown, had me, uh, I became, I guess, more Chinese in a certain way, you know? Yeah, I mean, more Chinese because I'm immerged in that with the culture, with the elders, with the language itself too. Mhm. Yeah. I like that. I guess, broadly speaking, it's just a similation. Or a nicer way to put it as well as adaptation, right? Mm-hmm. Yeah. Same with your dad, learning to accept it and live with it. different environment.. Correct, correct, yeah. Okay, global events and racial racialization. So I had asked you earlier, were there any global events that made you feel Asian Americans were, oh, This one's a good one. Did you feel that there are any? sorry, I'm like reading these. I enjoying it. Do you feel like there are any global or national events that made you feel Asian Americans were suddenly more visible or more targeted in the US? From then until now? Oh, the tenement square always gets to me. Oh. Yeah, the tenement square is like, oh, that's a crowd Asian that's stood in front of the tank. Yeah. Yeah, that was very brave of him to do that to stand up for the for all the agents. Yeah. How is that portrayed in the US media? Um, I was young. I can't remember, they... I remember being shown on TV a lot, too. And it can't recall exactly what the, what people were saying. But it was something, it was powerful. Mm-hmm. It's good. So I'm sure he was probably portrayed in a really good light because he was talking about, like, I mean, those students, right, were more Democratic, and we're trying to usher in more change, right? Mm-hmm, yeah, yeah. And I think my cousin would tell me, too, that one of our, my, one of my cousin from China was trying to escape. escaped China and made it to the U.S. border, but was found and had, and they deported him. So he tried twice. Twice. Reporting him. I think he ended up committing suicide, too. But that... If my Chinese was good, and I was able to understand what my cousin said, then that's what my father was trying to tell me, too, that he tried to get in twice. To the U.S. Failed and end up committing suicide. Wow. And what, what, would this happen because of the cannabis per incident or? Yeah. Yeah, everything that was happening at the time. Oh, wow. Damn. Do you think, did you know that, man? Or that cousin, well? I've never met him. I didn't, at the time, I didn't meet him. I don't think I've met him. If I did, I don't remember because going to China for the 1st time was a huge shock. I' sure. There's a lot of them. Oh, you read it to me. You know, I was like, Oh, everywhere you turn, everybody kind of looked like me, but yet I felt like a foreigner because I didn't speak the language well. Yeah. And I dress differently, too. They didn't understand what they were saying. Yeah. I know exactly how that feels. I went to Taiwan this past summer to visit my grandma. The last time I'd been back was 10 years prior. So this last summer was the 1st time I'd been back, right? And I felt like a foreigner as well. Um, people. They look similar to you, but it's like before you even open your mouth, they can tell that you're not them. That you're different. And it's like, so when you walk through the streets and you see the languages on the, um, on, on the windows, right, and the restaurants are selling foods that you grew up eating. It's like, oh, I ate this in my household. I've never seen it sold, right? Uh-huh. Unless you go to at one specific niche restaurant in Chinatown, but you know, instead of going to specific spots, it's everywhere. I feel that a lot. Yeah, yeah. Okay. Um, during the COVID pandemic and, uh, do you think there are any shifts that you noticed in how Asian Americans were perceived or treated in Oakland? So this one's kind of more direct. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Easy targets? Yeah. Easy targets, you know, that's when the huge shift occurred in Chinatown. Yeah. That's why the elders did not want to get out of the house. Did not want to, you know, they just, they were just scared to go out because and then, and then you're not long after that, you got the Asian paint, right? So, on top of the COVID, they didn't want to become victims. And when they climbed, so, I mean, the old man that was pushed to the ground that was shown all over the world before, you know, that I started. I was right in front of our, um, of our, our clinic in Chinatown, right in the corner there. The gas station. Yeah. Yeah. on our side, the same street, right in the corner there too. So, you know, that scared a lot of people. We had a lot of patience. They don't want to come. They don't want to ask for an afternoon appointment because they'll get home too late. Let it be 3 o'clock, but 2 o'clock is too late because they don't want to be out so late because they were scared. Yeah. Um, So yeah, so that's the COVID and the Asian pay definitely changed to the scenery around Chinatown. And a lot of burglary and violence was at one time, people were running into the restaurants, stealing people's purses. What? Patron purses and stuff like that. Yeah. And then they just left, you know, they came as a group, boom, give me a purse, give me a wallet, give me your phone and everything, and then just took off. A lot of people were scared to eat in Chinatown. So a lot of restaurants were forced to close early because they were scared.

Yeah. You know, their staff was scared, too. So even now, you know, a lot of stores are closed early because their staff are afraid to go home late. Yeah. Especially with the time change when it gets darker too. You know, Chinatown's pretty much a ghost town at about 230 or 3 o'clock. I've seen it, yeah. Hmm. Sad. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, they were, oh, never be the way it was when we grew when I grew up, you know, when all the stores were open, like restaurants were packed late. You know, you had restaurants out open till midnight when we were in high school, you know, we go watch a movie, boom, let's go to San Hong Kong and eat. Okay, because I'm not going to eat. Let's go here and eat, right? They were open. You know, to one o'clock to accommodate everybody that wanted to eat late. Now just, they're close. They're, they're no restaurant that's open late now. Yeah, Chinatown. Then, okay, maybe if we let's expand the scale to more global scale. Like, uh, between like events on in the US and China, I mean, we see these events and these articles all the time, right? But other kind of tug of war for power and influence. How is this like economic competition? Um, or media portrayals of, Of like US and China Tension, has that affected you or how you saw yourself? Do you stand on anything? Yeah. Which side do I have? Exactly. Which side do I pick? You know, do I want to support China for what they're doing or do I want to support the American, which, you know, both sides, I don't agree. Mm-hmm. Honest, some of the things you're doing too, but which side do I stand for? Hmm. Yeah. And have you ever, do you think you ask yourself any other questions or any other things that would help you figure that out? No, I haven't. Not, not yet. No, I haven't. Yeah, I'm sure it's a struggle for everybody. Yeah, think about for us. Growing up now, we don't even know if we're Chinese or American, and then you have all this stuff going on in the world too. Mm hmm, yeah, yeah. Because then a lot of people are saying, yeah, I mean, you hear a lot of things about China. So, you hear things, oh, well, you're trying to say therefore, you're representing them. So your mentality must be the same. Yeah. But you hear a lot of stuff like that, too. No, not really. We don't think we don't think that way. Mm hmm. Yeah. So you hear loss about expectations for a way you're supposed to think? Because of the way that you look. Sometimes. Yeah. Sometimes. And depending, like, with my, my, my, my close friends, you know, they, I don't feel the pressure, but if I'm, like, in the social setting, that's outside of my friends group. Sometimes I do feel that pressure too. You know, you Chinese, so you're American, are you Chinese, or are you American? Yeah. We've tried you stand for, it's like, I don't stand for either side. Because I have a 3rd country to stand for, so. France. Yeah. Hence the confusion again. Yeah. So, Uh, maybe another broad question here, but all these events that have happened, Tiamon Square, COVID, right, and the U.S. China Tensions. Did these events change your understanding of what it means to be Asian American? What is your understanding of what it means to be Asian American? Do you feel like, uh, maybe a couple leading points is why I'm really asking is like, do you feel like being a major American is a good thing? It's worse than being Mexican-American, comparing it to other groups. How do you feel like we stand as Asian Americans in America? Um, Is the term too broad, maybe? You know? Yeah, no, no, no. we no. Sometimes, you know, as soon as like, you're proud to be Chinese, because of the, of the strength that comes from an upbringing. Yeah, right? So, and in a depth of a culture and everything else too. So sometimes it's like, yeah, I'm Chinese, yeah, I'm strong. I could be I could be strong. and support our culture. Mm-hmm. Because of our upbringing and everything we've been through, right? So they try to explain it to other cultures, you know, why we stand behind our culture, you know, like the Mexican and the Asians, I hear all the time that, you know, very family oriented. Very. Versus other cultures, you know, that the some Caucasians, right? I love my, love my, uh, my, uh, my niece, right? She's half white, half Asian, right? Her dad says, you know, you're 16, you gotta move out, be on your own. You never hear that. Chinese culture. Never. I'm sure you got people who are living with family until they're 25. Yeah, or, you know, we have to family, family, and then the wife and her husband have been to the family too, right? I want you to get married. So, yeah, so that's the difference. That's certain part of the Chinese culture, I'm very proud of because we dance with family. Yeah. We stand for culture and all that stuff too. Yeah. I like that. Safford County separate culture. Okay. Now, more on your, I guess, I don't know if these questions were, I'll reshape some of these questions. Is it okay if we have another meeting maybe like maybe a 30 minute meeting some other time this week? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Because I had thought that you were born in the US and so... So your questions are different now. Yeah, some of them, yeah, some of them I had thought that you were born in the US. I was hoping to compare that experience with like the refugee experience that I'm reading about, right? Vietnamese Americans. So, but now that I find out you're not, I don't really know. Um, I have a couple other ones that maybe don't apply here, but, uh, Uh, or maybe they're, I mean, too redundant. They're about identity formation, but yeah, I wanted to hear about your comparison between, um, your understanding of being Asian-American in your childhood versus your adulthood. So if you had to stay in one to 2 sentences, what's the differences? In your understanding. That I'm more aware of being Asian when I was on my own, in my adult year. Hmm. Younger, it, I was just a person. Yeah. I looked different, but it didn't, I didn't associate it with being Chinese. I was just a human. But as an adult, I understand that there's a difference between Chinese and being an American, being, you know, not looking like my Mexican friends or the African-American friends. We, there's differences. Hmm. Do you feel like the cultures like Chinese and American culture is almost in a sense mutually exclusive? How

do you feel like representing both cultures? Um. I don't know. We can get back to that one. It always help, yeah. Yeah, because both cultures, there's some, there's some differences, right? But then the Asian cup is more family oriented. than the American, right? American, like I was saying, like my niche, you know, she's pretty much on her own. Yeah. Because your dad, you're, you're, you know, when I was younger, I got kicked out, and therefore, you get kicked out. You should try to survive on your own. Yeah. So representing both cultures, is it easy for you? How do you do it? It all depends. You know, depends if it's convenient for me. If it's, you know, it feels right in my heart. You know, if it's the right thing, right? So if, you know, if I had a kid, The American culture was a kicking out in a certain age, I would never do that. Sure, right. You know, not unless you know the total slack where you're sitting here doing nothing, you're not going to school, but then you know, I might change things, but, You know, just because you're a certain age, you're not old enough to take care of yourself yet. You know, you're not, you haven't learned, haven't learned to live in the world. It's tough out there being young. Yeah. So that's actually a really good point that you made about if you had a kid. So I have a question about that. If you did have a kid, what would you tell them about their identity? Um, I'd be proud of it. You know, if you look Asian, be proud to be Asian. Do you live in America or are you proud to be an American? What, what, what does that mean being proud? You know, that was something for them to learn on their own. Mm-hmm. To find out, you know, what does it mean to be proud to be a Chinese? What's the problem? What does it mean to be proud to be American? You know, you be part learn to be Chinese, you know, learn about your culture. So be proud to be both. Mm hmm, yeah. They're about supposed to be proud of people. You don't have to pick one or the other. And that's the thing, I struggle, is like, which one, which one do I pick? Yeah, that's how I feel too. Mhm. And with talking to somebody, took the wife, you need to pick, just be proud to have all 3 countries. I wish it was that simple. Exactly, exactly. Exactly. You know, it could be temporarily too, but it's not that simple. Yeah, like, you know, even if you're saying, oh, yeah, just be proud to have all three, right? You are still picking, depending on the situation, like you said, whatever's convenient. Correct, correct. Yeah. Yeah, I feel like, you know, I feel like I'm putting on different masks sometimes. Sometimes when I'm around Taiwanese, people who are very stickler about the whole Taiwanese Chinese thing. I say I'm Taiwanese, and then around other Chinese people, I'll just say I'm Chinese. And around American people, you know, I kind of say I'm Chinese, kind of say I'm American. Depends on how receptive they are. It's something I'm struggling with now. You know, do you think that, do you think you have the strength in you or like the courage? Do you think it requires courage to admit to being Chinese around an American crowd? No, no, no, no. This is obvious. Mm. It's obvious, I don't have to state it, but then if they're gonna, if they're gonna try to challenge me, then I might, I might, you know, just, just step up and say, you know, I'm Chinese and I'm proud of my culture. Yeah. So you're, I'm really happy that you feel that way because I don't think that a lot of people now, especially, a lot of my peers are very proud to be Chinese, especially in America, right? They feel almost apologetic for it. You know, there's a lot of, it's like they're embarrassed to be it, yet they can't help their situation. So they kind of just, they kind of escape by only hanging out with other Asians, with Asians of different shapes and fonts, I mean, right? Filipinos, Indonesians. Wow, right. Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese. A lot of Chinese people only hang out with other Chinese people or other Asians because only in our little bubble of Asia, do they really understand and we don't have to be like, we're Chinese and be proud of it, right? And have to like, I don't have to explain yourself. Exactly. Yeah, you explain, why do you take your shoes off when you enter somebody's house? Little things like that, right? Yeah. That's a big one, honestly. Bothers me. Okay. And then... you never shaped yourself. This one we have to get back to as well. And then you said, you'd answer being Asian American mean to you now versus when you're younger. It's more apparent now, you said. Mm-hmm. Uh-huh. And are you also more proud now? Uh, I won't say more, but I'm proud. Yeah, I'm proud. Yeah. Because back then I didn't... I didn't know the difference. Because of the death of culture, right? You said the depth of culture. Like, that's nice. Okay. And I have 3 more questions. All right. Ready? I'm gonna give them to you. What do you hope younger generations of Asian Americans will understand about their identity than you learned over time? The struggle that our ancestors went through to get us to where we're at. So like a lot of our patients, they talk about working in the field, not having enough food to eat. You know, not always be cold and stuff like that. that the kids nowadays, they don't want to hear that. Mm-hmm. You know, you have all this now. Where are you always talking about their past? You know, it was important for them. Yeah. You know, they're the one that, that struggle, to put the, put food in there and, and for the, now put food on the plane and get the family here in the US, you know, all that struggle that they had to, to get the family here so that they could have a better life. Yeah, so I said, you know, it's for them to understand the hardship that the previous generation has gone through. to know, for them to know, know how, how you became. I like that. Previous generation, too, you know. So basically just know your roots, right? Know your roots, know the hardships that other people had to do to offer you and give you the life that you have now. Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. That sounds more like humility, right? Being humble. Yep. It's like, you know, like the railroad trains, right? Yeah, yeah. You know, we did that, you know, to help out everybody. Now, it benefits a lot of people too. So be proud that, you know, the ancestors were hard. To put the railroad down for you guys, yeah.

Yeah. How do you think global events today might shape the identity of future Asian American communities? It's hard because it all depends what happens. Yeah, I guess so. Yeah, it already depends what's gonna happen and everything's so volatile now, right? So everything's so sensitive that everything changes daily. So it all depends who comes on top. Let it be by force or other things. All right, that is true. And what stories or lessons from your own life do you feel are most important to pass on? Be yourself. Be proud of yourself. Yeah, don't let anybody else tell you otherwise. But how is it possible to be proud of yourself if you don't really know who you are growing up, right, as a kid? Well, that's part of the process. Right? You gotta learn to experience. to know, to know what makes you tick. You know, what makes you feel good, what makes you, well, what makes, what, what irks you? Right? So it all, it's all that. So you gotta learn the process and you're gonna learn through experience. If you don't go through any kind of expense or hardship, you're never gonna learn. And by learning, you know, it's always consequences, right? So you can pick one or the other. No. Thank you. That was great. That was great, actually. All right, that's all I have for the questions today. Maybe we can schedule another meeting. I'll be in touch with you, um, through, like, messages or something and we can figure that out, okay? Okay. All right, all right. Thank you so much. We were able to touch base after all the confusions today. No, yeah, me as well. Thank you so much. It's all right. Yeah, you're welcome. Well, you have a great weekend. I'm looking forward to, um, coming up with some good answers for your questions. Okay, I'll send them over to you. Should I send it to your email? Yeah, yeah, yeah. send it to the email. It'll be the Asian network one, though. Okay? Yeah, yeah, that's fine. Great. That's fine. Thank you so much. You too. Take care of the dogs, too. All right, have a good one. Bye. Bye.

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