Author Name: Angel Mok
Contact Email:man-yee-angel.mok@students.mq.edu.au

LISTENING TO THEIR STORIES - CHINESE FAMILIES SHARING THEIR LIVED EXPERIENCES IN AUSTRALIA AND THEIR CHILDREN'S MATHEMETICS LEARNING

Angel Mok
Macquarie University

Abstract

This paper challenges the prevailing understandings of homogenous Chineseness in the context of children's mathematics learning in Sydney. Recent research which examines the influence of culture on student's mathematics performance tends to see Chinese as one homogenous group. Research data collected from six Chinese families living in Sydney, however, suggests a contradictory view on Chineseness. Through the use of narrative inquiry as storytelling of lived experiences, it was found that families have different interpretations of Chineseness and hence, different representations of their identities. Their hybrid identities shift over time and in different social situations. While they see mathematics as important for their children's future, there do not seem to be clear links between their perceptions of identities and their children's mathematics learning in Australia.

Data gathered in the interviews with the six families were first analysed with themes derived from the literature on identity and Chinese students' performance in mathematics before they were written in the form of narratives. Interpreting data with different analysis crystallises the experiences of the participants. This paper also provides some insights into how the researcher's own narrative can provide a special lens in the interpretation of that of the participants' in an ethnographic study.

Introduction/Research Context

Students from South and East Asian background appear to consistently outperform their western counterparts in international measures such as Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Students in Shanghai surprised the world in their first attempt in PISA in 2009, in which they scored the highest in both mathematics and reading among 65 participating countries. Followed their lead are students from Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea and Taipei. These four countries/cities have topped PISA's mathematics scores since 1999. This phenomenon has attracted research attention that mainly focuses on finding the "reasons" for these remarkable performances. For instance, studies have looked at students' IQ (Dandy & Nettelbeck, 2002; Lynn & Mikk, 2007), motivation and attribution (Chen & Stevenson, 1995; Martin & Hau, 2010; McInerney, 2008), family background (Wang, 2004) as well as

Author Name: Angel Mok
Contact Email:man-yee-angel.mok@students.mq.edu.au

parental expectations (Li, 2004).

Culture and family have further become the popular sites for investigation of Chinese students' outstanding academic performance, for example, Hess, Chang, and McDevitt (1987), Huntsinger, Jose, Liaw, and Ching (1997), Stevenson and Stigler (1992), and Wang and Lin (2005). Asian immigrant students who outperform their local counterparts are often perceived as diligent and highly motivated (Vialle, 2013). This view is shared by other western countries (Biggs, 1996a; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). Subsequently, a picture of Chinese students was created: they are diligent and motivated students on one hand but uninspiring rote-learners on the other. And in the background of this picture stand the controlling parents who have very high expectations. Although later comparative studies have defended the image of rote learners and argued that repetition is in fact a way to deepen understanding (for example, Biggs, 1996b; Kember & Gow, 1991; Kember, 2000; and Watkins, 2000), the stereotypical image of the Chinese learner as "memorising machines" still prevails.

Similar academic performance is also found in New South Wales, Australia. Statistics from The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) provide evidence that schools with a high percentage of enrolments from a language background other than English (LBOTE) score substantially above the Australian schools average (ACARA, 2012), with a majority of the primary schools located in suburbs of Chinese or Asian communities. The academic outcomes and demographics of selective schools provide further evidence for this perception. James Ruse agricultural High school, North Sydney girls high school, Hornsby girls high school which were the top 3 selective schools in NSW in terms of Year 12 student outcomes rank in 2011, have LBOTE of 97%, 93% and 86% respectively (Ho, 2011). These schools not only score "substantially above" Australian schools average in NAPLAN, but they also topped the HSC, especially in mathematics and science subjects (ACARA, 2012). These statistics are supported by research studies conducted in an Australian context (Khoo & Birrell, 2002; McInerney, 2008). For example, compared to academic performance of students from Lebanese, Aboriginal and Anglo backgrounds, McInerney (2008) found that students from Asian background demonstrated better outcomes in both mathematics and English.

These studies, as well as others, have made an enormous contribution to the understanding of this phenomenon to the western countries. However, important as these factors are, they only tell part of the story.

Purpose and structure of this paper

This paper aims to demonstrate how narratives have afforded Chinese families space to share their interpretations of own lived experiences and how their identities should be understood in history as well as diasporic culture. It also aims to provide a discussion on the issues of examining mathematics performance of Chinese students from a cultural perspective.

Listening to their stories – Chinese families sharing their lived experiences in Australia and their children's mathematics learning
Author Name: Angel Mok
Contact Email:man-yee-angel.mok@students.mq.edu.au

This paper has been organized in the following way. It first provides an overview of Chinese students' mathematics performance in New South Wales. It will then argue against the essentialist notion of Chineseness and how narrative inquiry provides a space for participants' stories to be heard, which disrupt the homogenous discourse of Chineseness.

Chinese living in Australia

There is a long migrant history of Chinese people residing in this continent. The first wave came during the gold rushes in the mid- nineteenth century (Hugo, 2008). There was a significant number of Chinese migrants living and working in Australia from then and the number of Chinese settlers grew steadily until 1901 when the then Immigration Restriction Act 1901 restricted the migration of non-British, and deported migrants from Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands. It was not until 1980s when the migration of Chinese people started to increase again, mainly due to the Open Door Policy of China in late 1970s which has caused unprecedented changes to the lives of Chinese people both within and outside China. Both short-term travelling and migration increased significantly. On the other hand, the political uncertainties prior to the handover of Hong Kong in 1997 also created a big wave of immigration from Hong Kong from late 1980s to mid 1990s. Concurrently, Australia's skilled migration policy has attracted a large number of skilled and professional workers to the country, from 24.1% in 1995-1996 to 58.5% in 2004-05 of the total settler intake, if New Zealand citizens are excluded (Hugo, 2008). This big pool of migrants from both Hong Kong and China has further boosted the number of Chinese immigrants through the Family Migration Scheme. In 2006-07, family migrants outnumbered skilled migrants by more than double (Hugo, 2008). In 2011, people born in China have become the third largest group of overseas-born in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

Although immigrants from Mainland China and Hong Kong constitute the majority of the Chinese population living in Sydney, there are also a considerable number of Chinese migrants who came from other Asian countries such as Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Pacific Islands. The demographics are reflected in the questionnaire data from the three participating schools, which are located in south-western area of Sydney.

Chinese culture and mathematics

Research investigating children's mathematics performance seems to suggest a positive correlation in the practices within Chinese families and their children's performance in mathematics. However, our understanding of 'Chinese families' has to be studied with caution. First and foremost it is not realistic to treat Chinese people as a homogenous group. The politics of Chineseness has been insightfully and thoroughly discussed by scholars such as Ien Ang (2001) and Rey Chow (1998). Here I attempt to provide some discussion on the "indeterminacy of Chineseness as a signifier for identity" (Ang, 2001,

Paper presented at the AARE Annual Conference, Adelaide 2013

Australian Association for Research in Education

Listening to their stories – Chinese families sharing their lived experiences in Australia and their children's mathematics learning
Author Name: Angel Mok
Contact Email:man-yee-angel.mok@students.mq.edu.au

p.24).

Since the opening of China in 1979, we have seen unprecedented changes in China politically, economically, socially and culturally. The rise of China as a world power from the late twentieth century has brought shifts in the meaning of Chineseness, both within and outside China. The movement of people to and from China has increased our understanding of the place and the people. Paradoxically, in this day and age in which ethnic, linguistics and territorial boundaries are becoming more and more porous and ill-defined, we can no longer say for sure what it means to be *authentically* Chinese. Here I am not going to advocate for an essentialist understanding of culture but that in a collective sense, identity implies a fundamental sameness among members of a group, which is often manifested in shared dispositions or consciousness (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000).

In the context of the Chinese diaspora, Chow (1991) has made an observation that Chinese people living outside China, for example, Hong Kong and Taiwan, are often seen as less authentic or pure as their Chineseness has been diluted by the western culture. This observation has to be read with the idea that the definition of Chineseness is often constituted by what it means in and from China, which can only provide a restricted and imagined understanding of what Chineseness means in a diasporic context. Interestingly, overseas Chinese are often found to aspire to their imagined authentic Chineseness, as reflected in their attachment to traditions and rituals in doing everything the *Chinese way*. The struggle between the 'Australian ways and the Chinese ways' is a manifestation of the assumption that we are living in a bicultural world, that there are Australian/Chinese ways which we can attach to. However, this essentialist understanding of Chineseness is problematic. Firstly, in this ever changing world in which movements of information, people, ideas and materials are too fast to be tracked, we can no longer say for sure what is and what is not "real and authentic" Chinese. A bicultural understanding of identity dismisses the space "in between" the two poles. This hybrid in-between space challenges the absolute notion of Chineseness that is constructed and articulated within the local discourse rather than being defined by absolutism.

In her reconceptualisation of diaspora, Ang (1998) argues that Chineseness is not fixed or pre-given but an open signifier which

> …acquired its peculiar forms and contents in dialectical junction with the diverse local conditions in which ethnic Chinese people construct new, hybrid identities and communities, both in the place where they're at and, where possible and desired, in connection with each other. (p.7)

In other words, Chineseness is a productive, dialogical and dynamic discourse that is being defined and redefined constantly both within and outside China. It is not a category in which we can find clear

Paper presented at the AARE Annual
Conference, Adelaide 2013

Australian Association
for Research in Education

Author Name: Angel Mok
Contact Email:man-yee-angel.mok@students.mq.edu.au

criteria of what is and what is not Chinese.

Diasporic Chinese play a role in the construction and reconstruction of Chineseness in this postmodern world. Our identities should be understood as the subject location in this context we are residing in, through our interpretation of our experiences. In Ang's words, it is "a reflexive positioning of one self in history and culture" (2001, p. 24). As such our stories should be heard, in this context. By using *Narrative Inquiry*, which will be explained below, this study provides the space for each participant to speak as a Chinese, and for the readers to understand participants' locations in this world.

Narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry is used widely in different disciplines but as Riessman (2008) points out, there are still challenges to provide a simple, clear definition of the term. Broadly speaking, narrative inquiry is interested in how the narrator selects, organizes and presents life experiences in a way she/he does to the audience (Chase, 2011; Riessman, 2008). However, there are substantial differences in the use of narrative inquiry in research in human sciences, which is mainly due to the different epistemological stance researchers take. Within the realm of social sciences, for example, there are strands of realist, modernist, postmodernist, and constructivist (Riessman & Speedy, 2006), each holds a vastly different approach in what *reality* is and how it should be studied. Chase (2011) also suggests that different research interest has created different categories of researchers. Narrative inquiry was adopted as the method of inquiry due to researcher's interest in exploring *how* narrators tell their stories, and what stories they tell (Chase, 2011).

Central to narrative inquiry is its commitment to study the lived experience of individuals. The essence of lived experience is its temporal nature, a dimension which Connelly and Clandinin (2006) have identified as crucial in using narrative inquiry as an analytical framework. Lived experiences do not manifest themselves in the present but only come to our consciousness when they are reflected as past experience (Van Manen, 1997). People live storied lives. Their experiences are structured as narratives and narrative researchers collect the stories told by the participants, and construct narratives of experience. Stories, often only seen as personal, "[are] a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). In other words, stories connect the people to the world.

In marking out the landscape of narrative inquiry, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) have identified a three-dimensional space in the use of narrative inquiry in research of human experience. The three dimensions of *temporality*, *sociality* and *place* have provided an analytical framework to make meaning of research data in this study. *Temporality* suggests that human experience does not exist in isolation. It acknowledges the continuity of experience in history. Experience in the present is an outcome of another experience in the past, and it will impact experience in the future. Narrative

Author Name: Angel Mok
Contact Email:man-yee-angel.mok@students.mq.edu.au

inquirers study events and people who are in temporal transition rather than fixated at a point in time. *Sociality* points out that individual are always in interaction with the environment as well as other people, including the researchers. It encompasses both the personal and the social conditions (Bamberg, 2006). *Place*, the third dimension, refers to the "specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place where the inquiry and events take place" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 50). In the context of this study, Sydney is the pivotal place where participants' experiences take place. Due to the temporal nature of experience, participants' experiences in their homelands were also studied, in order to make sense of their Australian experience.

The methodology of this study was inspired by the view of Connelly and Clandinin (1990) that narrative is both a phenomenon and a method of inquiry. However, while the lived experience of Chinese migrants can be seen as a phenomenon in which a structure can be studied, cultural identity is a fluid construct which is contextual and unstable. As such, this study is not a phenomenological study in a strict sense, though it did employ "a general phenomenological perspective to elucidate the importance of using methods that capture people's experience of the world without conducting a phenomenological study that focuses on the essence of shared experience" (Patton, 2002, p. 107). The method chosen to "capture people's experience" in this study was narrative inquiry which was informed by the hermeneutic perspective which emphasised on interpretation and context. Hermeneutists argued that the reality constructed by the researcher was a function of who, how and from what perspective it examined. In relation to this study, the interpretation provided here in this thesis was the product of the method *I* chose, the *focus* I looked at (Patton, 2002)

Data collected from six families in this research were first analysed with themes derived from the literature on identity and mathematics learning. Thematic analysis is a flexible method to identify, analyse and report patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It has helped to provide a systemic interpretation of thick data in this study. However, it has its limitations mainly in presenting a holistic picture of the experiences of families in this study. Themes are strong tools to study a topic in depth but may potentially lack coherence in its presentation of families' immigration over a long period of time, sometimes over a couple of decades. The complexities of incidents and richness of experiences cannot be explained by a few terms. It also runs the risk of over-analysis by the researcher and leaves little room for readers to interpret the data from their perspectives. Narratives, on the other hand, provide the contexts of how, what and where the stories happened. Experiences are woven in the stories told by the participants who have lived in them. As such, a *thematic narrative* for each theme was first written, aiming to make sense of what the theme or topic means to that family. Subsequently, based on the narratives written from each theme, a *family narrative* or portrait was written to capture the big stories (Freeman, 2006), the significant life events and decisions such as marriage, migration, children's education. The strength of the family narrative is that it also gives space to small stories

Listening to their stories – Chinese families sharing their lived experiences in Australia and their children's mathematics learning

Author Name: Angel Mok
Contact Email:man-yee-angel.mok@students.mq.edu.au

which are the constant and natural features of everyday life (Georgakopoulou, 2006). Small stories might be small in length but not in significance. The telling and retelling of certain very recent events or hopes for the future, for instance, the refusals to tell or the absence of certain people, or the repetitive emphasis on someone, all have great significance to the participants and the analysis. A family portrait provides the landscape and contour for readers to see how the small stories sit in the big stories. On one hand, small stories are found to be informed by the big stories that happened in the past. On the other hand, they project the life trajectory into the future.

Narratives of each family were told and constructed more than once in the process of data collection and analysis. First, stories were told in the semi-structured interviews that allowed participants to decide what experiences they wanted to tell the researcher. By telling their experience as migrants in Sydney, they select, organize, connect and give meanings to their own lived experiences to the audience. As a researcher, I also go through the same process of selection and organization and meaning making. I examine not only *what* participants chose to tell me but also *how* they did so. I gather information and connect experiences to their understanding of identities, as well as their actions, choices or attitudes on mathematics learning. In other words, not only did participants tell stories, I construct stories from the data I collected from them as well (Riessman, 2008). In a way, family narratives provide a window for me to see the contradictory views families had on Chineseness (Chase, 2011).

Crystallization

Data in this research were collected by interviews, journal diary, observation as well as questionnaire. Multiple methods were adopted to get detailed information from the stakeholders, not aiming to 'triangulate' in order to find an 'answer', but to gain clarity to the research topic. Richardson points out the problem of triangulation is that it assumes a "*fixed point* or an *object* that can be triangulated" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 963), and that there is an answer to be found. However, the purpose of postmodernist writing is not to find *an* answer but to obtain multiple interpretations. We believe there are no universal truths to be discovered as all truths are partial. As such, my intention is to co-construct meaning and understanding of the research topic with my participants, instead of finding an answer which could be generalized and called truth. Instead of triangulation, Richardson suggests the concept of *crystallization*. Crystals reflect the external environment and at the same time they refract what's outside within themselves. The notion of crystallization suggests that postmodern texts should be read from different angles to achieve multiple interpretations (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). It is also about feeling, thinking and interpreting a phenomenon or an experience and represents them in different forms of texts. Our own history, gender, and beliefs, all contribute to the angle we adopt in reading the texts and what we can see.

Author Name: Angel Mok
Contact Email:man-yee-angel.mok@students.mq.edu.au

Developed from Richardson's original concept of crystallization, Ellingson (2008) expands and discusses crystallization as an emergent framework, and provides a definition of it.

> Crystallization combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researchers' vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings, reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them. (Ellingson, 2008, p. 4)

This explanation captures the work of crystallization as both a theoretical framework and process. It also highlights the contingency and ambiguity of postmodernist texts, which encourage multiple readings of a phenomenon. Narrative analysis in this research sees at least two *stages* or *levels* of crystallization. First, family narrative was produced through the use of thematic analysis and narrative inquiry. They inform each other and bring clarity to how participants relate their personal stories to the social. The second level sees each family portrait as a text in the bigger narrative of Chinese migrants living in Sydney. They are a 'partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction' (Ellingson, 2008, p. 4). Some of these family narratives share similar pre- and post-immigration experience, which reflect the political and social discourses when they entered Australia. For example, the family who migrated in late 1970's repeatedly mentioned the racial comments they received up to late 1980s. On the other hand, families who migrated from the 1990s onwards either did not mention or dismiss experience of discrimination. Contrasting stories from participants who came from a seemingly similar background continue to demonstrate how people's history, gender, beliefs and intention refract the externalities differently for different people in the analysis. Contrasting data further crystallise the lived experiences of these Chinese immigrants and challenge the assumption of an essentialist Chineseness.

My positioning

Just as in all qualitative research, the researcher and the researched in this study cannot be separated. My position in the study is even more entangled as I share both the cultural heritage and migrant experiences of living in Sydney. As such, it is of paramount importance to be highly reflexive of my positioning and explain my reflection to the readers of this paper. O'Leary's comments that credible research demands 'reflexive awareness of our worldviews and a conscious effort for us to take them into account as we enter into the research journey' (2010, p. 30) is particularly relevant. I entered this research as a researcher to explore Chinese students' mathematics performance from a cultural perspective. However, I did not enter from the outside because I have always been inside. I applied my dual positionality as a hybrid subject in the course of this research. This positionality foregrounds who I am in this research space. As well, I treat my own stories about life experience in this inquiry process, aiming to 'explore a topic or research question more fully' (Chase, 2011, p.423).

Author Name: Angel Mok
Contact Email:man-yee-angel.mok@students.mq.edu.au

This is a study about the interplay between self and culture and I engage myself differently at different points in this process. Self-conscious conversation has helped me to understand and acknowledge my identity and position in this study. I have attempted to make this revelation public in the form of a narrative. This is a reflective ethnographic study in which my own narrative is not the focus of the study, but my experience illuminates the culture under study (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). As such my narrative is instrumental in examining 'place, biography, self and other to understand how they shape the analytic exercise' (Macbeth, 2001, p. 35). Readers will be able to see how my experience has brought alive an ethnographic study, and how research data were analysed through my eyes. Reflection on my *self* is essential in identifying the discourses which have impacted the lens through which I see the world and the research data.

It is certainly not my intention to exercise my authority as the author of this paper to force my readers to believe my interpretation is either the best or the only one. In fact, I would like to invite readers to take an active role in the construction of a response to the data presented to them as I appreciate multiple interpretations of postmodernist texts and believe this is how we can get closer to the core of complex social phenomena. My intention is to provide space for readers to listen to the voices in and between families. As such, readers will find limited interpretation of the narratives below.

Families narratives

Below are excerpts of narratives of the participants in a research study that is still in progress at the time of writing. They aim to demonstrate contrasting understandings of Chineseness and cultural identities of three participants who shared similar backgrounds. Both Katherine and Wilson came from Shanghai in the 90's. Katherine came to Sydney to join her husband and Wilson came here to study. Sue also arrived Australia in 90's, 'only for marriage'. (All names are pseudonyms to protect participants' privacy). They all have high educational qualifications (at masters level or above) and speak fluent English. Readers are reminded that these stories are far from complete. Apart from the fact that this research study is still in progress, excerpts from a narrative often feel truncated as they lack the information and flow a complete narrative provides.

The first excerpt shows how Katherine makes sense of her identity under the bicultural paradigm and identifies herself clearly as a Chinese individual who does everything 'the Chinese way', although other parts of her narrative sees the hybrid nature of her 'Chinese way'. The second excerpt sees how Wilson, who is a scientist, dismisses the whole idea of 'culture'. Sue in the last excerpt identifies herself as both Chinese and Australian, with a clear division between her Taiwanese identity from Chinese (Mainland) identity which is often assumed by others.

Excerpt 1:

Katherine said she felt 'discriminated by my own daughters' when they said to her, 'Mum, you are so

Author Name: Angel Mok
Contact Email:man-yee-angel.mok@students.mq.edu.au

Chinese'. They made her aware of how she did things 'the Chinese ways'. She said she just 'naturally behave(s) the Chinese way'. She didn't seem to be bothered by the comment but she was aware of the difference in identities between herself and her children… She has seen Chinese migrants changed to 'western life (lives)' but 'I don't'. She explained further, 'Actually I'm fine to be Chinese. I keep the way I am'

How she identified herself (self identification) was congruent with how her daughters identified her (other identification) – I am (you are) Chinese - but the stigma attached to it was different. She was proud of China and proud to be Chinese… It's a conscious position she adopted even after her daughters pointed out her 'Chinese ways'. However, on the other hand, she sensed the negative stigma in her daughter's comment. 'Mum you are so Chinese' was seen as discriminatory by Katherine, with a smile though. The use of 'Chinese' as an adjective described the ways she dressed, shopped, talked and so on..

Excerpt 2:

Wilson identifies himself as 'an Australian with Chinese background'. He said he can't deny his Chinese background but he said that there is nothing unique about Chinese culture, that 'those nice characters that people usually attribute to Chinese culture … (are) completely universal'. Wilson said, 'I think … I will challenge anyone to give me anything unique about Chinese culture! Can you name one? Can you name one trait about Chinese culture? Everyone is talking about Chinese culture. Except cooking. Cooking is a technical thing…' At times when he felt he was different from the group (which he meant people from other cultures), he attributed this identification to 'individual' rather not cultural difference. Wilson is clear that he is not able to deny his ethnicity but he dismisses the concept of culture. By breaking the boundaries of different cultures, he seems to argue for commonalities and connections of himself to other cultures. By diffusing the difference between Chinese and non-Chinese, I feel that he is trying to adopt a more fluid location between them.

Excerpt 3:

Sue identifies herself as both Chinese **and** Australian when I asked her about her cultural identity. Chinese is her culture, her root. She is also an Australian because she contributes to the country. And for her, the identity of Australian and that of Chinese are not in conflict. She commented on the abandonment of home language in her husband's family who came from Holland two generations back, '…for me that's ridiculous because your culture is your root. And you say you can forget your root and you are someone with no soul. And that's ridiculous. And I don't see any conflicts in maintaining your cultural identity and participating and contributing to the country like a native Australian will do… and in some occasions I actually think I do more than some native Australians. They claim they are native but they do little to contribute to the country…' She is aware of the White

Author Name: Angel Mok
Contact Email:man-yee-angel.mok@students.mq.edu.au

Australia Policy and pressure of assimilation at that time.

According to Sue, 'it's the culture one represents which gives one the identity'. Culture is neither represented in language nor practices but 'the way of thinking'. 'I think differently from Australians'. One needs to have the culture and heritage to represent that culture. She said those who don't think the Chinese way are not Chinese, as 'they don't have the culture or heritage in them and they don't represent the Chinese culture'. She called those people 'banana', 'yellow skin and white inside'.

For Sue, there are differentiations within this Chinese identity. She distinguished herself from Chinese from Mainland China, who 'think differently'. She commented on how Mainland Chinese 'jumped up and down' to the Japanese government's denial on the invasion during the war and said, '*They* (Mainland Chinese) think differently'; whereas '*we* (Taiwanese) know the history and background but we seem to move on better than those Mainland Chinese'. She clearly distinguished her Taiwanese identity from that of Mainland Chinese with the pronouns 'We' for Taiwanese and 'they' for Mainland Chinese".

These excerpts, truncated and fragmented as they are, have drawn three very different images of Chinese living in Sydney. Each of these participants has adopted a different "reflexive position of one self in history and culture" (Ang, 2001, p.24) which reflects the big stories in their lives. As indicators of how they perceive Chineseness and their identities, we have seen that factors such as education, country of origin and length of stay are very limited. Their subject location should be understood from studying their life experiences and how they make sense of them.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have situated the discussion of Chinese students' mathematic performance within a cultural framework, and provided examples of how narratives allow the reality to emerge. Narrative is a powerful tool in that lived experiences are selected, organized and told by the speaker. Generalization cannot be drawn but meanings are made in how the speaker makes sense of the experiences they have lived in.

In our discussion of Chinese students' outstanding mathematics performance, we often hear the voices of the researchers, the teachers, the politicians, and the like. Very seldom do we hear the voices of Chinese parents and their children. And when researchers are interested in them, they are interested in *what* parents do to their children which might give them the answers to the question of 'why Chinese students do so well in mathematics?' Data are often quantified so an answer can be generated. Limited attention has been put in *why* they do so, the values as well as beliefs underpinning these choices.

Research data from six families have reinforced the need to listen to family's stories. They bring insights into the misconception that Chinese people can be categorized in one homogenous group.

Listening to their stories – Chinese families sharing their lived experiences in Australia and their children's mathematics learning
Author Name: Angel Mok
Contact Email:man-yee-angel.mok@students.mq.edu.au

Contrasting data urge researchers to stop thinking families as one group of people with little differentiation. Narrative approach serves as a most appropriate method of inquiry as well as representation of data. I would propose the use of narratives in future research with other ethnic groups in Australia, in order to disrupt the stereotypical discourses often portrayed in the public.

References

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011). Retrieved May 30, 2013, from http://www.abs.gov.au/

ACARA (2012). My school website. Retrieved May 29, 2013, from http://www.myschool.edu.au/

Ang, I. (1998). Migration of Chineseness: Ethnicity in th Postmodern World. Retrieved 1st Novermeber 2012 http://motspluriels.arts.uwa.edu.au/MP798ia.html

Ang, I. (2001). *On not speaking Chinese : living between Asia and the West* London: Routledge.

Bamberg, M. (2006). Stories: Big or small: Why do we care? *Narrative Inquiry, 16*(1), 139-147.

Biggs, J. (1996a). Learning, Schooling, and Socialization: A Chinese Soluation to a Western Problem. In S. Lau (Ed.), *Growing up the Chinese way: Chinese Child and Adolescent Development.* Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.

Biggs, J. (1996b). Western misperceptions of the Confucian-heritage learning culture. In D. Watkins & J. Biggs (Eds.), *The Chinese learner: cultural, psychological, and contextual influences.* Hong Kong/Melbourne: Comparative Education Research Centre/Australian Council for Educational Research.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.

Brubaker, R., & Cooper, F. (2000). Beyond identity. *Theory and Society, 29*(1), 1-47. doi: 10.1023/a:1007068714468

Chase, S. E. (2011). Narrative Inquiry: Still a Field in the Making. In Norman K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (4th ed., pp. 421-434): SAGE.

Chen, Chuansheng, & Stevenson, Harold W. (1995). Motivation and Mathematics Achievement: A Comparative Study of Asian-American, Caucasian-American, and East Asian High School Students. *Child Development, 66*(4), 1215-1234. doi: 10.2307/1131808

Chow, R. (1991). *Woman and Chinese Modernity.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Chow, R. (1998). Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem. *Boundary 2, 25*(3), 1-24. doi: 10.2307/303586

Clandinin, D., & Rosiek, L. (2007). Mapping a Landscape of Narrative Inquiry: Borderland Spaces and Tensions. In D. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Connelly, F.M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry. *Educational Researcher, 19*(5), 2-14.

Connelly, F.M., & Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative inquiry. In J. L. Green, C. G. & P. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (3rd ed., pp. 477-487). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Author Name: Angel Mok
Contact Email:man-yee-angel.mok@students.mq.edu.au

Dandy, J., & Nettelbeck, T. (2002). The Relationship Between IQ, Homework, Aspirations and Academic Achievement for Chinese, Vietnamese and Anglo-Celtic Australian School Children. *Educational Psychology: An International Journal of Experimental Educational Psychology, 22*(3), 267-275.

Ellingson, L. (2008). *Engaging Crystallization in Qualitative Research: An Introduction*: SAGE.

Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. (2000). Autoethnography, personal Narrative, Reflexivity. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 733-768). USA: Sage.

Freeman, M. (2006). Life "on holiday"?: In defense of big stories. *Narrative Inquiry, 16*(1), 131-138.

Georgakopoulou, A. (2006). Thinking big with small stories in narrative and identity analysis. *Narrative Inquiry, 16*(1), 122-130.

Hess, R., Chang, C.M. , & McDevitt, T. (1987). Cultural Variations in Family Beliefs About Children's Performance in Mathematics: Comparisons Among People's Republic of China, Chinese-American, and Caucasian-American Families. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 79*(2), 179-188.

Ho, C. (2011). 'My School' and others: Segregation and white flight. Retrieved from Australian Review of Public Affairs website: http://www.australianreview.net/digest/2011/05/ho.html

Hugo, G. (2008). A changing Diaspora: Recent Trends in Migration between China and Australia. *Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies, 2*, 82-116.

Huntsinger, C., Jose, P., Liaw, F.R., & Ching, W.D. (1997). Cultural Differences in Early Mathematics Learning: A Comparison of Euro-American, Chinese-American, and Taiwan-Chinese Families. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 21*(2), 371-388.

Kember, D. (2000). Misconceptions about the learning approaches, motivation and study practices of Asian students. *Higher Education, 40*(1), 99-121. doi: 10.1023/A:1004036826490

Kember, D., & Gow, L. (1991). A challenge to the anecdotal stereotype of the Asian student. *Studies in Higher Education, 16*(2), 117-128. doi: 10.1080/03075079112331382934

Khoo, S.E., & Birrell, B. (2002). The progress of young people of migrant origin in Australia *People and Place, 10*(2), 30-44.

Li, J. (2004). Parental expectations of Chinese immigrants: a folk theory about children's school achievement. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 7*(2).

Lynn, R, & Mikk, J. (2007). National differences in intelligence and educational attainment. *Intelligence, 35*(2), 115-121. doi: 10.1016/j.intell.2006.06.001

Macbeth, D. (2001). On "Reflexivity" in Qualitative Research: Two Readings, and a Third. *Qualitative Inquiry, 7*(1), 35-68. doi: 10.1177/107780040100700103

Martin, A. J., & Hau, K.T. (2010). Achievement Motivation among Chinese and Australian School Students: Assessing Differences of Kind and Differences of Degree. *International Journal of Testing, 10*(3), 274-294. doi: 10.1080/15305058.2010.482220

McInerney, Dennis M. (2008). Personal investment, culture and learning: Insights into school achievement across Anglo, Aboriginal, Asian and Lebanese students in Australia. *International Journal of Psychology, 43*(5), 870-879. doi: 10.1080/00207590701836364

Author Name: Angel Mok
Contact Email:man-yee-angel.mok@students.mq.edu.au

O'Leary, Z. (2010). *The essential guide to doing your research project*. London: Sage Publications.

Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). USA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Richardson, L., & St. Pierre, E. A. (2005). Writing: A Method of Inquiry. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.): SAGE.

Riessman, C. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*: SAGE.

Riessman, C., & Speedy, J. (2006). Narrative Inquiry in the Psychotherapy Professions: A Critical Review. . In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology.* (pp. 426-457). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Stevenson, H. , & Stigler, J. (1992). *The learning gap : why our schools are failing and what we can learn from Japanese and Chinese education*. New York: Summit Books.

Van Manen, M. (1997). *Researching lived experience: human science for an action sensitive pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Toronto, Ontario: The Althouse Press.

Vialle, W. (2013). The "Tiger Mother" factor: Curriculum, schooling and mentoring of Asian studetns in an Australian context. In Shane N. Phillipson, Heidrun Stoeger & A. Ziegler (Eds.), *Exceptionality in East Asia: Explorations in the Actiotope Model of Giftedness*: Routledge.

Wang, D. (2004). Family background factors and mathematics success: A comparison of Chinese and US students. *International Journal of Educational Research, 41*(1), 40-54. doi: 10.1016/j.ijer.2005.04.013

Wang, J., & Lin, E. (2005). Comparative Studies on U.S. and Chinese Mathematics Learning and the Implications for Standards-Based Mathematics Teaching Reform. *Educational Researcher, 34*(5), 3-13. doi: 10.2307/3700061

Watkins, D. (2000). Learning and Teaching: A cross-cultural perspective. *School Leadership & Management, 20*(2), 161-173. doi: 10.1080/13632430050011407