EMERGING CIVIC IDENTITY: UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN A PRIVATE AMERICAN SECONDARY SCHOOL AND THEIR DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIC IDENTITY

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DEDICATION

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Students of 21st century educational trends will note that in an increasingly global society, an unprecedented and increasing number of students are studying internationally (SVEP, 2014). The majority of those students are coming from China to the United States. Interest and enrollment in American educational institutions has gradually moved from graduate institutions, to colleges, to secondary schools. These students arrive in American secondary schools with conceptions about what it means to be a citizen and a perspective of themselves as citizens based on their past experiences at school and in society in China. As students in American schools, they learn about democracy and what it is like to live and interact in a democratic context in and out of the classroom.

My research focused on how twelve international students from China, studying at a private secondary school, described their past and current civic
experiences and how these experiences shaped their conception of citizenship and civic identity. In order to accomplish this, I interviewed the students using a semi-structured interview protocol, conducted focus groups, and utilized observational methods to collect the data for the study.

The study revealed that, due to their previous experiences, these students initially had great difficulty thinking and conceptualizing citizenship and civic identity in a broad context. The students lack of exposure to democratic normative behavior and minimal opportunities for civic engagement narrowed their initial conception of citizenship to the right of birth, and personally responsible behavior. My research also revealed that their experiences in school in the U.S. allow them to broaden this view to include not only personally responsible behavior, but also strong participatory behavior and the development of democratic skills and dispositions. Additionally, my research revealed that students engagement in school, in the classroom, in co-curricular activities and in service learning experiences contributed to the overall development of their civic identity.

Emerging from this work are several conclusions that may contribute to how schools with international students, especially ones where democratic norms are not well established, address the engagement of these students in school and in the classroom.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Students of 21st century educational trends will note that in an increasingly global society, an unprecedented and increasing number of learners are studying internationally (SVEP, 2014). The majority of those students are coming from China to the United States. These students will be uniquely poised to utilize their experience as multicultural agents in a global society. Many students come from families of position and influence in China and they seek an American educational experience (Du, 2001, p.39; Gaztambidé-Fernández, 2009, p.285). Interest and enrollment in American educational institutions has moved from graduate schools, to colleges, to secondary schools. Their American experience is beginning younger and is providing them with a more significant depth of cultural perspective. It also allows them to adapt to American culture and prepares them to assume the responsibilities of their own educational future.

I have lived this cross-cultural experience, first as a high school exchange student to a Gymnasium in Germany and then, after college, as a teacher living in La Paz, Bolivia for eighteen months. It was during this time that I became acutely aware of how my own perceptions of schooling, government, were shaped by my previous experiences both as a student and as a citizen growing up in the United States. Additionally at those times in which I was abroad, I was
challenged to question and reflect on my own beliefs and perspectives and open myself up to alternative ways of seeing and understanding.

My cross-cultural experiences are a part of who I am, and when I am confronted with a new situation or some issue that requires me to consider alternatives, I consider the ways that I needed to navigate a new culture or negotiate a new boundary. These experiences came freshly to mind when I heard about a recent conversation between a school administrator and a Chinese international student at a local private high school.

One late spring day in 2014, a young international student from China sat in the vice-principal’s office at Veritas1 High School. She had made an appointment with the vice-principal to discuss how the Chinese students could have a greater voice in the life and culture of the school. She proposed that the Chinese students form their own student government association. She had given the plan some consideration and in conversation with several other Chinese students had selected leaders who could be appointed to the four executive positions.

The vice-principal listened intently to the student and her plan, but working to balance the student’s enthusiasm and desire to participate in the life of the school, and the electoral student government process, she offered a more

1 A pseudonym
democratic solution. As I heard this story, I began to contrast the student’s request and her desire to be a participant in the life of the school, an important aim of citizenship education, with her inability to conceptualize how to do this within a democratic framework commonly accepted in all American high schools. This brief encounter with a bubbly, enthusiastic teenage Chinese young lady began my interest in the topic of this dissertation.

Veritas High School has educated hundreds international students for the past ten years and I became very interested in how the students’ education experiences, both in and out of the classroom, influenced not only their perceptions and understanding of democratic citizenship, but also how it affected the development of their own civic identity. The Chinese families that send their children to Veritas High School often talk about dreams and hopes for their children to have the opportunity to escape the “dehumanizing” testing culture of schooling in China. Families will pursue study opportunities in the United States, where their children will be able to learn in a school culture that is challenging, yet supportive of the emotional, social and creative growth of their children (Ming, 2001; Zhao, 2013). Parents who send their children to Veritas also appreciate the supportive culture and faith-based worldview that Veritas High School nurtures.

Researchers have documented growing numbers of Korean and Chinese students coming to the United States to study at mostly private American secondary schools (Dillon, 2013; Ly, 2008). According to information from the
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency and the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP), in 2014 over 37,597 non-immigrant students attended secondary schools in the United States using F-1 visas that enabled them to attend private American High Schools for up to four years (SEVP, 2014). Thirty-eight percent of those students are from China (SEVP, 2014). According to a recent Associated Press article,

The high schoolers want to escape the rat race at home, where students often study late into the night with little opportunity for extracurricular activities. They also believe studying in the U.S. will help them attain coveted spots at more prestigious American colleges. (Tang, 2014)

One Chinese student who decided to study in the U.S. stated “in China, everything you learn is in preparation for a test or entrance exam. There were no opportunities for me to choose my own classes and learn the things I was really interested in” (Dillon, 2013). The increase in the number of Chinese international students in private secondary schools across the United States from 4,503 in 2008 to 23,795 in 2013 has been a windfall for private institutions, which have faced declining enrollment and financial pressure amid the recession (Zhao, 2013, April 4). Yet, little is known or has been studied regarding the experiences of these students while in their host environment.

**Background and Context**

Veritas High School, serving grades 9-12 is located in Northern New Jersey and is the site of this research. This site was selected because, as a former Trustee of the school, I am aware of the growing international student
population at the school and have interacted with the students on many occasions. The school offers a strong college preparatory program as well as general and business programs for students going immediately to careers. State certified instructors teach their subjects from a Christian perspective. The school was recently recognized by a national school-ranking site “The Best Schools” as one of the top 50 Christian Schools in the United States and the system was recently honored with the School of Character award from the NJ State Department of Education. Veritas High school is situated within a larger K-12 school structure named Veritas School.

Veritas School has been dedicated to educating and challenging young people for Christian life and service since 1892 and has a parent governed non-denominational elected Board of Directors. While the school remains non-denominational, it receives substantial support from local churches, businesses, and alumni. This school is accredited by the Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges and is approved by the New Jersey State Department of Education (NJDOE).

Veritas School is a pre-K through 12th grade institution with three campuses strategically located in the New York metropolitan area. There are 710 students from over 40 communities and 140 churches reflecting a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The high school is located in Northern New Jersey and has 330 students. It has a thriving, diverse international program that includes students from China, Korea, Taiwan, Bolivia, Honduras, India, Italy, and
Japan. Many of the students are a part of Veritas’s homestay program that provides care for students, total immersion in English, and ongoing cultural education. The homestay program is comprised of Veritas families, friends, and alumni willing to assume the responsibility of having an international student stay at their house for the academic year. Each of these families is paid a sum of $1,200 per month to defer the costs of boarding, food, transportation, and cultural activities. The remainder of the international students who attend Veritas live with self-selected friends and family members who assume responsibility for the students while they study in the United States on F-1 visas. Each international student pays full tuition and an additional sum to cover the costs of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, insurance, and other program expenses. Like all of the students at Veritas School, additional fees are assessed depending on the extracurricular activities that the student joins.

Veritas High School has 65 students from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. With the exception of ESL, the academic program in which international students are enrolled is the same as all others at Veritas High School. As a result, the Chinese students attend social studies and civics classes and learn about the American story and its ideas of democracy. They are also engaged in other civic experiences through co-curricular activities, sports, and service learning experiences. This immersion in the American education system provides an unprecedented opportunity to study and perhaps to understand the formative
effect that an American high school experience may have on the development and conceptualization of citizenship and a student’s civic identity.

Demographics

The demographic distribution of the school by race in 2014 was as follows: 5.4% Black, 8.1% Hispanic, 22.7% Asian-International, 2% Asian-American, 2% other/mixed, and 59.8% White. Approximately 94% of students continue their education at four-year colleges, two-year colleges or business/technical schools. In the 2015-16 school year 47% of the domestic students entering ninth grade were new to the high school, meaning that they had not been enrolled in Veritas for their K-8 education. Fifty-five percent of the domestic students enrolled in the high school received some type of financial assistance from the school.

Program of Studies

The program of studies for the high school is similar to those of many other comprehensive public high schools in the area. The curriculum of the school closely follows the requirements of the NJDOE in all major subject areas. Students are required to take four years of English, four years of Social Studies, three years of Mathematics, three years of Science, and two years of a World Language. Students are also required to take two years of Fine Arts, four years of Physical Education and Health, as well as several other singleton classes (i.e. Financial Literacy) as required by the NJDOE. The school has adopted a modified 4x4-block schedule with 80-minute class periods, which allows for a
normal years worth of instruction in one semester. In addition to the regular program, there are also classes in religion offered from a Reformed (Calvinist) perspective and mandatory weekly chapel experiences for all students. The Reformed Calvinist perspective worldview to which the school adheres is not explicitly civic, but the theological underpinnings of this perspective provide a basis for engagement in all areas of life. From this perspective there is no sacred-secular dichotomy; all areas of life are “broken” and in need of redemption.

In 2015 the school was named a National School of Character by Character.org, a Washington D.C. based organization that facilitates school-based character development programs in both private and public schools nationally. In 2008, with student, staff, and parent input, the school developed a Core Values statement that reads: In pursuing the Character of Christ, we will – Seek Truth, Serve Others, Embrace Community, Exhibit Compassion, Develop Responsibility, and Strive for Excellence. The tagline for the Veritas School is “Engaging the Mind, Nurturing the Spirit and Transforming the World.” The school does not have an explicit civic mission other than that which can be construed from its Character Education, Core Values and tagline statements. The high school offers a broad array of extra-curricular activities including a full interscholastic athletic program for boys and girls, required opportunities for service learning called Faith-in-Action and an elected Student Government.
Significance and Rationale

The Chinese students who attend Veritas, like all students, arrive at their high school experience with thoughts and conceptions of civic life and how it may be lived in the public sphere. These Chinese students arrive with a history and experience that is unique to them and their previous upbringing and enculturation in China. However, as the world becomes more globalized and intercultural experiences and opportunities increase and become more common for students to study around the world, minimal studies exist on the effect that these experiences have on student citizenship and civic identity formation. Mitchell and Parker (2008) hypothesize that students, rather than identifying themselves in a static place or as a citizen of one nation or another, become “citizens in formation” and their allegiances and citizenship are flexible and malleable into often contradictory positions. This positioning is referenced by author Karin Fischer who, in her NY Times article: For Some Students, US Education is Losing Its Attraction, notes that students who return home to China are often referred to as “Haigui” or sea turtles referring to those with the world on their back and one foot in the homeland and another overseas or by the term “Haidai,” or seaweed, referring to those who are unable to anchor in either culture and find themselves washed up on shore (Fischer, 2014).

The adjustment of international students to American high schools is significant. There is an acculturation process as these students adapt to their new environment, learn a new language, and experience new values, beliefs,
and customs. Behavioral scientists and psychologists have studied this social and psychological process in immigrant communities and found that the acculturation process was also challenging for these students (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000; Miller, 2007; Abe-Kim, Okazaki, & Goto, 2001). There are some similarities to my study population and immigrant students, yet there are many differences that are distinct. The students may have a similar cultural adjustment, but at this time they do not wish to become dual citizens or seek full American citizenship. While there are various reasons why F-1 visa Chinese students attend private U.S. secondary schools, their educational experiences inevitably place them in learning environments, classrooms, and activities where they may also develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions of democratic citizenship that may contribute to their civic identity. These students typically fall outside the frame of current research that predominantly looks at the difficulties and successes of immigrant students in public schools across the U.S. Gaztambidé-Fernández (2009), a researcher of elite boarding schools in the U.S. stated, “It was clear to me from the little time I spent with international students that they did no share the experiences of immigrants in public schools” (p.285).

This qualitative exploratory study seeks to document and understand the lived experiences of 12 Chinese students at Veritas High School. In this study, I explored the journey of these international students and how it may have affected the development of civic identity. While this study endeavors to shed light on how their school experiences at Veritas affects their lives as “citizens in
formation," I also hope to contribute to the sparse research that exists on this population of students. To do so, I constructed this study to pursue answers to the following research questions:

**Research Questions**

1. How do Chinese students in a private American Secondary School conceptualize and understand their civic identities?
2. How do their experiences at Veritas contribute to that understanding and conceptualization?
3. How do these students perceive their past civic learning experiences in China compared to their current ones at Veritas?

These are critical questions to explore if we are to understand how the experiences of these Chinese international students at Veritas affect their overall development of civic identity.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

There is a paucity of research on the experiences of Chinese international students, or international students in general, in relation to the development of civic matters. While there is limited scholarly literature on identity formation and international students, there is, to my knowledge, no research regarding how the experiences of international students influence their development of civic identity while attending American secondary schools. My goal is to provide a foundation for understanding citizenship education and civic identity formation and the dominant theories that can be used as a lens to situate, collect, and analyze my research.

The scholarly literature on citizenship is extensive. The intent of this review is to narrow the lens of citizenship education to provide the foundation in terms of the research, literature, and theories surrounding citizenship education in American secondary schools. I shall highlight a review of the concepts of civic identity and how students develop this over time via experiences in school through both curricular and extra-curricular activities. I will juxtapose this with the scholarly literature about Chinese civic development. The theoretical framework established herein incorporates political socialization theory, a “good citizen” typology established by Westheimer and Kahne (2004), a typology of citizenship learning contexts suggested by the research of Biesta, Lawy and
Kelly (2009) and a framework of citizenship put forth by Lawy (2014). By doing so, this creates a framework for understanding the lived experiences of these international students' experiences.

**Citizenship Education**

Educational theorists from Horace Mann and John Dewey (1944) to Ernest Boyer (1990) and Diane Ravitch focused on citizenship education and how schools, both public and private, could foster the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and dispositions to nurture thoughtful democratic ideals in order to create productive citizens and thriving communities. From the inception of public education, fostering responsible citizenship in youth has always been a priority for American education. Schaps and Lewis (1998) argued that prior to Sputnik, citizenship education had been the primary goal of schooling and only recently had academic achievement and proficiency come to the foreground.

Citizenship education has received a tremendous amount of attention lately for many reasons. Questions about what constitutes good citizenship and proper civic education have been fueled by a widely perceived crisis in democratic life and citizenship in America (Galston, 2001; Galston 2007; Putnam, 2000). For many reasons, there is an explosion of interest in the concept of citizenship that is now widespread in many fields including education (Haste, 2010; Shuck & Helfenbein, 2015; Bringle, Clayton, & Bringle, 2015; Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan, 2010; Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). There are many
views and positions that researchers and authors take on citizenship education at schools ranging from whether citizenship education and development should even be an aspiration in schools, to arguing which type, theory or curriculum of citizenship education should predominate (Gutmann, 2000).

But what do we mean by citizenship? According to Abowitz and Harnish (2006) “citizenship confers membership, identity, values, and rights of participation and assumes a body of common political knowledge” (p. 653). The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) civic frameworks assert that civic education should be comprised of three distinct areas: Civic Knowledge, Intellectual/Civic skills, and Civic dispositions (NAEP, 2010). These three measures are interpreted differently depending on which theory of civic education is applied.

The work of Abowitz and Harnish (2006) identifies two predominant citizenship discourses that emerge from research. The two most common discourses found in American citizenship education are that of civic republicanism and liberalism. The identification and development of these “critical discourses” has invigorated study into the epistemological reasons fueling the overall concerns about civic disengagement of youth in America.

For the purpose of this study, I review the two predominant theories: civic republicanism and liberalism as well as provide a short review of several other forms of citizenship widely discussed in the field. The civic republican and liberal
discourses define and powerfully shape how society understands citizenship and the ways its institutions, such as schools, shape citizens. However, others may also contribute to our understanding of how these students engage civically and develop a civic identity.

*Civic Republicanism*

Civic republican discourse expresses the value of love and service to one’s political community on the local, state, and national level (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006; Dwyer, 2010). Civic republicans promote civic identity among young people characterized by a commitment to the political community, respect for its symbols, and active participation for its common good. Civic republicanism is especially common in many school texts and provides the foundation for numerous documents on civic standards and citizenship. A central feature of civic republicanism is one’s love of country as exemplified by patriotism. Additionally, civic republicanism requires identification with, and commitment to, community goals acquired in the process of education and active engagement and democratic processes (Ravitch & Viteritti, 2001; Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). Through these actions, citizens derive a sense of understanding and connection by engaging voluntarily with society to address its means and ends. From these common collective experiences, the values and norms developed create a social capital and sense of unity and cohesiveness (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006).
In civic republicanism, community service is an outgrowth of one’s identity within the community. Additionally, civic republicanism strongly values civic knowledge and civic literacy as an essential component of citizenship (Milner, 2002). This civic literacy is exemplified by seminal texts such as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and the Pledge of Allegiance of the United States.

In addition to civic knowledge, skills valued under this model are self-sacrifice, loyalty, patriotism, and respect. These skills are exemplified under civic republicanism’s duty to participate in service to one’s community. Damon (2001) defines this duty as,

An allegiance to a system of moral and political beliefs, a personal ideology of sorts, to which the young person forges a commitment or the emotional and moral concomitants to the beliefs or devotion to one’s community and a sense of responsibility to the society at large. (p.127)

According to this mindset, civic dispositions such as participating in society, engaging in discourse, behaving in a civil manner, accepting responsibility for one’s actions, becoming informed, voting, and taking action, inform an individual’s public consciousness. Again, these attributes or dispositions emerge as a duty to others in civic republican discourse. For civic republicans, responsibility is frequently juxtaposed with the idea of the rights of individuals as espoused by liberal democratic theory or liberalism.
Another widely espoused approach to citizenship in contemporary democratic debate is liberalism. Liberalism focuses on the rights of individuals to define a “good life” within imposed constraints that account for the rights of others. With this priority on individual rights, liberalism inherently focuses on the equality of all people, especially those who historically are marginalized and oppressed (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006; Dwyer, 2010).

One of the primary values affiliated with liberal discourse is that of individual autonomy. A person could argue that liberalism rejects adherence to standard institutional structures of governance as embodied by institutions, in favor of discourses that promote autonomy and individual liberty and critical consideration of all aspects of living, especially as it pertains to authority (Macedo, 2000; Abowitz & Harnish, 2006; Kymlicka, 1999). Liberal discourse also focuses on citizens as participants rather than subjects, and encourages and promotes dialogue, reasoning, deliberation and compromise, that recognize individuals as freethinking persons with the capacity to discern and critically analyze issues, problems, dilemmas, and controversies (Galston, 1995; Taylor, 1995; Parker, 2003). Citizenship education in this view is a process of education, inquiry, and creation, an active and restless process that human beings undertake to make sense of themselves, the world, and the relationship between the two (Gordon, 2009, p.53). Judith Torney-Purta (2002) asserts that ideal civic education experiences in a democracy enable students to develop
meaningful knowledge about the political and economic system, the ability to identify the strengths and challenges of democracy and the attributes of good citizenship, empowers them to participate in respectful discussions of important and potentially controversial issues, and makes them aware of behavior in a civil society and its organizations.

Both civic republicanism and liberal discourses of citizenship occupy important spaces in the dialogue about how best to nurture and shape future citizens in America. Because of their dominance, they are able to construct the language, values and norms of civic education, and life in America (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006, p.657). The language we use, and the values and normative experiences we have, create the climate in which citizenship is learned and reinforced. It is helpful to understand that civic republicanism and liberalism are poles in the discourse of citizenship as well as citizenship education. As such, there exists a spectrum of beliefs between these two ideal types that provide us with a context for understanding wider discussions of citizenship education and the development of civic identity (Dwyer, 2010).

*Other Models of Citizenship*

The previous conceptions of citizenship often assume that affinities for citizenship occur in a one-state, one-loyalty framework. When discussing international students, we become cognizant that this is not the only framework through which we can view citizenship. Many researchers conjecture that in
order to understand citizenship in a modern context, one must take into account the “flat” interconnected nature of life in the twenty-first century, the rise of a global economy, and the ability of people with economic means all over the world to live, conduct business, and have social and political relationships in countries other than where they were born (Friedman, 2005; Nussbaum, 1996; Banks, 2004).

Nussbaum (1996) argues that in a globalized world, the definition of citizenship should be more expansive and consider that as individuals engage in commerce and other activities on a global scale, they may not develop a fealty for one nation, but many. In this cosmopolitan framework, she argues that it is unrealistic to use more traditional and conventional models for citizenship when the world is so interconnected economically, politically and socially. Social media and other forms of communication, she argues, only serve to strengthen this model.

Others such as Aihwa Ong (2004) argue that when people live and conduct business in more than one country, such as occurs in the age we live, that we need to rethink citizenship education using a more flexible, transnational lens. Transnational communities are groups whose identity is not primarily based in a specific territory, but based on more transcending values and virtues that exist in each culture. Ong (2004) argues that it is entirely possible for people who live in more than one country to accept practices and conceptions of life in one
country and at the same time, without contradicting themselves, hold civic beliefs and values in a second country.

*What Kind of Citizen?*

As we consider how to understand discourses of citizenship, civic identity and civic engagement, Rubin (2007) provides caution that almost every model and instrument used to measure such engagement derives from the perspective of the designer of the instrument. This is, in her mind, a shortcoming of every instrument as by its very nature, does not take into consideration the “lived experiences of students” and greater “vernacular notions of citizenship” (p. 450). However, for the purposes of this study, frameworks are needed to use as a lenses through which to look at the area of civic engagement of the students. Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne (2004) have developed a flexible construct that serves the purposes of this study well. This model identifies three outcome models of a “good citizen.” They are the Personally Responsible Citizen, the Participatory Citizen and the Justice-Oriented Citizen (Table 1).

Each of these frames is founded in its own theoretical basis and has different goals and natural extensions of program and school curricula that would look quite different. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) also point out that these frames are not cumulative or to be used as a ladder. A program that focuses primarily on a participatory frame may also promote personally responsible citizenship, but an orientation towards justice may not be a “higher” calling for
that program or person. Likewise, a justice-oriented program or the actions of a justice-oriented citizen may not be focused in the same way as a participatory frame. Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) framework appears to assume a democratic operating framework in its outcomes. But, it may also be applied to other political frames. Indeed the personally responsible frame represented in the typology could also be categorized as a private or personal citizenship that the authors themselves admit could also apply to any framework with respect to citizenship.

As useful as Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) typology of a good citizen may be, it may also be helpful to use a lens that is focused less on outputs and outcomes than on inputs and experiences that contribute to civic engagement and civic identity. In support of the precepts of Rubin’s (2007) concern about the overall neglect of student experiences and voices in citizenship education and the development of civic identity, Lawy (2014) conjectures that education systems and schools typically assume that there are common assumptions, values and principles of democracy held and that there is an agreed model of citizenship to which students should aspire. As such, throughout their schooling years, young people should acquire knowledge and skills in order to be integrated into the values, culture, and principles of democratic life.
Civic Identity

The formation of one’s civic identity is a dialogic conversation involving knowledge and practice. Civic knowledge is defined by material that students are required to master. Civic engagement is defined by the degree to which a student is participating, or intends to participate, in local polity (Rubin, 2007). Typically, the data in these two areas are “grounded in investigators’ perceptions rather than students’ definitions of civic knowledge and as a result, often fail to capture students’ understandings or modes of engagement beyond those pre-defined by researchers” (Rubin, 2007, p. 450). International students and others who attend U.S. secondary schools develop and create meaning, identity, and a sense of themselves in the world by using a variety of resources, including pre-existing constructions of citizenship, ethnicity, race, gender, and social class. Studies of young people’s development of civic identity frequently overlook the meaning they make of their daily experiences with civic institutions and their agents nested within the surrounding cultural practices.

Civic identity as described by Nasir and Saxe (2003) is defined “not as purely essentialist properties of a static self, but rather as multi-faceted and dynamic, as people position themselves and are positioned in relation to varied social practices” (p. 170). While this theory is typically applied to citizen-students in U.S. schools, it is possible that international students will experience similar construction and development to their civic identity because of their experiences in U.S. schools. Law & Ng (2009) conjecture that citizenship is a dynamic,
context-bounded social construction, reinvented through the intertwined interactions of different actors in response to, and as a part of, social changes, including globalization (p. 854). Youniss, McClellan, and Yates (1997) argue “that civic knowledge and learning is something that is (or is not) attained, making a shift to the notion that civic identity is constructed or developed amid particular structures and practices” (p. 620). Kneffelkamp (2008) conjectures that civic identity consists of four essential characteristics: 1) It does not develop in isolation, but rather develops over time through engagement with others who bring a wide variety of interpretations, life experiences, and characteristics to any discussion of moral dilemmas, 2) Civic identity is not the same as, but is deeply connected to, complex intellectual and ethical development, 3) Civic identity is a holistic practice requiring an integration of critical thinking and capacity for empathy and, 4) Civic identity becomes a deliberately chosen and repeatedly enacted aspect of the self (p. 2-3). Kneffelkamp (2008) argues that:

Individuals with a mature sense of identity are both idealistic and realistic, patient and persistent, committed to thoughtful engagement and aware that others may engage differently. They see their role in life as contributing to the long-term greater good. And perhaps more importantly, they have the courage to act. (p.3)
### Table 1

#### Kinds of Citizens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personally Responsible Citizen</th>
<th>Participatory Citizen</th>
<th>Justice Oriented Citizen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts responsibly in his/her community</td>
<td>Active member of community organizations and/or improvement efforts</td>
<td>Critically assesses social, political, and economic structures to see beyond surface causes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works and pays taxes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obeys laws</td>
<td>Organizes community efforts to care for those in need, promote economic development, or clean up environment</td>
<td>Seeks out and addresses areas of injustice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recycles, gives blood</td>
<td>Knows how government agencies work</td>
<td>Knows about democratic social movements and how to effect systemic change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers to lend a hand in times of crisis</td>
<td>Knows strategies for accomplishing collective tasks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sample Action:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributes food to a food drive</td>
<td>Helps organize the food drive</td>
<td>Explores why people are hungry and acts to solve root causes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Core Assumptions:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must have good character; they must be honest, responsible, and law abiding members of a community</td>
<td>To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must actively participate and take leadership positions within established systems and community structures</td>
<td>To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must question debate and change established systems and structures that reproduce patterns of injustice over time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aihwa Ong (1999) notes that, “seldom is attention focused on the everyday processes whereby people, especially immigrants, are made into subjects of a particular nation's state” (p. 263). Soliciting this perspective is important for understanding the nature of diverse students’ civic identities and the part that formal and informal civic education plays and may play in the development of these identities. Rubin’s study conducted in four diverse U.S. high schools included immigrant students and those that recently emigrated to the United States. In the study she demonstrated that students in American schools developed civic identities from an array of sources that reached far beyond civics lessons and textbooks. Students’ civic orientations were shaped through their daily experiences with particular social, economic, institutional, political and historical contexts (Rubin, 2007).

Researchers argue that an open school and classroom culture and climate may facilitate the development of skills and dispositions that encourage student engagement and the development of civic identity (Hess, 2009; McAvoy & Hess, 2013; Parker, 2003). In other words, how schools organize themselves, and how teachers structure lessons and create a culture of respect and trust in the classroom, may be determinative in the development of civic identity. The context of international students’ educational experiences in both China and the U.S. provides a rich opportunity to understand how these students develop their sense of a civic self.
Chinese Civic and Political Education

In order to understand the student population in this study, it is important to understand enough about the context of their previous educational and civic experiences. It is suggested that China is the oldest continuously existing civilization on the planet. While this ongoing continuous history is significant and relevant to the Chinese today in developing national pride and an understanding of the cultural and political richness of China’s past, when discussing the notion of citizenship, civic education, political attitudes, and ideological-political education in modern China, it is most helpful to begin in the twentieth century with the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in China in 1949.

The modern concept of citizenship itself is considered by many Chinese to be a western notion.

Citizenship is the relationship of the individual to the nation-state, which includes the individual's rights, obligations and responsibilities. In Western societies, the concept of citizenship stresses the role and place of the individual in the state’s political, ideological, juristic and public systems. (Wan, 2004, p. 363)

Up until the 1990’s and the exponential growth of China’s socialist market-based economy, the concept of citizenship was viewed as requirement of Western democratic societies for the individual’s political socialization and included knowledge of social political systems, attitudes, and participation skills. Chinese “citizenship” was conferred to all Chinese people and the constitution outlined
their rights and responsibilities as citizens, but because the definition was more a legal one than a politically or socially constructed or enacted one, no one used or referred to the term.

Like all modern democratic societies and perhaps all modern societies and cultures, schools were places where young people gathered to learn many things. Throughout the history of the PRC, schools and other institutions were responsible for shaping the Chinese peoples’ knowledge, attitudes, and behavior towards society, the state and the nation through education in politics, history, and morals. The three forms of this political education have been understood as education for ideological-political education, moral education and patriotic ideas (Fairbrother, 2003). Li (1990) argues that political education in modern China often acts as a form of “political indoctrination” designed for the stabilization of government, and that it appears that changes in the content of textbooks and literature are a reflection of changes in political leadership and policies. In this context, the political education of students in China may be seen as a reflection of the ongoing struggle and tension within the CCP to maintain legitimacy among its people as expansive, government-led, social, and political programs such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution were instituted in China. The textbooks and political literature of these times reflect a strong revolutionary tone and highlight the actions and attitudes of individuals with strong Marxist beliefs as reflected by Mao Zedong (Martin, 1975). The educational materials of the time also reflected a strong sentiment that encouraged the Chinese people to
continue the revolutionary zeal of its communist leaders in an economic manner
so that China could surpass capitalist nations within 50 years (Fairbrother, 2003).

This brief review of political and economic history is presented to situate
the more recent political and economic developments in China over the past
thirty years that have deeply affected economic, political, social and educational
policy in China. These changes have also have reverberations throughout the
world. The unprecedented prosperity of China has resulted in thousands of
students attending secondary schools in the U.S. and elsewhere outside of
China.

In 1982, in order to “win back” the confidence of the youth and the nation,
the CCP undertook new initiatives directed at students in schools. The two most
significant ideological shifts were the inclusion of patriotism throughout all school
curricula and the reframing of capitalism through a socialist-Marxian lens. The
CCP, the State Education Commission, and national leaders in the 1980’s and
1990’s all called for patriotism to be placed in the forefront of moral education
(Fairbrother, 2003). Additionally, rather than fight against the ills of capitalism,
textbooks and curricula were revised to promote the benefits of a socialist system
of government that embraced elements of market-based capitalism that
promoted economic expansion and growth.

Patriotic education rose to the forefront of every institution’s agenda.
Schools, all levels of government, journalism, film, women’s associations not to
mention the military, were called upon to develop the patriotism of China’s youth. Patriotic education was infused at all levels of school including devotion to national symbols such as the flag, national emblem, and national anthem.

Patriotic education not only transmits knowledge about the nation, but is used to shape attitudes as well. The most basic of these is love of nation, specifically the People’s Republic of China, and correspondingly and understanding that love for the nation, the party, and socialism are indistinguishable. (Fairbrother, 2003, p. 64)

It is under the guise of patriotism that men, women, and youth in China were responsible for guiding the peaceful evolution of Chinese society.

It is in this context that the idea of modern Chinese citizenship emerges as students are encouraged to consider how their future contributions will build the strength of the nation. Modern Chinese students are educated about their rights and responsibilities and even “encouraged” to pursue their own interests. Simultaneously, they are also reminded that these interests are to be second to the overall development of the nation’s interests and and those of the CCP.

The latest set of school reforms in China reflects their overall growth and strength as a nation, as well as position in the global economy. The new curriculum embodies the basic characteristics of comprehensive education, such as taking into account the student’s physical and psychological development, as well as adapting to the requirements of social progress, economic development, and science and technology development (Wan, 2004). In 2002, the President of China, Jiang Zemin stated that “in today’s world the competition for national
power is manifested increasingly in the competition for economic strength, national defense, and national cohesion” (Jiang Zemin as quoted in Wan, 2004, p. 369).

It is in this educational and political context that the students who attend American secondary schools have been steeped. These students arrive at our classroom doors with strong patriotic and nationalist sentiments towards their homeland. While their conceptions of citizenship are different from our own, they create a basis from which to explore how their time with us in the U.S. impacts their overall development of civic identity.

**Civic Learning, Engagement, and Participation in School**

High school students develop their conceptions of democracy and citizenship in many ways. Researchers agree that democratic citizenship may be learned in classrooms, in school-based organizations, clubs and sports, and through service learning projects (Schaps & Lewis, 2008; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Morgan & Streb, 2001; Almond, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Just how students learn about civics and the most effective ways to learn them is a subject of great discussion. Schools in America educate for democratic citizenship in many different ways. Certainly, this is accomplished by transmitting knowledge and content of American democracy to students in classrooms, but as important as this is, there is an informal curriculum of relationships, classroom management and discipline, and organizational climate and policies (Schaps and Lewis, 1998;
Hess, 2009; McAvoy & Hess, 2013; Torney-Purta, 2002). Still others (Flanagan, 2003; Flanagan, Stoppa, Syvertsen, & Stout, 2010; and Sullivan & Transue, 1999) conjecture that interpersonal and social trust that result from interactions with others in the school community including teachers and administrators are formative factors when investigating student engagement and the motivation for participation. This permits the development of local community through the experiences of the students on a daily basis in classrooms that foster a caring culture and inclusive community (Schaps & Lewis, 1998, Hess, 2009). When caring and influential communities of students and teachers develop, commitments to each other’s learning, growth, and welfare also arise. It is within these communities, and others, that students develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions that help them become integral parts of a school community and participants in an active civic democratic culture.

Hess (2002) advanced on of the challenges of developing citizenship skills and dispositions in adolescence and asserted that students in classroom experiences often felt that other students could criticize their beliefs and ideas. In addition, researchers have found that students who perceived that others around them were not like-minded in their opinions, tended not to express them (Glynn, Hayes, & Shanahan, 1997). Due to these factors, it is often difficult for educators to create dynamic classroom discussions. The discussion of political topics, current events, and controversial issues is considered by many to be a primary way of preparing students for further civic engagement (Parker, 2003). This idea
is particularly important because it highlights many challenges and illuminates the need for strategies for school teachers in inducting young people into political conversations that are essential in a deliberative democracy (Fishkin, 1991; Hess, 2009; Hess & Avery, 2008).

One study that provides a helpful benchmark for political theorists and educators to consider in civic education programs is the International Education Association (IEA) Civic Education Study (Torney-Purta, 2002). This study identified three important, primary elements of civic education at schools; the formal curriculum, the culture of the classroom, and the culture of the school (Torney-Purta, 2002). While many of the findings reveal a relatively optimistic view about the potential of civic education and schools in the U.S. and elsewhere, they also identify many challenges. In the study, classroom climate and community dimensions of a positive civic environment develop where students can practice their knowledge and apply it to interpersonal situations and experiences. The IEA study also identified that a sense of efficacy at school, school culture and classroom provided a foundation for students for collaborating with peers in solving school problems.

Another way in which the attributes of democratic citizenship are developed is through in-school service learning or community service. Service learning has been shown to be an effective way of preparing students for citizenship (Morgan & Streb, 2001). Service learning provides opportunities for students to foster the learning and acquisition of skills and dispositions that gird
citizenship education (Kahne & Sporte, 2008). The thought is that while students may learn knowledge and concepts of democracy in class, it is in the practice of this knowledge that develops meaning. Putting knowledge into action realizes the meaning of citizenship for many students and fosters an emerging civic identity.

**Political Socialization**

Political socialization is the lifelong process by which people form ideas about politics and acquire political values and the process by which citizenship orientations are transmitted (Owen, 2008). Political socialization theorists believe that there are “pre-cursive” forms of political identity (Hyman, 1959) that take shape in schools all across America. Central to their argument over time is that schools are primary places of political socialization and that they influence the developing political and citizenship ideals of students. While political socialization theory has changed over time since Almond and Verba’s (1963) seminal work, there have been many constants. Easton and Dennis (1967) argue that,

> Every society introduces its members to the political system very early in the life cycle. To the extent that the maturing members absorb and become attached to the overarching goals of the system and its basic norms and come to approve of its structure of authority as legitimate, we can say that they are learning to contribute support to the regime. (p. 25)

Recently, theorists have taken up this work and included developmental and psychological, cognitive, and social theories of learning (Flanagan, Cumsille, Gill, & Gallay, 2007). The more recent work of these theorists has confirmed some of the earlier work of Almond and Verba (1963) and added to the volumes
of more current research that point to the importance of schools, and the
developmental socialization process that takes place within them, to help
students form civic identities and values. According to many researchers
(Flanagan, et al., 2007; Parker, 2001; Ehman, 1980; Gimpel, Lay & Schuknecht,
2003), school and classroom climate and culture, play a pivotal role in the
political socialization process. Almond and Verba (1963) propose that political
socialization has a major impact when considering how students perceive
authority and their ability to influence decisions that are made in and out of
school. “Opportunities to participate in decisions might convince him of his
competence, while thwarted influence attempts might lead to the opposite
conclusion” (Almond & Verba, 1963, p. 368).

In addition, the IEA study of 14-year-old students in 28 countries
confirmed some of the same precepts (Torney-Purta, 2002). The developmental
aspects of these studies have not ignored the importance of adolescence as the
time when identity formation is in complete focus (Erikson, 1968). The students
who are in this study fall into that time in their lives when their identity formation
is an ongoing construction. In fact, the subjects of my study are almost at the end
of that curve. While there is no universally agreed upon age of adulthood, as it
varies across cultures, in the U.S. we argue that these students are adults with
the full rights and responsibilities of citizenship. The habits and ties that an 18-
year-old student has developed prior to adulthood, according to theorists, put
them on a civic path that may be predictable (Gimpel, et al., 2003).
Researchers argue that the view of political socialization and broader socialization in schools articulate a *citizenship-as-achievement* model that posits the importance of future implications of formal education and experiences of students as they mature into “good citizens” (Lawy, 2014; Biesta, Lawy, & Kelly, 2009). Such a model relies heavily on the assumption that students enter dimensions of their citizenship education with a citizenship deficit and assume that students are *tabula rasa*.

Lawy (2014) and others contend that another model, *citizenship-in-practice*, may be more compelling to address perceived shortcomings in the *citizenship-as-achievement* model and may take into account the “lived experiences” of students as Rubin (2007) suggests. The *citizenship-as-practice* model holds that students construct their understanding and conceptualization of citizenship and identity through experiences and contexts (Lawy, 2014, p. 602). Thus, rather than assume that there is an archetype of a good citizen and that citizenship is more or less a fixed idea to be achieved, we may understand that young people develop their conceptions of citizenship and identity over time and place through various contexts, practices, interactions, and relationships.

Biesta, et al.’s (2009) previous findings, in their study to understand ways in which young people, aged 13-21, learn democratic citizenship through participation in a range of formal and informal practices communities, suggest
that the different contexts where students learn to act and be, the relationships within those contexts, and the prior dispositions of the young people all contribute to their citizenship learning. Biesta et al. (2009) propose there are inherently four types of different contexts that provide students with different opportunities for acting and being: unavoidable, compulsory, voluntary and ambiguous. Rather than Westhiemer and Kahne’s (2004) model of a good citizen, which identifies the outputs and actions of types of citizens, this model proposes an input example that addresses the inner workings and experiences of the students.

Biesta’s (2009) typology may be a helpful lens to understand the dynamics of citizen learning in that it helps to “understand the different ways in which opportunities for acting, being, and learning are related to contextual characteristics” (Biesta, et al., 2009, p. 18). The second main finding of Biesta et al. (2009) was that the impact of different contexts was mediated by the relationships within contexts and those broader relational aspects concerning the organization and structuring of young people’s experiences across cultural boundaries was significant. The third finding was that opportunities for young people for citizenship learning were not only dependent on contexts and relationships, but also conditional upon their individual dispositions- the different ways in which they approach individual relationships and situations (p.19).
Conclusion

It is using these literatures and theoretical constructs that we may focus our lens on the emerging citizenship education and developing civic identity of these students. We may begin to understand levels of engagement in school, what facilitates or inhibits that engagement and participation, and ultimately begin to understand the evolving perspectives of the students and their construction of civic identity.
Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

This section describes the process and methods used to study the developing civic identity of Chinese International students who are attending the Veritas School. It begins with a brief description of the objectives of the study and follows with explanations about the site and participant selection criteria, the specific methods and processes in use to collect the data, how I address my positionality in the study, and validity threats. The section ends with an explanation of the data analysis process and efforts that I made to ensure the quality of the data.

Overview

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Chinese students who attend secondary school in the U.S. using the lenses of citizenship education, civic identity formation and the contexts of their current and previous school experiences. Civic identity is a developmental process that comes about through formal and informal learning and experience (Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997). This qualitative phenomenological study captures how the students describe their civic identity and conceptions of citizenship in both a Chinese and American context. It also solicits their perceptions and experiences in both their Chinese and American schooling experiences. In detailing these experiences in China and the U.S., I am interested not only in understanding
their conceptions of citizenship and civic identity, but how they arrived at these ideas.

This study is designed to describe the meaning or “essence” of the lived experiences of the students in school (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Creswell, 2014). Colaizzi asserted that the success of phenomenological research depends on the extent to which the research questions touched the lived experiences of participants rather than theoretical knowledge (Colaizzi, 1978 as cited in Creswell, 2013). The phenomenological approach may also provide a deeper understanding of the students’ perceptions and experiences, especially the meaning that they give to events, concepts and issues (Knapp, 2007). To date, the experiences of Chinese students in private American secondary schools have not been studied with an eye towards understanding how their school experiences affect their formation of civic identity. It is my intention not only to document their experiences, but also to understand the larger framework of how their formal and informal experiences converge in their understanding of citizenship and civic identity as well as implications for international students at Veritas. Due to the limited nature of the study and its specific context, the work may not be generalizable. It may however, assist others who desire to explore a topic of this genre with other international students in other school specific contexts. In any school setting, it can be expected that the shared experiences of the students may be different in that all learning is socially constructed in an environment that has inherent variety in students, classrooms, teachers and
taught curriculum. This research provides me with the opportunity to study this experience with an identified unique group of students.

**Research Setting**

Twelve interviews and two focus groups were conducted at the Veritas High School in Northern New Jersey. The interviews and focus groups occurred during the school day with arrangement coordinated by the International Student Director. I was also given the opportunity to interact with students informally in the cafeteria, library, hallways and classroom.

Veritas High School uses a modified 4X4 block schedule with 80-minute core instructional periods. In this model students are able to complete a full year course in one semester. There are many advantages to the block format, but one of the disadvantages is the consistency that courses are offered. In a study about citizenship and civic identity it may have been helpful to look at the curriculum and talk with the students about their coursework, but in this case there was little consistency across the group in which classes the students took and no common framework could be established. Due to this limitation, this study focuses primarily on the “lived experiences” of students in the school and classroom that may provide a more useful lens to understand the students (Rubin, 2007). It is also in this context that we can understand the importance of classroom climate and culture (Torney-Purta, 2002; Schaps & Lewis, 1998), the effect of student engagement (Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Morgan & Streb, 2001),
how students are socialized (Almond & Verba, 1963; Owen, 2008; Gimpel et al., 2003; Flanagan et al., 2007), and how the actions of teachers and administrators create spaces where students may develop trust, voice and student agency (Parker, 2003; Hess, 2002; McAvoy & Hess, 2013; Flanagan, 2003).

**Participant Selection Criteria**

The study spanned the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years. In 2014-15 there were seventy-one International Students at Veritas School and forty-five of the students were Chinese. In the 2015-16 school year, there were sixty-six International Students at the school and forty-seven of them were Chinese. Using administrative data provided by the school, and with assistance from the Principal and International Student Coordinator, I purposively selected the Chinese students for this study. The International Student population is fluid and there were several criteria that I had established to select the students. The students needed to be educated in public schools in Mainland China prior to entering Veritas High School. Other Chinese students attend Veritas, but they are from diverse backgrounds that include Hong Kong and Taiwan as well as students who are Chinese citizens but have lived outside of China for the bulk of their lives. From this pool of potential students, I selected students who attended Veritas for at least one year and who were 18, or almost 18 years old. Students also needed to be conversational in English and be successful as demonstrated by their grades. Twelve students were selected to participate in the study. Nine were female and three were male.
Table 2

Research Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name+</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Enrollment In Years</th>
<th>Interests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Shanxi</td>
<td>Taiyuan</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>ISL*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelsie</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Shandong</td>
<td>Rizhao</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iris</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Hebei</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avril</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Hebei</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>tennis, ISL*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esther</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Zhejiang</td>
<td>Hangzhou</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>ISL*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Liaoning</td>
<td>Dalian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>film</td>
</tr>
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<td>Lavender</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Zhengjiang</td>
<td>Hangzhou</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>speeches</td>
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<tr>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Pudong</td>
<td>Shanghai</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Jiangsu</td>
<td>Yancheng</td>
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<td>basketball</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Zhengjiang</td>
<td>Fenghua</td>
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<td>Art</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eileen</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Pudong</td>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>internet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ American names  *International Leadership Team

Using a semi-structured interview protocol, I conducted interviews with the twelve students for between 55 and 75 minutes. All interviewees answered the same primary interview questions (Appendix A) that served as a basis to understand and interpret their civic identity and experiences in China and at Veritas. I made an audio recording of all interviews and had them transcribed using an available service. I then reread each interview multiple times with the
recording to ensure accuracy. To preserve the anonymity of the Chinese participants, all interviewees were given American names.

Follow-up interviews and check-ins were an ongoing part of my work. This was especially important considering the potential language issues that inevitably arose and I used these follow-ups as opportunities to clarify what was said and to ensure that I had captured their words and ideas accurately. Two of the students were interviewed in late spring of 2015 before they were matriculated to college. Prior to their departure, I reviewed and studied their transcripts and met with them briefly to follow up on any questions that remained from their interviews. These two students were not a part of the focus groups.

**Methods and Data Collection**

The section describes the methods used to study the students at Veritas. It provides a framework to understand the structure of and purpose of the student interviews, the focus groups, as well as the use of classroom observations, research memos, and field notes that I collected over time. In addition, two types of administrative data were collected and reviewed. The first was student information including grades, date of birth, date of entry into Veritas, and student home city or town. The second type of data collected and reviewed included school information such as mission and vision statements, the goals and functioning of the service learning program called Faith in Action, and the School of Character Application that was submitted in 2014.
Participant Interviews

The nature of this study required that I ask questions that caused the participants to reflect on their experiences while in school both in China and in the U.S. as well as their conceptions of citizenship in general. To do so, I used a semi-structured interview format, foregrounding the experiences of the students themselves, as I wished to hear their interpretations and perceptions of their experiences. In a qualitative study, in order for the subjects to think as deeply, thoughtfully, and elaborately about their experiences as possible, it is recommended that interviews be as unstructured as possible; however, some structure is required to stay on topic (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This semi-structured interview format also provided me with the opportunity to ask follow-up questions for clarification and expansion of their ideas (Maxwell, 2013). While students openly and willingly answered all questions related to their current experiences in the U.S. and their former ones in China, the questions about citizenship were more challenging. For many of the students in my study, like most of students of the same age in classrooms around the U.S., citizenship was not something they had deeply considered. I needed to restate and rephrase my questions into contexts that were clearly understood. It was also important to me, and I think to them, that when asking about certain topics such as citizenship in the U.S., the students were clear about the fact that I was not asking them as citizens of the U.S., but rather what their perceptions about citizenship and civic
identity were based on their formal and informal experiences in China and the U.S.

Focus Groups

After interviewing students individually, I conducted two focus groups with selected participants depending on the topic or issue to be discussed. A focus group interview is defined as a “carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions in a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (Krueger, 2009, p. 2). Ravitch and Riggan (2012) opine that focus groups allow “interpretations and descriptions of identity to overlap and interact in a social setting, allowing participants to co-construct or further explain key themes together, and to articulate differences and similarities in their perceptions and experiences” (p. 74). It was also my intention to have students discuss their experiences together to promote a conversation among students about a topic that they may have not ever explored or considered. In consultation with my dissertation chair, one of the focus groups was selected randomly and one was selected to include only females. This was done because of the higher percentage of females in the study and to create a possible atmosphere where the female participants may be less self-conscious about speaking in a group.

School and Classroom Observations

I had the opportunity to interact informally with these students on several occasions including a trip to Chinatown in Flushing Queens and several informal
cultural celebrations organized by the International Student Leadership Team that occurred at the school. These informal school observations were also a means for me to collect important data kept in a journal to use for later analysis. Field notes and jottings during the interviews were also part of my data collection. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) discuss the importance of research writing and notes in that these notes allow us to “identify themes and patterns as they emerge in context” (p. 154).

I also visited seven classrooms and teachers who were mentioned by the students. This provided me with insight into classroom experiences and helped me validate and triangulate the students’ statements about classroom practices, climate, and culture. While in the classrooms, I primarily sought data regarding student participation, the degree of openness or closed-ness of the class, and the culture and climate that the teacher had established. As in my informal observations, I kept field notes of my experiences in a journal.

Research Memos and Journaling

During the study, it was also important to explore my own reflections on the interviews as I worked to make sense of an interview or a student response. To do so, I created memos to make sense of what I had heard and experienced and a way for me to document the emotions and tone in the interviews. According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) “memos are typically a rapid way of capturing thoughts that occur through data collection, data condensation,
data display, conclusion drawing, conclusion testing and final reporting” (p. 96). I also created memos while coding and reflecting on the ongoing analysis of the data. This was very helpful as I processed the student interview data.

**Sequencing Methods**

I began by reviewing the administrative data pertaining to the students with the principal and the International Student Coordinator and then conducted the interviews. Throughout the process of the interviews, I reviewed the school data particular to the service learning program, the School of Character application and vision and mission statements. Following initial first round coding, I conducted the two focus groups. For classroom observations, I conducted them in the classrooms of the teachers who were brought up by the students consistently as having an open positive classroom climate and culture. Informal observations occurred in various places throughout the school on the days when I was present to conduct interviews.

**Researcher Role and Positionality**

There are several issues of which I am aware regarding my role as researcher and my positionality within the context of the research study. First, I am the Veritas High School Principal’s spouse. My wife is known and well respected by the students and their parents and occupies a significant position of leadership and authority within the school. Asian students typically have a high regard for education leaders and the fact that I am connected to the principal is
both a help and possible hindrance. Rubin and Rubin (2012) highlight that in cross-cultural interviews “groups differ in how they react to their differing perceptions of the status of the researcher. Interviewees may answer differently depending on whether they think the questions are coming from someone of higher or lower status” (p. 181). To address this situation, I ensured that the interviews were completed in a space considered common to the International Students. There is an International Student Office and sitting area connected to a classroom and this space provided the right balance of privacy and openness.

I also, wanted to remind the students that their participation was voluntary and that any time they felt uncomfortable or wanted to stop that would be acceptable.

Another situation that I need to be mindful of is how my white, male, American, native English speaking positionality may affect how comfortable the international students are with me and how responsive they may be during a cross-cultural interview. There were several issues of which I was aware in this context. First, the interviewees are not native English speakers and while all of the Chinese students were juniors or seniors who had spent at least one year in the school, their limitations in English required me to restate and rephrase some my questions. In addition, I needed to “pitch the level of my English to the interviewee’s level of competence [while] neither overshooting or undershooting the target” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p.186). I think my overall positionality as a researcher was limited because I have known many of these students casually.
prior to the start of the study. The fact that they are all over 18 years old and slightly more mature was of great benefit.

Validity

An important element beyond the researcher role and my own positionality as a researcher is establishing the trustworthiness of the study. Lincoln and Guba identify four constructs that may be used to establish the trustworthiness in a qualitative study. They are: 1) Credibility in preference to internal validity, 2) Transferability in preference to external validity/generalizability, 3) Dependability in preference to reliability and (4.) Confirmability in preference to objectivity (Lincoln & Guba as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 246).

In addressing credibility, I am familiar with both the context of the interviewees and know them as students in the school. Additionally, prior to the interviews, I visited the school several times to establish myself in the context of the school, which should have assisted with creating credibility. Semi-structured Interviews with each participant were audio-recorded in a common location for the students. I also established informal member checking opportunities with participants throughout the study. While transferability of a qualitative study could be difficult, my interviews were of sufficient length to gather some thick description of the experiences of the students. In an effort to establish dependability, I built in informal member checks for responses that I questioned and wanted to clarify. I also created two focus groups that provided the students
with opportunities to share their own experiences with others. In addition, I kept jottings and memos from my interviews to help contextualize the responses of the students and create a dialogic relationship that informed the reading of the transcribed interviews. Finally, to help confirm my method, I pilot tested the questions with one international student who was not involved in the study.

A threat to the validity of my study was researcher bias. It was no surprise that I had constructed a study that sought to look at the effects of the experiences that Chinese students had while attending their Chinese school and a U.S. high school. I cannot eliminate my bias in assuming that there is some effect in this regard, but I can diminish it. Maxwell (2013) posits that the validity of qualitative conclusions is threatened by the selection of data that fit the researcher’s existing theory, goals, or preconceptions and the selection of data that ‘stand out’ to the researcher (p. 124). First, I am aware of this bias and that is a first line of defense. Second, I used triangulation as a layering of corroborating evidence for codes that emerged from my data, which I believe brought integrity to the conclusions. I concluded that the methods that I used to collect my data: semi-structured interviews, two focus groups for comparison purposes, classroom field notes, and jottings and journal entries from my informal visits assisted me in keeping a check on my own biases.
Data Analysis

In a qualitative study, especially one that is exploratory, I felt it was important that I regularly review my data. Each time there is an interaction and after each interview, there is an element of analysis that may take place. Emerson et al. (1999) comment that “analysis should pervade all phases of the research enterprise” (p. 144). In the semi-structured interviews student emic descriptions provided initial fodder for the early codes that emerged from these conversations. As needed, I conducted follow-up interviews to clarify statements and issues related to the initial interviews, especially those pertaining to language issues that arose in my transcripts. After each interview was transcribed and read, I created memos that reflected initial impressions from the interview and my reflections and jottings.

Emerson et al. (1995) believe that the initial step of qualitative analysis begins with reading the interview transcripts, observational notes, or documents that are to be analyzed. Using an inductive approach that allowed the themes, events, examples and perceptions to emerge organically, I began setting up my coding scheme for the interviews. My coding scheme was two-fold. Initially, as suggested by Rubin and Rubin (2012), I began by looking to code the themes and concepts that I asked about (p.195). In order to be attuned to the information received to glean new insights from the interviews, I also used an emergent, open-coding strategy or grounded theory model that was also conducive to an inductive analysis (Maxwell, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).
I began my formal coding using Dedoose software with two interviews primarily using descriptive and values coding. Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) state that descriptive coding is particularly helpful for beginning qualitative researchers and value coding is most appropriate for studies that explore issues related to identity and culture (p. 74-75). Descriptive codes allowed me to summarize some data in a word or short phrase. Then, after initially coding the two interviews, I reduced and combined the existing codes into like areas. After importing the remainder of my interview and focus group transcripts, I used the revised schema to code the remaining ten interviews. I also included my journal entries and memos into the coding process. Upon completing the coding of the interviews, memos and journal entries using the initial code set, I conducted a round of Second Cycle coding using categorical pattern coding and a condensed and edited descriptive code set. My research questions helped me focus my codes and look for larger themes that were emerging for the data. This prompted further consolidation of my categories until larger patterns emerged such as are found in Appendix E. It was using these pattern codes and descriptive codes that themes emerged more clearly and this provided me with further insight to the literature surrounding citizenship education and the development of civic identity and some structure to present my data findings. After reviewing the categories and themes, I went back through my interviews, focus groups, jottings, memos and observations using this lens and looked for further evidence of these themes.
Chapter 4

Understanding and Conceptualizing Civic Identity

This chapter reviews data on how the Chinese International students at Veritas School in the U.S. understand and conceptualize their civic identity. The data provide a glimpse into how civic identity is formed in both a Chinese and American context as well as insights into the formative factors that comprised that development. The subjects of my study, like many students their age in high school, were not explicitly aware of what the term citizenship means, or of what civic identity consists, and were provided with no definition. However, the students were able to describe how they see themselves and how others see themselves as citizens in China. The students interviewed came from various socioeconomic backgrounds, diverse educational backgrounds, and assorted cities from the Chinese mainland (Table 2). The students described themselves as patriots, admired tales of their ancient heroes, and in general expressed a love and a pride in their country, as represented by its rich history and accomplishments, and admired China’s development into an economic powerhouse in modern times. At the same time, the students were also highly critical about many facets of China as a whole, especially when discussing the Chinese government, its approachability, and their individual and collective ability to influence Chinese policymakers and government officials.
As part of the research, the students were also asked about their ideas regarding American citizenship. The primary questions that I asked (Appendix A) were similar to those asked of them about Chinese citizenship. Like their answers to what citizenship consisted of in China, many Chinese students referred to American citizenship and some of the duties of being an American as rule following, obeying the law, paying taxes, and not committing crimes. Patriotism was also discussed, expressed through actions such as reciting the pledge of allegiance in school and loving one’s country. Other characteristics that were mentioned were being loyal, honest, and a good person. One student also mentioned the importance and function of the court system in the U.S. as a way of solving disputes and problems within the community.

The themes relating to the conceptualization and understanding of citizenship and civic identity that will be discussed in this chapter are:

- citizenship and civic identity in China and the U.S.
- hypothetical experiences of engagement
- trust, distrust and voice
- the tension between family and community ideals

**Citizenship and Civic Identity in China and the U.S.**

In alignment with ideas posited from Rubin (2007), Youniss, et al., (1997), civic identity was not fixed or stable, but was constructed over time through actions and experiences using a variety of sources. In this section, the twelve
students in this study describe their journey of development and their conceptions of citizenship and civic identity.

**What does it mean to be a Chinese Citizen?**

To begin my inquiry into citizenship and civic identity, one of the questions that I asked the students was, “What is a good citizen in China?” and “What does a ‘good citizen’ in China do?” After some puzzled looks, all of the students responded in ways that reflect personal and government responsibility and the generally accepted norms of any community. Answers from some students were “to love my country” (David), “be a good patriot” (Tina), “follow all the rules and we should help poor people, we have to donate [to poor people]” (Crystal), “pay taxes, follow their rules, vote and those kinds of things” (Iris), and “a good citizen should take care of himself and vote” (Avril). One student also commented saying:

> I think being a citizen in China you just need to take social responsibilities. You need to pay the tax to your government and you need to... In China because we only have the one party, which is the communist party and we need to... In school they're always teaching us that you need to love your country, you need to love your party. (Jerry)

Another student recalled her conception of a good citizen saying:

> I think the good citizen in China is to do your best, to protect your own community, I think, or just do what government ask you to do, or maybe just to not go against with them. Try to have some contributions, I think. (Esther)

These responses also strongly reflect a focus on the Chinese “ideo-moral” education characterized by Lee and Ho (2008), which included political,
ideological, and moral education. These three tenets substitute for formal
citizenship education in China, as no course or curricular strand defined as
“citizenship,” or explicitly and publicly directed to this purpose, exists in the
official Chinese Education curriculum. One student, who attended a school in
Beijing, remarked that her teachers were also helpful in her moral development:

Well, teachers tell you what a good person is. What things you can't do. What things you mustn't do. Because we are a community, so usually contribute to your society. So far, you accumulate knowledge, you accumulate experience, you accumulate so-called good behaviors in school, which paves the way for your future when you graduate from the college. You apply for some job career. That's what my school teacher says... (Lavender)

Another student remarked that being a good citizen was to, “commit no
crimes and have good morality” (Eileen). One student, reflecting on political and
ideological education strands, included citizen rights and responsibilities in her response saying, “Even though I'm automatically a Chinese citizen, because I was born in China, but I think to be a true citizen I have to love the country and you have certain rights and responsibilities as a citizen” (Kelsie). One student also spoke of good habits and dispositions saying, “It's to tell you to help people and some person who is old or got trouble just help them, and to be respectful to your father, the teacher, or be nice with your friends, and your classmates” (Ray). Westheimer and Kahne (2004) argued that these comments aligned to their model of a personally responsible citizen.
As illustrated by the students' previous words, following the rules and obeying the “rule of law” was an important concept in the mindset of any “good” citizen. The “rule of law,” and a court system able to enforce the laws, is a newer concept in China, but one that is growing in importance in China’s transformation to a socialist-centered democracy, and a country that is being heavily shaped by a free-market economy. One student remarked that,

If you have money in China, you can get away with a lot. That is how it works in China. In America, it’s no matter if you have money or not if you do this, something wrong you just wrong. (Ray)

Other students referring to good morals described that being a citizen in China meant, “following laws and not committing crimes” (Iris), and to “do the things that keep you out of prison” (Avril).

The statements from the students reflect that they regard citizenship as behaving in a personally responsible manner and acting individually towards others and their community. The students’ words highlighted the importance of civic and social responsibilities and obligations while making little mention of their individual rights and the rights of others.

What does it mean to be a U.S. Citizen?

All students were asked about citizenship in the U.S.. Using the questions “What does it mean to be a citizen in the U.S.?” and “What does a ‘good citizen’ do in the U.S.?” the students commented on their conception of and understanding of citizenship in the U.S.. Some of the students’ responses
were consistent with their personally responsible view of citizenship, but some included other aspects of citizenship including autonomy. One student commented that, “I think there are some similarities being a citizen here you also need to take social responsibilities, you need to cut your grass, you need to pay the taxes” (Jerry). Several other students commented on personally responsible traits remarking, “You need to do pledge of allegiance” (Eileen), “first you have to follow the government’s rules” (Eva), “I think being a good citizen in the U.S. means paying your taxes and voting” (Tina), and “pay taxes, vote and those kinds of things and participate and be a part of society” (Iris).

One of the notions that emerged from the data was the important concept of freedom and liberty to express your opinion and make choices about one’s life. Several students commented saying, “freedom for rights… for choosing, electing your leader. The liberty and obeying the laws, Be honest. Do not kill others” (Lavender), and “That’s what I think about America, is freedom. You can be a communist here; you can run for president here even. You can join the KKK” (David). One student phrased this idea succinctly in saying, “in America, it’s ‘if I can do it, why not? If I can do it, maybe I just do it. Why do I have to leave it to another person?’ That is the good citizen, I think, in United States” (Ray).

Other students commented specifically about the freedom to express oneself openly without fear of judgment or retribution and the frequency and importance of doing so. “If you have the opinion, you should say it to make the country be better, and there will be someone who will hear your opinion” (Esther),
and “I think in the United States people discuss about government's decision more than people in China” (Kelsie).

The students also mentioned that being a U.S. citizen conveyed a neoliberale transportable social capital. Two students remarked on this point saying, “In America, it's like you have a green card that allows you to travel around the world and also live in America” (Iris). Another student commented on this idea saying:

I think being a citizen in U.S. is more like a passport because I know like Chinese business man or like alien workers they all got green card or even the citizenship in here… I think being a citizen here is just freedom and you can, you know, you can be who you want to be. (Jerry)

Finally, one of the themes that emerged, which was different from pervious responses, was a greater emphasis on being a part of the community. One interviewee commented saying:

A good citizen should feel responsible for what happens in the community, not just his or her homes, so he should care about the good of the whole community and society. He should have a job that is beneficial to other people. He should pay his taxes on time. He should never intend to hurt anybody. (Kelsie)

The importance of community will be addressed more substantively later in this chapter, as the frame of community was an important concept in their development of notions of citizenship and civic identity. Many of these ideas and concepts mirror those previously expressed by the students about China and
could be framed by Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) typology of the personally responsible citizen.

**Hypothetical Experiences of Civic Engagement**

A student’s conceptual construction of citizenship and civic identity may happen as an outgrowth of their civic engagement (Youniss, McLellan and Yates, 1997). To try to understand the students’ level of civic engagement, I proposed hypothetical situations to them in two contexts. The first context was out of school and the second was in school. I did not want to give them a particular scenario at first, but when my question was met with puzzled looks, I felt that offering them a follow-up scenario was useful. In contrast, later on in the interview, I asked the same questions pertaining to their current town or community and their current school.

*Response to a Hypothetical Problem: Taking Action in China*

In the first scenario, the students were asked what they would do if they observed someone that did something that was injurious or dangerous to others, such as dumping garbage, a chemical, or gasoline in a body of water. This question was asked to get a sense of how a Chinese student might respond to a problem and whom they might contact if they witnessed such a problem. An analysis of the students’ responses revealed the following: Three students were not sure how they would respond or did not answer, four students would not respond to a problem if they observed it, and five students would either report the
problem to a local official, a department, the police, or a teacher. However, two of those five who indicated that they would respond, expressed skepticism over whether anything would be done about it. Students who indicated that they would not respond at all said that, “No, we don't really do that. I think we don't have the way to contact the government” (Eva), and a second student remarked, “I mean if I saw this I probably wouldn't do anything. I probably would be silent” (Jerry). Reflecting this same idea, another student commented:

Yeah, but that depends, because I’m very busy that days. I won’t do anything. I think in China, there are some TV shows, they go to a lot of places to interview them, or to record the things happen. There are some people who are willing to report these things. The government, they are trying to change the situation. (Esther)

Lastly, another student responded saying:

I think because I was raised in China, I don’t think I have a sense of interfering with things like that because in China, as I was talking about, being a citizen basically to me is to not commit crimes, to not cause mess and chaos in the society, and to maybe have a voice when other country tries to take over our land or something like that. It's basically not to break the laws and cause trouble in the community. (Tina)

These quotes indicate and highlight a lack of desire to assist or intervene and a limited trust in the government. They also illustrate some characteristics of personally responsible citizens who according to Westhiemer and Kahne’s (2004) typology of the personally responsible citizen, often have more of a personal and individualistic mindset and less of a participatory one. One could expect similar answers from many American students.

In contrast, five students commented that they would try to reach out in some way to a local official if they saw or experienced something that could be
injurious to them or someone else. One student said, “Because police should be in charge of that I think in China. He’s dumping stuff I don’t know it’s probably going to affect my safety I guess” (David). Another commented saying, “I’d call someone. I’d probably want to ask my mom which number I should call” (Avril). A third student said she would do something like call the police but wasn’t sure that was the correct entity to address the problem:

I guess we are not allowed to call the police. It's more like a waste of time calling them and they're not really taking care of this. Only when you see people get in fight or it's going really serious and a car accident, that's the time you can call the police. (Iris)

Lastly, two of the students expressed a skepticism and suspicion about whether anything would be done if they reached out to an authority. One interviewee said,

Maybe I would write a letter to them, but I think they'll probably just ignore it. I will tell my mom first and let her contact the ... I don't know what its called, It's for the people who manage this place [this type of problem]. (Crystal)

A second student commented similarly saying:

Because nobody will take care of that, for example, if I got a trouble, I got a problem and I need government to fix for me. For example, I want to contact the president of China. I won't make it because the people in China will just block it or they just can look at the letter and say, “Oh, well, who is this guy?” Maybe they see this one. It’s because they have a thousand letters going to the government everyday maybe even more than ten thousand, maybe a hundred thousand letters. They just throw it away. They didn’t even check, which is why I can’t contact the government right away. If I have to, if I want to contact government, the only thing is, for example, go to the news or if you have money, just go to see some person who will listen… (Ray)
While some students clearly wanted to find a way to intervene and developed a civic consciousness as discussed by Tong (2012), no students indicated that they would directly intervene themselves, and several of those that wanted to do something expressed that contacting an authority would not be fruitful.

**Responding to a Hypothetical Problem: Taking action in the U.S.**

All of the students were provided with a hypothetical scenario that was the same as the one presented in the earlier section. The students were asked what they might do if they saw someone doing something that would be injurious or dangerous to others because of damage to the environment, such as dumping garbage, a chemical or gasoline in a body of water. This question was asked to get a sense of how the Chinese students might respond to a problem and who they might contact if they witnessed such a problem in the town or community where they lived in the U.S..

In response to the question, seven of the twelve students responded that they would take some action to address the problem. While only one of the seven indicated that he would stop the person from continuing to pollute, the other six indicated a desire to intervene by writing letters or calling the police or a government official. The students were not familiar with whom to call, but they did refer to looking up the phone numbers and addresses of government officials on the internet. One student said that:
I would probably write a letter to the company and give them... Like you cannot do this. It's making the environment worse. I think they would probably reply to you if they're good, and they would probably promise me to not do this stuff. (Eileen)

The student who said that he would intervene directly commented that, “I would probably try help him deal [properly] with the stuff that he wants to dump” (David).

Other students were not sure what to do and felt at a loss to describe their potential actions. It was interesting to me that no students responded that they would do nothing or would ignore the situation. The students indicated that they believed that a responsible person or citizen should do something to address this concern and may have developed a sense of participatory consciousness that had not existed in the same way prior to their time in the U.S..

Distrust and Trust

Throughout the interview process, one of the emergent themes was that of trust. Following the rules, and obeying authority and developing a sense of agency as a citizen has the potential to build democratic dispositions by building relational and social trust between and among people, institutions, and other civic organizations. Relational and Social trust may also create an inclination towards collective actions (Flanagan, 2003). Students were deeply cynical about their trust of government authorities and officials. Aspects of this distrust arose in the previous section regarding taking action and these perceptions are addressed in greater depth in this section. The students’ distrust of and suspicions came as a
result of the perception that the government and other authorities were removed from the lives of ordinary citizens and that officials had significant power over them. One student put it this way:

Actually, all the government officials, they’re individuals. They’re in the society. They’re in the system. When they add work, they are kind of arrogant … they say- because I owned the right. I wield the power. You should follow them. You should listen to me. Whenever I implement an issue or a law, you cannot negotiate with me. You just follow it. Obey it. I’m the God. You are the citizen. (Lavender)

Another student reflected on her perceptions of the disenfranchisement that she feels:

The government in China, it’s too far away, too untouchable to me to even think about touching it, there are people who do care, but a large group of people don’t. Like me, my family, they don’t care. My mom watches news and then she reads magazines about it, but she doesn’t really talk about it all the time like, “Oh, this mayor is doing whatever, whatever, and then he’s having a meeting with this leader…” or, “Our chairman is having a meeting with Obama.” It doesn’t have anything to do with us. I think I can never have anything to do with the Chinese government. They make their decisions about which mayor to fire, which mayor to use, and which country they want to friends with, which country that they want to buy oil from, which doesn’t really have anything to do with me or my personal life or my family or anything about my life. (Tina)

Students also felt that there were clear, well-known, and understood interventions in the form of censorship on the part of the government that contributed to their skepticism and distrust of the government and officials.

We have a Chinese twitter because Twitter is blocked in China, we've got a Chinese version of it and they've got a department to delete the comments people make. If they tweeted something about the president of China and people can make the comments in the tweet but you can't say bad things about him. If you do they're just going to delete it. (David)
One student remarked that she had never heard of the Tiananmen Square uprising in 1989 until she came to America and watched YouTube videos about China. Another stated that the history of Taiwan was different in China than in Taiwan, and that each country told the story with a narrative that best fit their country’s overall position. One poignant example of censorship was related by a student who described his experience in the summer of 2015 when a chemical factory exploded in Tianjin:

They controlled the news. They say, “Oh, this explosion may be just bad,” maybe a couple of people [are hurt]. The truth is it’s almost a thousand, a thousand people died. They just say only a couple people dead. A thousand people got hurt, something like that. They cover the truth. It’s stuff like that if you don’t know. It’s like they set up this. The government set up every step and though led us to go to each step. (Ray)

Lastly, one student commented that one of the reasons why she came to school in the U.S. was the ability to use the Internet without restrictions:

[I came to the U.S.] for the ability to search on the internet. Because when you’re in China, the browser, some websites are limited. Blocked by our government. We need a special way to find what we need… Because we only have one party, sometimes, we cannot know the reality. The government hides the realities. For the public, we only know some edited information. (Lavender)

Trust is an important part of the reinforcing “virtuous cycle” between students, institutions, and organizations and it is imperative for engendering civic engagement (Putnam, 2000; Flanagan, 2003). As previously stated, the
perception of trust will be addressed again in a school context in later chapters. Juxtaposed with the idea of a lack of trust that students perceive in China overall, the students believed that citizens in the U.S. had strong sense of agency, voice, and choice when it came to interacting with the government and its officials.

**Voice**

Concurrent with the theme of trust or distrust of the government was the repeated theme of voice. Students made frequent reference to the idea that the voice of American citizens mattered and that their voice and opinions could make a difference. Students referred to the openness that citizens had to criticize their government and what was happening in the country on both a national and a local level. This happened rarely in China as citizens and students alike were fearful that their public statements and criticisms of the government would result in adverse actions towards them. While the students generally recognized that they could get away with more of this public criticism because they were only “kids,” they were still reticent to speak their criticisms publicly, even at school. To clarify this point, in most public schools across China, one of the administrators is a ruling member of the local CCP. Two students spoke succinctly about their sense of disconnection and powerlessness to take action on any given issue. One student commented saying:

It [the government] doesn't really affect me. It's still doesn't ... I lived in that country, but I don't really get involved with the government a lot. Let's say if you just live in China as a normal person, you just hate the government, but you can't do anything about it. You can't protest. (David)
The second student expressed her frustration as she commented on her perceived powerlessness and lack of agency:

We just talk, not to do something to try to change this situation, because we know that we don’t have that much power to change it. We do have opinions, but we can’t talk about it at home or at school. We talk about the political things in school sometimes in class, but we will not express this to the government directly, because it doesn’t matter about what we say. The thing is in America, every person is a part of the government, or the part of the nation. In China, the government controls us. It’s not just control, but it’s like the government leads us to the direction or to somewhere, but people always do not have opinions about that. (Esther)

In contrast, the students openly commented on their perceptions of how citizens in the U.S. voiced and critiqued the government. One student remarked:

The United States people, they have the power to tell the government what they think. I don’t know if that’s true but I feel like the people can tell the government what they think, how can they change, how this place can be more better, how to change this place. (Crystal)

Another student commented similarly, saying:

They [Americans] are more free to express their opinions, and they talk about how they want the government to improve. They talk about other possibilities. I think that being a good citizen means that you have a mature worldview. You don’t have to listen to whatever the government officials say, but you want the best for the country, and the best for the people. (Kelsie)

Students also commented that people in the U.S. do not just criticize the government and its officials, but they also openly debate controversial issues such as gay marriage and immigration, and offer solutions to problems and try to
make society better. One student commented regarding the impact of her voice and the voice of Americans saying:

Maybe here, actually I believe I have more of a voice, but it just set to my mind that I don’t have … It’s just in my mind it’s not my business. I can’t really do anything about it, which I can’t. Even in China or in US, I feel like I actually can do something about it, but I’m just not going to bother because I feel like I'm such a tiny piece of this huge community. I know it’s a different sense that I have between … I'm sure American citizens doesn’t think the way I think. I think they have more of a desire to say to advocate for what they think needs to be done in the community. They would actually have more energy and the drive to actually take action, which I don’t have, just because I grew up in China. (Tina)

This student’s comment regarding the desire and energy to make a difference in the lives of others was representative of comments by others in the study. The students also revealed how Chinese citizens, such as their parents, frequently criticized the government in private or anonymously online. Significant criticism and critique of the government and its officials happens using social media. As mentioned previously, the Chinese government monitors, edits, and censors critiques of the government and its officials on social media and websites. While the online opportunities provide the students and other citizens with some semblance of voice, the ongoing censorship of their posts contributed to their overall distrust.

**Cultural Tension Between Family and Community**

While there is a significant cultural component to the hierarchy perceived by the students when it related to the importance of individuals, families, and the
concept of community, the interviewed students frequently mentioned the importance of family, and meeting those needs first before addressing needs or issues within the community. This cultural tension does not imply that students are not concerned about community or have even expressed a consciousness towards serving the community, but rather, in their minds there is a cultural hierarchy that focuses their lens first on family and then the larger community. This sentiment was clearly expressed by one student:

Regardless of how school taught us to help others as a part of community, I didn’t really have the sense of doing that when I was still in China. I think most of the students, teenagers, or adults, what’s on their mind is to do well in school and then to take care of their family more, instead of community, I think. (Tina)

Chinese students discussed the importance of their families and respecting their elders and treating others well. While this is often a universal cultural value in most societies, these students are referring to the writings and philosophy of Confucius. One scholar suggests that, “Confucian values tend to emphasize responsibilities of the individual (i.e. filial piety) rather than the rights of the individual, which may result in a rather passive form of citizenship” (Zhou, 2002, as cited in Tu, 2011, p. 444). This sentiment was echoed by a student interviewed when she said:

I think in China family is the first thing for us, because we’re born from our family, and we do have the responsibility too, to do something for our own families. Friends are our second circle, because we need friends in our lives and we do have friends in school every day, we meet them, we talk
to them. In the community, I don’t think it’s the same as here, because we
don’t put a lot of time to do something in the community. (Esther)

In commenting on the importance of responsibilities vs. rights one student
commented saying:

People in China, we don't really care about other people around us. They
care more about taking care of their families, so if government has a new
policy, even though some people may not agree with the policy, but they
will not express their opinions. As long as the policy doesn't hurt them,
they don't want to say anything. (Kelsie)

The strong, traditional influence of Confucianism in China cannot be
ignored when personally responsible citizenship is discussed in a Chinese
context. While concern for the larger collective in the Confucian tradition is
important, it is subordinate to individual responsibility and the ongoing investment
in, and responsibility for family. This “familial” filial piety ethos may help address
and restrain the concern of rampant individualism, but it inhibits the cultivation of
civic practices and participation.

It was also expressed by the students that one reason community
belonging does not exist the same way in China as in the U.S. is due to China’s
size and scale compared to the type of intimacy present in the U.S.. Towns and
cities are larger and more impersonal in China and there was less of a perceived
sense of belonging. In the students’ minds, there was also a lack of ownership of
activities and events that happened in the community. This was expressed by
multiple students and commented on by one interviewee:
In China, it's like only the government is in charge of making progress. Since we are not really in charge of that, we become less interested in improving the society because we have only a sense that someone will take care of it so we don't need to worry about it. (Iris)

In addition to the belief that someone else would take care of problems and issues, students’ discussed that that their individual actions had little impact on society in general. In a rudimentary way, community was discussed, but rather than being intentionally appreciated, developed, and nurtured, community was the bi-product or result of individuals taking care of themselves and their families. One student commented on this idea saying, “If everyone contributes to themselves and their family, the community will be better” (Lavender). Several students also discussed the idea that it would be unusual to help a random individual in the community and that people would think that this type of behaviors was strange or odd. This was articulated by one student when he said:

The Chinese people are more unified in family than here, you [wouldn’t] just go up to a stranger and help them. I would not do that back then when I was in China because you're not relevant to me and we're not family. People would think that you were weird. (David)

However, not all students remained focused on prioritizing family and “filial piety” over that of the community. One student reflected and elaborated on her experiences and notions of the importance of community. When asked about the importance of community in America, she commented:

I feel like that aspect, like how they see things are different because I know family is a great …. It’s a very important concept in America, too, but
American citizens obviously have a stronger sense of community service and they obviously have more actions as for community service than the Chinese citizens. I think having a community is a key to having a united country as a whole. I think to work as a whole, requires everybody’s own work as an individual. I think that’s what the citizen is responsible for. To help to serve from little and then from little things to bigger things, just whatever you can do because even though as a citizen you’re just one person, it seems like you can’t do a lot but if you start together from smaller things and then expand it, then serve bigger …. Let’s say just serve somebody around you like your classmates, and then serve the school, and then you get to serve the community, and the community forms the country, I think. I changed my view of being a citizen when I came here hugely because all were out serving communities. (Tina)

The last quote provides some evidence that community can be an important part of how the Chinese people view themselves and their community. Historically, Confucianism has been used by the government to stress individual responsibility over the development of a collective “others.” However, more recently, scholars have started to address and talk about the growing body of research and opinion that Confucianism may be an effective way of cultivating community in China. These scholars argue that the core values of Confucianism, self-cultivation and self-enrichment, can be positive factors leading to active participation. Under Confucianism, students see the importance of contributing to the harmony of society by cultivating themselves (Zhou, 2002, as cited in Tu, 2011; Li, 2009; Fukuyama, 1995).
Chapter 5

Formative Student Experiences at Veritas School

It has been well established that students can learn their conceptions about citizenship while at school in a multitude of ways (Schaps & Lewis, 1998; Torney-Purta, 2002; Parker, 2003; Hess, 2009; McAvoy & Hess, 2013; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Morgan & Streb, 2001). Even so, the nature of citizenship education, and the effectiveness of specific practices employed in schools and classrooms, is of great debate among scholars (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Galston, 2001; Galston, 2007; Parker, 2001; Parker, 2003). Torney-Purta’s (2002) IEA Civic Education Study’s results suggest that three elements of school are important to civic education: the formal curriculum, the culture and climate of the school, and the culture and climate of the classroom (p. 210). This research informed an important aspect of what I observed and learned through my study. Namely, that the school’s culture and the culture of the classroom environment are foundational aspects of the students developing and understanding ideas of citizenship, and ultimately, their civic identities.

When considering citizenship education and the development of civic identity of students in school, Schaps and Lewis (1998) discuss the importance of reviewing the informal curriculum of relationships, classroom management, and organizational climate and policies. The first section of this chapter will discuss the ways in which students participated in or were engaged in the Veritas
school community. This section describes how students responded to both hypothetical and real problems posed within the school context where the students had to make choices about intervening or not and what actions to take or not take. The second section describes how the students were or had been engaged in the school community and what structures existed for them to become engaged. These structures included: the Ambassador Program, Co-Curricular activities, Student Opted Academic Resources (SOAR), Interscholastic Sports, Service Learning experiences and the effect of being a part of a faith community. Lastly, the importance of having choices within the school community was explored.

**Solving Problems at Veritas**

One of the ways that students were able to identify elements of the culture and climate of the school was through discussion that the students and I had around a hypothetical problem. All students were asked about what they would do if they encountered a problem or a situation in school that they wanted to address and what action they might take to resolve the problem. The students asked for clarification and a context for the question so I pointed to the blue recycling container in the room and asked them that if they wanted to start a recycling program at Veritas, would they do so, and if so, what actions would they take to make it happen. Ten of the twelve students responded positively indicating that they would take some action(s) to address this problem. The responses to my question fell into three categories. Six students responded that
they would contact a teacher or school authority. One student put it clearly when remarking:

If you think of Veritas as a country, I can easily go to Mrs. Wright to say something that I want to say. Even though not everybody goes to Mrs. Wright all the time, but I would feel okay. I don’t go to Mrs. Wright all the time, but I feel okay if I want to say something. (Tina)

When commenting about contacting a teacher, one student remarked saying, “The teachers can help us solve problems” (Esther). One student commented that he would talk to a teacher and ask to create a SOAR class. “I would go to a teacher and talk to them about it and maybe start a SOAR... because we have a lot of SOARs trying to help the school. I don't think it's really hard to do that here” (David). Two students, indicated that they would contact a student government group such as class council or a student advisory group. Two students also indicated that they would talk with friends and if they thought it was a good idea, they would seek the help of a teacher. With respect to this hypothetical scenario it became clear, that students perceived a trust among their teachers and administrators that permitted them to voice their opinions and to participate in solving problems while at school.

Hypothetical problems were not the only context that students addressed solving a school-based problem. In a focus group, one student, Avril, indicated that a student (a Korean) in class insulted the Chinese students by calling them “dirty,” because of the pollution that exists in the country (Focus Group 2). As a
result, the students decided to go to the principal and discuss their feelings about
the insult. The principal met with them for some time and told them that she
would respond appropriately with the student to address the remark. While the
students were not completely satisfied because the student was not thrown out of
school, they were pleased that their concern was taken seriously and that the
student’s remark would be addressed. In another interview, Tina revealed that
she had gone to the International Student Director to discuss how she could
improve the orientation for the incoming International Students. This
conversation resulted in the development of an International Student Leadership
team.

These actions represented the importance of trust in creating a meaningful
school culture and climate. The students perceived that all members of the
school community, such as other students, teachers, staff members, and the
principal listened. One student remarked that, “If I were to go to the principal to
talk to her about my ideas, she may think to help me, but in China I don't think
the teachers would, because they're too busy handling other stuff” (Kelsie). Along
those same lines, another student remarked “I feel like our opinions [in this
school] are always being respected and treated seriously” (Iris). By valuing and
respecting the student’s voices and responses, the Veritas community engenders
a sense of trust that is vital for the nurturing of democratic citizenship (Flanagan,
2003). Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) argue that schools are often the first
place that young people encounter authority and rules and that this initial political
socialization is formative in promoting further extensions of democratic citizenship and social trust in a larger societal context.

**Student Engagement in the School Community**

A sense of belonging within the community was fostered by many activities sponsored by the school, either as a formal part of the regular program, or as specific activities offered to international students. This section discusses the ways in which students engage in various required and optional school activities. It also reveals the importance of how students in American schools often have choices about classes and programs in which they choose to participate.

*International Student Ambassador Program*

One program that the students discussed in their interviews was the Ambassador Program, which pairs International students and American students in the school. This program is not required, but strongly encouraged for all international students in the school. American students who want to be a part of the program fill out an application that is reviewed by principal and the International Student Coordinator. In past years, the group has been responsible for providing support to international students, sponsoring cultural celebrations such as Chinese New Year and other holidays, student dances, and is the organizing structure for destination trips and local outings. Examples of these destination trips include Disneyland, ski-vacations to New England, and visits to
New York City and the surrounding boroughs. In addition, cultural trips regularly include outings to Chinatown in Flushing, Queens and Manhattan, and Koreatown in Manhattan and in Fort Lee, NJ. During these trips the International students are the guides and the intention of the trip is to put the American students in the place of “outsider” and learner to contrast the daily experiences of the International students who are living in a culture that is unfamiliar to them.

Regarding her experience with the Ambassador Program one student remarked:

As Chinese we know what’s going on, and what international students really want. We’re able to help them get through the first hard couple days. When I came, there was no one there for me. I was scared. I’m really glad that I can actually help with someone to get to know the school and figure out any problems. They know there’s some people they can call. If they feel lonely, they have someone with them. We actually got to plan events for the whole school. We can plan for the trip to China Town and New York. I feel like it's really important for us that we bind the American student and Chinese student together. (Avril)

Another student reflected on her experiences with the Ambassador Program saying:

I tried to go to every new student orientation. I tried to answer all the newest kids, like they are asking questions which basically are the same. I would spend my whole night answering the same questions to five different people, and then type everything all over again or just screen shot it and then tend to, “Here’s the questions, here are the answers.” I still feel like I can do little because it’s an awkward position of being a person who tries to get involved in American community and also try to help the Chinese or international students in general. (Tina).

Co-Curricular Activities

The students also recounted the opportunities to be engaged in other activities in the school. Overall, ten of the twelve students chose to participate in
co-curricular activities. These activities included class council, peer-to-peer leadership, student senate, and various academic, interest-based, and sports related clubs.

Five Chinese students who were interviewed participated in school leadership teams such as Class Council, peer-to-peer small group advisory sessions, or Student Senate. One student, who was on Class Council and a peer to Peer advisory group leader commented that, "I felt like I was helping, and I tried to give out my opinions to help other students, especially freshmen who may have been struggling" (Tina). Another student commented that as a result of being on the Class Council that she was “being trained for future leadership through their work” (Iris). Lastly, a student recounted her pride in being given the responsibility to “make decisions that benefitted others in the school community” (Eileen).

Six students had participated in one or more co-curricular activities while at school. These groups afforded them the opportunity to pursue a personal interest that they had which was academic such as Math Club or German Club, sports related such as Golf Club, or a talent or passion that they wanted to explore such as singing.

*Student Opted Academic Resources (SOAR)*

One unique option at Veritas for engagement and participation that students mentioned was that they could participate in SOAR. Student Opted
Academic Resources is a 40-minute period each day when the whole school stops its regular academic programming to provide a time and space for students to select activities of interest. Depending on the nature of the SOAR, the duration can last for several weeks or exist in perpetuity. During a SOAR period, students can see a teacher for extra-help or enrichment, attend a special interest SOAR such as robotics, origami or film study, or SOAR can be used as a study hall. While there are many ongoing SOARs that exist, students may also create a SOAR with the support of a staff member to explore an area of interest. In order for a SOAR to be accepted, it must have a minimum student attendance. Three students discussed the opportunity to use the SOAR model to pursue an area of interest. Jerry, who has a passion for watching, creating, directing and producing films, created a film study SOAR that was popular with students.

I was really excited to share my love of film with other students. You know I am a film-maker and I was able to help other students learn about making films for their interests. It was great to have American and International Students in the class and I was teaching them. (Jerry)

Lavender discussed getting a team of students together to start a SOAR to establish a Model United Nations Team.

Another student and I wanted to extend our understanding of international issues. We saw an opportunity to also get other students involved and we talked with our Dean about starting SOAR. We met for a few weeks and found and advisor and created a team. (Lavender)

This team is travelling locally to compete on behalf of the school. As discussed earlier, David discussed creating a SOAR to pursue the hypothetical school-based problem that I presented to him.
*Interscholastic Sports*

The students commented positively on their involvement with sports and athletic teams as a way for them to be a part of the school community. Seven of the twelve students participated in one or more interscholastic sports teams. Students appreciated the ability to join athletic teams and for many, it was the first time for such an activity. In terms of athletics, there were many firsts for these students. For some it was the first time they had participated in organized athletic competition. For others, it was the first time that they had ever attempted to play a particular sport. As for others, it was the first time that they had been a part of a team or a group sport. While there is a paucity of scholarship on whether or not participation in high school athletics can contribute to overall citizenship development, students reflected on these activities positively, revealing interesting insights. The students commented saying that, “when I first started playing tennis and we lost, I was mad at my partner. But, I realized that I needed to change some of the things that I was doing and to communicate with my partner better” (Avril, Focus Group 2), and “when you are part of a team, you need to do your part for the team and persevere.” (Jerry). Finally, one student who was a varsity basketball player commented that:

I learned to collaborate and cooperate with my team members during the game. When we were in China, and I was the best player, I wouldn’t pass the ball a lot, we didn’t do teamwork, it was just street ball all the time. (David, Focus Group 2)
These examples highlight that something as commonplace as interscholastic sports in U.S. schools may have a lasting impact on students as they consider important aspects of what it means to participate on a team or in a community.

**Service Learning**

One area of significance that emerged from student interviews was the requirement for service learning. At Veritas, the service learning requirement is called “Faith in Action.” All students, international and domestic, are required to complete service learning activities in two areas. The first must be outside the school and the second must be connected to the school or an agency of the school. Much has been written about the effectiveness of service learning, including its connection to citizenship education and impact on helping students develop the acquisition of skills and dispositions that gird citizenship (Morgan & Streb, 2001; Kahne & Sporte 2008; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Other scholars have disputed the effectiveness of this practice calling it forced charity or volunteerism that creates a culture that reinforces established hierarchies (Pompa, 2002; Robinson, 2000).

While many of the students acknowledged that at first they participated in service learning because it was a requirement to graduate, many looked back and were thoughtful and reflective about how their experiences affected their lives. One student noted that her service learning experience,

**Helped me care about others around me…**. Caring for other people, aspiring for something more, you want to be good citizens, because you
have to care about the whole country, the whole community, rather than just your own circles... I got to know other students on my team and I learned that you should never judge people before you get to know them. (Kelsie)

Another student revealed,

While at first it was something to just get done to graduate, when I actually did it, I realized the meaning behind it, why I need to do this, because through helping others, I feel like I can have a sense of achievement for myself... I can help and that I am valuable. When I see other people do community service, what struck me the most is just seeing how they can pay such a hard work into serving others without getting anything in return, it really just makes me think why are they doing that? because they have a sense of serving others. Whether because they are children of Christ or being a citizen that's trying to help the community out, I think it's a valuable characteristic that I really want to learn. I think it's precious.... A sense of, I can do something for them caused me to step out and try to do something for them. (Tina)

Others realized that America was not the same for everyone and that there were inequities among people. “We went to Lynn, Massachusetts, and I know that every country has poor people, but I just didn’t realize that they can be that poor in Lynn” (Eileen).

Another common theme to emerge from the students’ service learning projects was that service to others connected them to the larger society more so than that of their local community or school. One student commented, “If you do this type of work, you are not only related to society, but you are also giving back to it, and others will be affected by you”(Iris). Another student commented about her service learning experiences saying:

I learned how to do more with your community, not just yourself. You’re not just a person, to do things that will only benefit yourself, but you should do something benefit your community or benefit others who need your help. (Esther)
Tina, who commented previously, also discussed how she felt American students were more participatory saying:

I think they [American students] have more of a desire to advocate for what they think needs to be done in the community. They would actually have more energy and the drive to actually take action, which I don’t have, just because I grew up in China. (Tina)

A Faith Community

While not specifically asked about their religion or Christianity, as not all students who attend the school are Christians, some students talked openly about their faith, the opportunity to study Christianity in school, and the overall impact that it had on school culture. One area mentioned consistently was morning devotions. Each morning at the school, a teacher or student reads a few verses of the Bible followed by some personal thoughts, an article, or an experience, followed by a brief prayer in which student requests for prayer are encouraged. Several students mentioned the importance of the daily devotional time in creating awareness of community and world events as well as modeling care and concern for others. Avril recalled a devotional where, as a part of prayer requests, she had asked for prayer for her friend who lost her passport in China and was not yet able to return to the school. She was impressed that throughout the week other teachers asked about her friend’s situation. The daily devotional time was also a time when students became aware of global connections. After the terrorist attacks in Paris in November of 2015, several
students recalled the prayers for those who died or were injured, as well as for the victims’ families.

Other School Practices and Choice

The development of community as well as a sense of empowerment was also fostered by other school practices, some of which were unique to the school, and others that were common to the American way of educating students. The “freedom” to select courses of interest was mentioned by every student as a positive aspect of the school. While this “managed choice” is common to most U.S. schools, the Chinese students appreciated taking classes other than their core subjects where they could explore their talents, hobbies, and interests or investigate new ones. The courses mentioned ranged from art and music to computers and website design. One student, Jerry, who is heavily involved with amateur filmmaking commented:

Freedom is always great so you can study what you want to study. For example, if I wanted to pursue my career as an artist you know as a filmmaker, I should always draw a lot of things to describe what is in your mind. I can study more history and I can study more in general I can study anything it would be helpful for me as a future filmmaker, which is what I want to be. The choice and the freedom is significant, it gives you the opportunity to do the things you want to pursue. There is a chance and it is here for you and you can just go for it but in China you need to study math, you need to study poetry you need to study Chinese and all different kind of courses and I don’t think it would be helpful for what I want to be in my future. (Jerry)
However, the idea of choice and freedom also operated on another level, which we might also call autonomy. Some students identified that they also had the choice to do nothing and that their time was their own. They could choose to not participate in organized, co-curricular clubs and activities or sports, and instead, use their time afterschool for their own interests in their own manner. Jerry also noted that freedom to choose also meant that students could make choices that were not in their best interests:

Sometimes I think it's a good thing for student to have a clear dream have an ambition and a desire to study, want to get more knowledge, want to pursue their dreams. It's also a very bad thing for students, some international student come here they are suffering and struggling. If they're not getting the education they need like just to relax they might choose video games. It's not totally their fault because in China they always have a supervisor around them but now the supervisor is gone and their parent is gone. (Jerry)

Classroom Climate, Culture and Community

Torney-Purta’s (2002), Hess, (2009) McAvoy and Hess, (2013), and Schaps and Lewis’ (1998) work additionally revealed the importance of classroom climate and culture in creating spaces where citizenship education could best flourish. This section describes the ways in which the interviewees described their classroom experiences. It begins by describing their interactions with the teachers at Veritas. The second part of this section reveals the multiple ways in which classroom practices and pedagogy, such as classroom deliberation, reinforce a sense of student voice and agency in the classroom.
Teachers

Routinely, the students interviewed described their relationships with their teachers and other school officials. Students referred to their teachers as kind, caring, inspiring, and motivating. Some said that they “loved their teachers” (Lavender), and one said that, “she had an easier time connecting with her teachers than the American students” (Kelsie). In response to questions about teachers in the school, all of the students were able to identify at least one favorite teacher and many mentioned several teachers in the school. The common thread established in the responses of the students was that they regarded teachers as a positive presence to help them grow as individuals and help them learn. One student said that, “The teacher’s role in this school is not to show, not to tell, but to guide us” (Lavender). Commenting on how teachers were invested in the learning of students, one student said that the “teacher, Mr. B., would stop and say, ‘oh, you guys didn’t get that, lets go back and look at it again…’” (Esther). Another student responded:

In the ceramic’s class, Mrs. A. always encourages the students, and I feel more [em]power[ed] to do the work. I have a good attitude to do the work. She gives us a very positive attitude and I’m in her class right now and I feel like I should encourage other people and let them have a positive way to do everything. (Crystal)

Others felt supported by a teacher, Mr. A., who, according to one student, says:

“You guys know it but you just don’t know the language,’ so he always let us use translator (electronic dictionary) for it. In class, he would ask American students, ‘If you go to China and history class, how will you do?’” (Eva)
Eva also commented that the opinion of international students was frequently solicited during the class to add perspective. These experiences revealed the importance of social trust that was vital to the development of a diverse democracy (Flanagan, 2003).

The students also remarked on the role of the teacher as being more than about academics. Several students shared that they would make themselves vulnerable to a teacher and that they either had already, or would be willing to share a problem or struggle with a teacher. Other comments about teachers that were not related to academics were that, “we share our troubles with them” (Esther, Focus Group1), “they help us pull together like a family” (Jerry), “that the teachers are interesting people” (Ray), “teachers share personal experiences with us” (Iris), and that “they help us develop our faith” (Lavender). In this environment the teachers are seen not just as educators but as adult mentors invested in more than just their academic performance.

*Classroom Deliberation*

By far the greatest quantity of comments from the students was in response to primary and secondary questions that they were asked about critical thinking, the forming and shaping of opinions, and the use of discussion and debate in the classroom. Parker (2003), Hess (2009), Hess and Avery, 2008, McAvoy and Hess (2013), and Fishkin (1991) argue that dialogue and the discussion of current events, controversial issues, and political topics are a
primary way of preparing students for civic engagement. The students consistently commented on the substantial amount of discussion and debate that happened in their classrooms. Vygotsky (1978) highlighted the significant role that discussion plays on a personal level.

When asked why they thought this was the case, the students answered, “Students will get the knowledge through the process of discussion” (Jerry), “They are making me think the things I wasn’t thinking before and they are giving me a new aspect and new perspectives of things” (Tina), and another stated:

I think they just want to know how we understand it. They want us to use our own words to talk about what we learned from the class. I think they just want us to use our own words. It's not just some of the answers from the book. (Crystal)

Another student commented on the how the class discussions permitted teachers and students to have conversations and to criticize those in power:

I think the teacher just wants the students to know that nobody is perfect, even if he's the President, he makes mistakes. For the country's good you should judge the President .... You have to make him pay for what he did wrong even if he's the President. Everyone is equal here.” (David)

The students also shared that they frequently spoke about controversial issues in class with their teachers. Topics mentioned included slavery, racism, health care, the Iraq War, 9/11, terrorism, homosexuality, poverty, the presidency, politics, and the treatment of indigenous peoples. While some researchers (Hess, 2002; Glynn et al., 1997) argued that students might be reluctant or hesitant to share their opinions for fear of criticism and judgment, this did not appear to affect the desire of these students to participate. One student
remarked that, “I participate sometimes and I feel like it’s sort of cool you guys can talk about it legally in class. We don't do that in China, I wish we could” (David). Another insightful comment came from a student who commented on the teacher’s strategy of using debate in the classroom:

He gives us this topic and then they makes us split into two groups and then we have to debate on it. Everything has two sides, I think... He was not trying to get the students to fight towards each other, but he was trying to use a form of debate to make us understand different people in that time, what they're thinking, what they needed, what different things that they need, or different things that happened to them that make them different people. I think I like the debate because the single story about any group of people is not totally true. Generally, it helps me open my eyes and give me new perspectives. That’s my biggest understanding of taking the classes here, to make me think and make me have new perspectives... I feel like the History class that I have here, my teacher takes it to a next level of making me think why this happened and what can we do to prevent this thing [from] happening, if it's a bad thing. If it’s a good thing, why is it good? …Because this governor considered what parts and what aspects of the people were met or who complained. (Tina)

Fishkin (1991) and Hess (2011), argue that teachers need strategies for inducting and engaging students in political conversations and encouraging a deliberative democracy. Students also shared that they were challenged in class though the discussion of current events and other topics to grow in their understanding of the larger world around them and develop opinions about situations and events of the world. The students commented that through discussions on current events, “they were able to know the world better” (Tina), and that, “we can understand why this other country is having these things
[problems] and why America is not having them” (Crystal). One student also remarked that:

I think it’s a better way to let us think, and not tell us what to do. I think in here [class] we learn more about our own thinking. I think in here, we think more maybe, more than we think in China. (Esther)

In my observations of classrooms the participation rate of students was very high and it was clear to me that the teacher consciously created this expectation. International student participation was indistinguishable from that of other students in the class. As I charted participation rates in each of the seven 20+ student classes that I visited, the maximum number of students that I observed who did not participate either in discussion or presentation was four.

Students also felt empowered by their sense of agency and voice. In one case, a student identified a key pedagogical construct in many U.S. schools, that of a gradual transfer of responsibility of learning from the teacher to the students.

We, ourselves give the lecture to the rest of class. We can actually tell the rest of students what we think. If we have a question of the teachers, we can actually tell them about the question [in front of] the whole class... I think the students actually are in charge here in the class. (Avril)

Our discussion of classroom climate, culture, and community would not be complete without a few words from students who did not find the pedagogy and practices of teachers helpful. One student commented that, “It made me really [feel] like dying because the teachers here will always ask you for thoughts and I don’t know what my thoughts are” (Eileen), and a second student said:
It may be just me but I don’t really have strong opinions about things…
[Americans] are very strong in their opinions, Chinese kids don’t have this. It may be because we cannot articulate all of our thoughts clearly in English, but [some] don’t say anything. (Kelsie)
Chapter 6

Formative Student Experiences in China

The previous two chapters established a foundation to help us unpack and understand the experiences of these students while growing up in the Chinese public school system. Chapter four provided an understanding and conceptualization of civic identity, the origins of civic identity out of civic engagement, the effect of social trust or distrust and student voice, a contrast between family and community ideals, and a typology of civic identity that we can use as a lens to view this population of students. Chapter five unpacked the various experiences of the students in the school and in the classroom and the formative effects of those experiences. This chapter delves into the students’ public schooling experiences in China using their own voices.

The purpose of this chapter is to understand the foundation of their conception of citizenship and civic identity as well as to present themes that emerged from the interviews and focus groups. The chapter is broken into three parts. The first section reviews the nature of the Chinese education system through the eyes and voices of the students in a broad context. This section is divided into subsections about the primacy of achievement, the intense pressure and competition that students face in the system, and the individual nature of the “work of school.”
Second, in line with the analysis based of the students’ American school experiences, there is an exploration of the students’ school experiences in China. This section is divided into sub-sections about the primary aim of school, the pressure to achieve, and the focus on individual effort. The second section looks at school climate and culture. The subsections in this chapter contain student responses to a hypothetical problem, how time devoted to school work constrains the time for exploring personal interests, the lack of student choices and co-curricular activities, experiences with service learning in Chinese Schools, and impressions about the overall structure in Chinese middle and high schools. The last section discusses classroom climate and culture. This section is divided into subsections about obedience to school authorities, the role of teachers, and classroom practices.

The Chinese School Experience

Primary Aim of School

In all aspects of the Chinese system, there is a complete focus on the achievement of students. The purpose of school is to acquire knowledge. Put simply, the role of the teacher is to teach knowledge and the role of the student is to learn the knowledge that is transmitted. One student stated that, “the schools in China are just school, nothing else” and that “every day seems the same, we just study, study, study” (Crystal). Other students described their educational experiences as, “growing their ability to study” (Lavender), and “managing
knowledge” (Jerry). While in their Chinese schools, and faced with few choices, most of the students and their families accepted that learning and the accumulation of knowledge was their primary task, but some felt that it came at the expense of other things like morals, friendships, and their own interests. One student said that, “the learning [in China] is all knowledge that we are not using” (Jerry). Another student said that the purpose of high achievement in school is to “go to college, get a job and benefit society” (Crystal). One student who attended a top tier school early in her education commented:

The nature of class in China is, you sit down and you pay attention and then the teacher is responsible to give you whatever information and knowledge that you need, and you are responsible of learning it. This is the classroom in China. You are also responsible for understanding the knowledge, not as much as applying the knowledge to life or doing your life application, but it's basically to understand the knowledge. (Tina)

Pressure to Achieve

Much has been researched and written about the Chinese education system and the pressure to achieve that students feel in Chinese schools (Fisher, 2014; Tang, 2014; Zhao, 2013). Based on my interviews, this pressure is tangible and comes from many different sources. It often arises from the students themselves, but also from their parents, and the school culture, and it is rooted in the nature of the education system itself. Competition among students for scarce resources and even more rare educational opportunities are the engines that drive this pressure for the students, their parents, and the schools.
The competition for top spots in Chinese schools and ultimately for acceptance to top colleges in China is fierce. There are too many students and not enough openings at the universities and there are few acceptable alternatives to college for students and families wishing to obtain further education. The competition begins in the earliest ages in school. Students are given final exams in elementary school and those exam scores determine what middle school the student will attend. At the end of the three years in middle school, students are given another final exam, the Zhong-kao, which determines their placement in high school. This exam is particularly important for students and parents. For the student, it will determine his or her placement in high school. All students desire to attend a top high school, which often ensures a good life and therefore the students' score on this exam is very important. One student who began her education in a top tier school remarked:

I feel like for Chinese kids, the schooling starts as long as you can talk and think quickly. I was an excellent student when I was at the younger stage of my childhood age, I guess. I was top at everything. Everybody loved me just because I was good at everything. When I was younger, I could recite more than a hundred Chinese poems and stuff when I was at the age of three. This situation kept going for a while until I went to middle school. When I was in elementary school, that sounds very young, but it’s a big deal because you just go through those ages and then you know where you are among your peers. I think that’s important.

That’s why I feel my perspective towards myself, towards my own academic level or capability changed after I went to middle school. Because I had good record and grades when I was in elementary school, I took some competition like tests, and then I got good grades. Those grades got me into the top middle school in my city. I started to compete with all those top students. Even in middle school, the pressure, ughh… [was a lot]. I did not achieve as well in middle school, compared to my peers.
I know I wasn’t going to have a super awesome great life after college, after work, but I was trying to strive for it. (Tina)

A student’s score on the high school entrance exam is also important to parents because it may determine how much a parent may need to pay in tuition for their child to attend high school. Students who do not receive the highest scores on the exam, and who may not be automatically admitted based on their score, may attend if their parents are able to pay for the tuition. The tier of high school that a child may attend is a significant source of pride for parents and often determines the future educational experiences of that student and the economic well-being of the entire family unit. One student, commenting on the intense competition in school said, “In China every high school has arranged that you must achieve a score in order to get in. They don't see your application, they don't see your essay, the only thing is to select your score” (Jerry).

At the end of the high school experience, all students take the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) or Gaokao and the score on this exam is the only determining factor for their college entrance. This funneling and sorting system ensures that only the most proficient and high-achieving students enter the top colleges in China. Unlike the U.S., where there is arguably a college for everyone, Chinese students compete for these scarce spots at the top universities throughout China. Two students commented on the pressure to succeed in the following manner:
Both, [my own pressure] and the pressure from our parents of course is real. If you go to secondary school in China you've got to take the Chinese version of SAT and it's a big deal, a really big deal for most of us. We have teachers always talk about that, like you've got to study hard; otherwise, you're going to fail on that test. (David)

Another remarked saying:

In China [it] is all about competition because there are many students and educational resources are very limited. I think that was the reason why it's very competitive. The environment is to push the students to do their best. (Jerry)

The goal of the student is clear: Study hard, learn the information that the teachers transfer to you in preparation for the Gaokao, and you will find success in the university, in your job, and in your life. Failure to succeed on any level in this system severely limits the student's chances of success in his or her life as well as the family’s success. There are limited other educational opportunities for students in China, and in such a competitive job market, the scarce spots at top universities are highly prized. Remarking on getting into the most elite universities, one student said:

All the kids want to go the top one (college), or other kids want to go to a college, go to a university…. Everyone needs to try their best, to get a better grade, so they can go to college or they can go to a better university. (Esther, Focus Group 1)

The system described above exerts significant pressure on students.

Even when students are sorted into tiers of schools, the internal pressure manifests itself in many ways. One student commented that:
Sometimes, my friends ask me questions. I'm just saying, "I don't know" but actually, I know that. The teacher will tell the whole class who got the top [grade] and who got the last one. It feels like, I should get good grades so if the teacher says the rank, so I don't feel like the loser. It feels like in China, I'm a little selfish. In China, the class, we have a rank. (Crystal)

Another commenting on the intense pressure between students said,

After mid-terms and final exams, the teacher will rank us according to our scores, and sometimes the ranking will be posted, so everyone can see who got what, and it was very ... I wasn't very comfortable with that. I don't know what it's like in America, but people in China don't trust other people. There are too many people in China, and many people are so competitive. We have so many people, but we only have limited amounts of resources, so many people in China are very competitive. (Kelsie)

Hard work and long hours are a typical part of Chinese students’ experiences. This exerts significant pressure on them especially when it comes to mid-terms and finals. Many students shared that all of their work in China was not graded. Homework, quizzes, and other tests are only a means to an end: the mid-term and final. A student could choose to take these formative assessments lightly, but most do not. They understand that not completing homework and studying insufficiently for general quizzes and tests only makes the work of studying and memorizing information for the mid-term and final that much more difficult. One student’s comment on this point was as follows:

I think it depends on ourselves. If you want to get a better grade, then you should study hard, even though it doesn’t impact on your GPA. If you don’t do the homework, you won’t know the next day what the teacher teaches. In China, the teachers are more, how do I say that ... In America, the teachers care about if you learn it or not, if you can’t understand what they teach. In China, teachers just teach what they should teach. If you don’t know, you can ask her, but they just teach. They prepare what to prepare.
I think all the students should learn this, but some students, they don’t want to. In China, our GPA system is different from here. The teachers don’t care about your normal quizzes or tests, or your homework. The only thing they care is about your final. We don’t have the quiz, the test, the homework on our GPA. The only thing on our GPA is our final exam. (Esther, Focus Group 1)

Several students also commented that competition to get into top schools created opportunities for corruption and favoritism within the system.

My father and my mother pay. They pay money. They open a backdoor for me to help me to get in that great school. That is how you work. That is the only way I can decide to choose the school. (David)

Another student commented similarly saying:

Unless you're very, very famous, like you've achieved a lot of, like a huge award, like you got a student Oscar in film or you have scientific discovery or be recognized by blah, blah, blah [person or group], you know. You know what I'm talking about. It must be a very, very huge award. You can be in the newspaper, so then you have some freedom. (Jerry)

These comments also reflect the structure of the Chinese high school entrance and acceptance system, where a small percentage of slots are reserved for the students of parents in China who have the significant means to pay full tuition for their child to attend the top school. While acceptance to the school does not always translate into academic success in that institution, the wealthy parents of these students also provide other supports to their children such as tutoring and academy training to give them every opportunity to succeed.

A Focus on Individual Effort

The students described that the nature of the schooling experience in most schools in China is focused on the individual rather than the group. Hansen
(2013), in a study of students in rural China, discuss that education in China has an individual quality reflecting a growing process of individualization that increasingly influences Chinese society. Students are taught to be responsible for themselves, their actions, and their academic performance. It was revealed in my interviews that this individualistic culture is reinforced by the nature of the classwork that students' experience while at school. While classroom experiences are discussed in greater depth later in this chapter, students describe their work as "listening and taking notes" (Crystal), "doing homework" (Avril), "filling out worksheets" (David), "practicing for tests" (Ray), and individually completing "exercises" (Eva). One student specifically noted that, "the teachers never give us group projects [to complete]" (Avril). The "work of school" in China can best be described as a series of tasks that need to be completed, which was echoed in one student’s thoughts when she said, “When I was in China, [my work] is to finish this test, finish this homework, and get into a good high school” (Tina). These descriptions are a reflection of the individual work ethic that is promoted by a common ethos of self-reliance, personal responsibility, and self-sacrifice.

One student commented that the individualistic ethos in their Chinese school also illustrated a lack of community within the school.

I think the reason why we don't have a lot of community in China is because we're more selfish and more think about our self as individuals not as a group of people. I'll put it these way ... if I cheat here in America you will have a direct bad reputation because everyone will know about it and they will say that you're a cheater and stuff. It takes a big price to
cheat in a test here, then in China, because in China if you cheat you don't care about it and nobody will hear about it because you are just you. It’s I don't care about you, you don't care about me, because we're just two individuals. (David)

School Culture and Climate

As previously discussed in Chapter five, Torney- Purta (2002) Fishkin (1991), Hess (2011), identified that school culture and climate can have a significant effect on the development of citizenship and civic mindedness. This section identifies the dominant themes that emerged that pertained to the students in school. Themes that will be discussed here include: taking action in a hypothetical situation, lack of choices, time constraints, service-learning and the structure of school.

Taking Action in School

In an attempt to understand the students’ level of civic consciousness, I proposed the same hypothetical situation as I did previously in the American context. The question that I asked was if they encountered a problem in school that they wanted to address, how would they do so? For clarification and context, I pointed to the blue recycling container in the room and asked them that if they wanted to start a recycling program in their school in China, would they do so, and if so, what actions would they take to make it happen? The responses to my questions were as follows: Five students said that they would not take any actions to address this problem; three students responded that they would have to talk to a friend about it first before taking any action; three students responded
that they would talk to a teacher or school authority and one student responded
that they would bring the problem up in a student council.

The responses for taking no action revolved around a few different ideas.
One student said that there “would be no advantage [to him] personally and
would not be included on is transcript for college... it is not wrong- so no one
would get in trouble for it anyway.”(Ray) Another student put it this way:

First of all I was just thinking about my grade. That's true because I think I
don't have time. I don't have time to think about the community issues and
I would just concentrate on my studying. It's all the parents and teachers
care about. More importantly, I think the teachers are more like-
concentrate on your study and they're only caring about your study and
your grade. While the community issue I think the teachers never teach
the students about what community issues we have. Sometimes we do
but it's just not a lot and we don't seek the importance of that in China.
(Jerry)

Echoing similar sentiments another student remarked:

We don't recycle in China. The school is about how to study, it's not about
doing other things like recycling stuff. If you told your parents you were
recycling stuff in school they won't be happy because you're suppose to
study in school. I definitely wouldn't do it in China. People would judge
you. (David)

Lastly, one student said that she would complain about it personally, but not take
any action because, “I don't have a sense of having a say.” (Tina)

Some students replied that they would talk to their friends first to see if it
was a good idea. If it appeared to be a good idea, the students would then
consider going to a teacher. Of theses students who responded that they would
contact a teacher after talking with friends, two were skeptical that anything
would amount from this action, as they characterized the teachers as “very busy” and “they would want us to focus on school” (Kelsie). The other student also suggested that while she would contact a teacher, “the teacher would probably not make my dream come true” (Iris). Three students also responded that they would seek out a teacher or other school official to discuss this problem.

Additionally, in response to my question, two students from top tier schools offered specific past experiences where they had actually contacted a school official where those actions taken had resulted in a change:

Because at our school, we have to come to school on weekends to study more, to learn more, but I think it's not good, because the government, they don’t allow the school to do this. I just reported this and then the school just cancelled classes. Sometimes, it works. (Esther)

The second student recounted a situation with a foreign teacher that troubled her and she had contacted a school official by writing a letter.

I guess he [the teacher] comes from Britain or Russia. Yeah, Russia. He's a bad guy, and probably he wasn't familiar with teaching 55 students simultaneously so he said some bad words. It was like, ‘You guys are such pricks’. I heard that. I wrote a letter to my principal. I do not want this teacher to teach us continuously, so he was fired. (Lavender)

Throughout the interview process, with a few noted exceptions, it became clear that students were inclined to regard their experience at school as a place only for formal education and not as a space for them to develop other important lifelong skills such as communication, problem solving, negotiating with fellow students, understanding the roles of a group, and especially practices of
citizenship that contribute positively to shaping and helping to improve their overall community at school. It was also evident that the teachers and school authorities should not be approached lightly because of their authority. There was significant reservation and even a sense of fear of approaching an authority figure. The strong reaction to not intervene at all and the idea that before approaching a teacher or school authority that the students would need to talk about it first among themselves could be indicative of the manner in which the students are socialized to accept the status quo whatever it may be.

*Choices*

Students in Chinese school have little choice in the courses that they take each year. Since schools are already divided into tiers by student scores, all students in the same school take the same level of classes. Students are prescheduled by teachers and school officials for eight periods a day in Math, Chinese Literature, History, English, Politics and Science classes. All students acknowledged enrolling in some form of physical education, which they described as an exercise class. Depending on the school they attend, students may have an occasional interest class such as art or music, but these are few. Accordingly, students were always encouraged to keep focused on their main academic subjects and not to spend time on other less important subjects. One student commented:

We have a speech competition in China in school. I spent one year in high school in China. When I have school, my teacher always told me that I
should not spend much time on the preparing of the speeches, because the main thing to me is to study, study for the college, study for the Gaokao. (Lavender)

Another student cited his lack of “choice and freedom” (Jerry) in his school, but most other students accepted the lack of choices as an inevitable part of their school fate.

Lack of choice or limited offerings also extended to other school based programs. Co-curricular activity opportunities were very limited in Chinese public schools, although four students expressed that they had the opportunity to explore other interests while in school. These activities were very limited for most students for several reasons. First, time in school or out of school did not allow for these co-curricular activities. Second, these activities were not considered the primary focus of school. Lastly, these afterschool activities were not well supported by the school. Two students mentioned that their school had a class council, but it was also reported that, “The teachers just tell the students what they want them to do” (Tina). Two students also reported that they had been in an art class and a sculpture class. However, the students also commented that the school had very “limited supplies” or “no supplies at all” so they could not “develop their abilities in this area” (Iris). One student mentioned that she participated in co-curricular music experiences.
Time Constraints

The students consistently spoke of the many hours that they spent at school and doing homework. While there was some variation in the starting and ending times of school, the typical school day in elementary school began at 7:30 a.m. and ended at 4:30 p.m. The middle school also began at 7:30 a.m. and ended at 5:30 p.m. The high school experience was more intense. While classes started at 7:30 a.m., students were expected to be present earlier to study and review, and classes ended at 6:00 p.m. for dinner. Homework was completed from 7:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. Several students also attended academy classes after school and on weekends. Students who lived more than a short walk away, described living in dormitories. Most students commented negatively on the effects of learning in a high-stakes environment. Often, this revolved around their inability to study and explore other areas of interest such as art, drawing, filmmaking, recreational reading, and other hobbies. Some had personal interests and passions earlier in their schooling lives, but because of the time constraints due to studying, they had dropped those interests. Three students who had significant interest in activities such as piano, art, and filmmaking commented:

I guess I wanted to stay away from studying a little bit to have a new environment where I can draw, I can study art, and do some outdoor activities. In China students pretty much study all day long, and that's not what I wanted ..., I had taken piano classes before, in China, but because of academic pressure, I quit during my middle school years. (Kelsie)
Another student commented that due to academic pressure she was unable to pursue other interests:

There is schoolwork every day and we don’t have a lot of time to do other things like what we like to do, or other interests, or the hobbies we like, or something else. The pressure in China, I think, is more than here. I think a lot of my friends, they choose to come here because they don’t want to live under too much pressure in school. I think here, you can learn more the things you never knew before. (Lavender)

Finally, a third interviewee suggested that students should be able to focus on other areas of interest:

I think a person should not just focus on one important thing. I think a good quality of a person is that they should have their strengths. If I find something I like, I should spend time on it, so I can strengthen this more, so that I can be better, I don’t know how to say it, just spend time on it and then I feel more confidence, I think. (Esther)

Service Learning

While not common to most students interviewed, three shared that their school encouraged them to do community service type projects. These were not a requirement, but service learning experiences were encouraged for applications to American colleges. The types of service experiences mentioned were serving the elderly and working in a museum. One student mentioned that participation in service learning in China was a means to an end.

It depends, their families, their surroundings. For me, all my friends are, I would say they want to go to a good college. Some of them are going to study in America. The schools will require them to do the service hours so
they have to do it. If they don't really care about it much ... if they personally don't care, they won't do it. If the school don't require they won't do it. (Avril)

The same student recounted that her mom would make her do even more community service on weekends but that she did not reveal the motivation behind such actions. Her mother sent her to a remote village in China where she was required to help build a house for a less fortunate family.

**Structure of School**

There was one aspect of the students schooling experience that was mentioned positively by six students. This was the school-based practice of organizing students into large groups or cohorts that stayed together for their three-year high school experience. This class, varied in size from 35-70 students, had a main teacher and he or she stayed with the class for their entire high school career. Subject area teachers rotated into this class, but the students remained in the same class. It was common for the homeroom teacher to teach one subject and to supervise the rest of the teachers.

In this manner the homeroom teacher served as a “student supervisor” (Jerry). Students described that, “They will have a very good relationship with classmates because everyday from morning say hello you know when the school ends they could be very interested and very, very familiar” (Ray). Other students responded affirmatively to this structure:

Even though you have sixty students and not all of them are doing great, but if you have five or ten students that are doing great, that means you
are doing great. Because the classroom sticks together and then this teacher is in charge of this class, so it’s more a sense of belonging. I do like the classroom experience in China better than here because we have one classroom that go as you go grow up for either six years in elementary school or three years in middle school. You just study and live and then spend most of your daytime with this group of sixty people, and then you do everything together. You play in the playground together. You take classes together. You take test together. You go home together. (Tina)

Another student commented similarly, saying:

I sort of miss the class structure in China because we all have to stay in the class. We won't change the classroom … I feel like the relationship between me and my classmates are stronger because we spend the day all together. I feel like I know each other more. (Avril)

Why this structure was viewed so positively could be understood in the context of the absence of any other structure that would create a classroom community in school. It also appears that, while competition with each of the students in the cohort is ongoing, that the structure creates important points in their day to connect with each other and creates a supportive, empathetic group consciousness.

School-wide patriotic Assemblies

Lastly, one state-mandated practice was to develop patriotism and a love of their country through weekly flag-raising ceremonies that consisted of the raising of the Chinese flag, the singing of patriotic songs, and the recitation the Chinese version of the pledge of allegiance. These practices were mentioned by five students. Of these practices one student said,

I don't think that they're really considering how to prepare you to be a citizen in China, but every Monday we have ceremony like entire school gathers together, kind of like pledge of allegiance here but we have flag,
we're running the pole and we're singing our national song wishing our flag raising up. I think in some parts it's just again it tells us we need to love our country is part of you being a citizen in China after I graduate. (Jerry)

Classroom Climate and Culture

In alignment with the findings in Chapter five, and based on Tourney-Purta’s (2002) and Hess’s (2011) research, themes emerged regarding the effect of the classroom climate and culture in the Chinese schools. Like in the U.S., not all schools are the same and this point should be recognized here. The students attended different schools and different tiers of schools. What follows in this section are the dominant themes pertaining to their classroom experiences that emerged from their interviews. This section contains the following sub-sections: obedience to authority, the role of teachers, and classroom methodologies and practices.

Obedience to Authority

As previously described, the focus on education, acquiring knowledge, studying, and working hard was accompanied by obedience to the teacher and others in authority. From the earliest ages of elementary school, students were instructed and “disciplined to be obedient and well-behaved” (Kelsie). This same student also commented that “some teachers just want you to study and accept whatever decisions the school makes” (Kelsie). Several other students commented saying that, “young students usually have no idea of their rights and
they just listen to whatever the teachers say” (Avril), and that it was important to “listen to your higher commander” (Iris). These comments reflect Hansen’s (2013) observations and research that revealed that students are conditioned to be law abiding and respectful within defined limits of the educational authorities.

For some students interviewed, obedience to the teacher was enforced by a rigid and strict classroom manner that often led to a fear of the teacher. Students shared that they sometimes felt “afraid” to talk about certain issues in class, “not getting the teacher mad at you for fear of being trouble” (David), and a fear of asking questions due to a fear of reprisal for not paying attention. This type of teacher behavior created the perception that some teachers are “unapproachable” and “very high above” the students. Students levied this same description to describe their principal, who was rarely seen, except for the opening day of classes, the closing days, and graduation. Furthermore, no one doubted or questioned the principal’s authority. Several students remarked that they would not share their personal feelings or struggles about class with the teacher. During the interview, one student expressed that she did not see the point of creating a negative classroom climate and saw it as a bad long-term strategy for helping students become responsible.

In China, we don’t have to think a lot what we should do or what we need to do, because the teacher already told us. I think it’s not a good way to establish a person or a student, because then if we go to the real world, or the outside of school, we won’t have the ability to fit in the situation around us, because if we go out, no one tells us how to do. (Esther)
In a system where students are expected to achieve at a high level, several students indicated that teachers also sense and experience the urgency of the primary goal of school. Verbal abuse and physical intimidation from a teacher emerged from two students’ interviews. One student reflecting on an experience with a teacher, where he was admittedly disrespectful, said:

Actually, my 8th grade physics teacher beat me once in class because I wasn't behaved well. I was really rude to him, I guess. I went to his office and took my glasses off and put them on the table and he was slapping me really hard a couple times. It happens a lot in China and parents kind of support because they want the teacher to be more strict to you so you can get better grades. That's kind of pressure you get. (David)

Another student recounted an experience with her math teacher that was similar to the first student:

Sometimes, students are very afraid of their teacher because they sometimes would hit students. Yeah, that's really scary. One time we had a math test. My math teacher, she said, "If you don't pass this score, 60, I will hit you. If you get 55, I'll give you 5 [slaps]……No, it's not every teacher. Some teachers, they're just probably going to say that. If there's something wrong, they will hit you. (Crystal)

This type of behavior, exhibited by some Chinese teachers in the classroom, did reinforce the dominant, authoritative position, perceived or otherwise, that teachers hold in China. It also created distrust and fear in the students.

*The Role of Teachers*

It is important to note that during the interview process and focus groups, eight of the twelve students recounted very good teachers and those who they
characterized as their “favorite teacher.” However, this was not true for all students; four students could not think of a single positive experience with a teacher. Two of the students mentioned in this section are the same that discussed the strict, rigid, authoritarian, and sometimes abusive behaviors in the previous section.

The students referred to their favorite teacher as “kind, responsible and helpful” (Jerry), “interested in students personally” (Esther), and “understanding and caring” (Kelsie). The teachers that best connected with students were those who were perceived to appreciate the difficulty of navigating the pressure of the education system and understanding the trials of adolescence. Two students mentioned that their teachers communicated with students online. Teachers spoken of positively by the students were the ones who were described as “caring more about the students than their grades” and “giving us pep talks” (Kelsie), “helping us live a good life” and “giving us lessons in being a good person” (Lavender), and “not pushing us all of the time but also helping us relax” (Jerry). One student commented on the fact that she had developed an appreciation of a specific subject matter because of a good experience with a teacher.

Another student shared how teachers in China play a different role than teachers they had experienced in the U.S.:

They are more like playing a different role than the American teachers they are more like a supervisor. I think is a good word supervisor you
know they're keeping track like what you are studying and if you're not studying well or you are making up your homework they will just correct you. They tell you what to do the good things like how to study well. (Jerry)

Teachers make an impact on students every day. Like education systems around the world, teachers directly interface with students and are on the “front-line" in the challenge to teach, train, and assist students in their goal to achieve. As a result, teachers are not immune from the effects of an education system that is focused primarily on the goal of student achievement. There were also recollections of unequal treatment and favoritism towards certain students that were conveyed through the interviews. One student who had been a top student as an elementary child and in early middle school commented:

I was not the top student and I was not the bottom student, so I don’t really have an intimate or more personal relationship with any of the teachers. Students like us we are in the middle and a little bit above average, get neglected the most because the teachers care about the top students where they can get top scores, obviously, and then they also care about the bottom students where if they don’t care about them, and they just do whatever they want and then they would drag the average grade of the class. It’s really understandable and I really respect that. I think it’s a really important factor to encourage both the teacher and the students to strive their best. The downside is, of course, the teacher pays seventy percent of their attention to the top students and then the rest twenty-nine percent of attention to the bottom student, and then only one percent for the middle of the class. (Tina)

Another student commented about how parents try to get special attention for their children saying:

Whenever it come to festivals, parents - they'll always send gifts, presents to the teachers, so then that way the teachers will focus more on their kids ….. The other thing is the relationship connections is really important in China. If your parents are really wealthy, rich, or they have the relationship
connected to the officials of government, the teachers and all those staff will treat you much better than anyone else. (Iris)

The performance of the students in the class on tests and assessments and their university placements also impacted how the teachers were perceived to have interacted with the students and the attention that students received from the teacher. One insight from a student explained the importance of the student’s performance on the teachers:

If you are from this class, this group, and then this teacher is in charge of this group, and then if you are doing well, that means your teacher is doing well. It’s like, if you are raising kids. If you have five kids, if only one of them success, that means you’re a successful parent. All the other ones, they’re just not striving as hard. It’s their fault. Basically, yes. That is what it is. If the teachers, their pride, their goal of life, besides getting their basic paycheck month to month - which doesn’t do anything, is able to say, “Oh, this great student in my class won the first place in this competition,” or, “Oh, this student in my class, he or she got into the top college in China,” then, people will see this teacher as a teacher that has the top students, which makes you a top teacher. Then from this way, that’s just something extra. Teachers like that, they get extra jobs. People will find them for tutoring. They will get more jobs for after-class teaching. They will have higher pay or salary, I guess. Obviously, every after-class teaching organization would want them because they’re a great teacher. (Tina)

Classroom Practices

We have already discussed several areas related to classroom practice.

Students previously discussed the individuality of their work in school. This next section illuminates those practices more clearly and concludes by reviewing these practices using the lens of citizenship education and civic identity development.
Based on my interviews, the most commonly discussed pedagogical strategy used by teachers was the standard lecture. While some local districts in China have promoted a more student-centered and participatory environment for student learning in order for students to learn citizenship (Zhang, 2008), this was not widely evident in my interviews. Students often expressed that they most frequently “sit and listen and take notes” (Kelsie). The teachers asked questions about the content of what was delivered, but this in no way resembled a discussion or conversation. One student offered that “the teacher talks more than us and because we have just 45 minutes [in the period] we do not have a lot of time to give back questions or answer the questions” (Eva). Students used words like “transfer,” “deliver,” “speak,” and “lecture” to describe their teacher’s instructional method. One student shared that his teacher is the “one who is transferring the knowledge to the students; they are lecturers like the college professors” (Jerry).

According to the students, rote memorization was an important skill for students in China to acquire and develop as recalling the details of the teacher’s lecture on homework, a quiz, or test dominates assessments, even mid-terms and finals. Several students commented on their experiences in the classroom:

The only things in China is practice, which is you have to practice this, practice that. You don’t have to know what it means. You only have to practice and just do it and just remember it. The teacher will all ask you to do that. You don’t have to think about why is this coming from. It’s very old teaching style. It’s really tough. You really need a good memory to remember that, all the stuff. When the teacher asks me to remember something or to do something, to do some work or some test, if I fail the
teacher will ask me to write a notes maybe just to copy all the notes maybe five times or ten times. There is a lot of work. Each section is a lot, maybe ten pages and that he asked me to write five times of those. You know what I'm saying? They just want me to remember all the stuff. Copy and remember. (Ray)

Another student commented similarly saying:

In China, whatever the teacher said, you just write it and then you memorize it. In China, they just talk. The teachers go through the book and let us highlight the important information. Then, we go back home and just memorize it. (Crystal)

**Deliberation**

Of great importance to the development of the concept of citizenship and civic identity is the discussion of ideas and concepts in class (Galston, 2001; Parker, 2003). Students described a didactic pedagogy along with a resistance to engage in "sensitive" issues, and that the pedagogical practice of open discussion was very limited and seldom occurred in most Chinese schools. One student simply stated that, “we don’t do discussion in China” (David). There were a few exceptions, notably of students who attended top tier schools, and a few others scattered throughout the interview data. Most of the exceptions were in non-core classes such as computers, where students would gather together to discuss how to create a graph or a spreadsheet on the computer.

With the understanding that the amount of discussion in class was limited, I asked if the students ever talked about sensitive or controversial issues in class. Ten students answered no, but two students, who attended top tier in schools answered affirmatively. One student commented that a reason why students
might not want to share their opinions with others was because, “the student might be judged for their words … and that other people might think that they are not loyal to the government” (Kelsie). Another student said that, “Students may want to talk about a sensitive issue, but that the teacher will tell them, ‘Don’t talk about it’” (David). Another student added that, “she felt that it is probably because we [the students] are too young to have our own opinions” (Iris). When asked about offering their own opinions during a discussion, one student said, “They [the teacher] may ask you about the thoughts of the figure or the people, but not your thoughts” (Eileen). Looking at this same idea from a different angle, other students also commented that when asked a question, “the students were trying to cater to the teachers. They wanted to talk about what the teacher wants to hear rather than what they want to talk about” (Avril).

Several students discussed that it was the teacher that occasionally suffered and got in trouble from classroom discussions in class. One student recalled that, “What I found is maybe the teacher will not participate in that conversation, but we can talk about it and the teacher might also talk about it without saying the sensitive words only for the reason that once, some student recorded all the things and that teacher got fired” (Iris). Lastly, a student commented that, “If you are a teacher you can’t say that sort of thing [hate the communists] because you will lose your job. But. I’m just a normal kid, so I can say that” (David).
**Ideo-Moral Education**

Students gain the knowledge that contributes to how they see themselves as citizens in their society in many ways. There is no single class whose focus is citizenship education. Rather, as Lee and Ho (2008) describe, citizenship education is an amalgam of history, politics, and ideological and moral education. The Chinese students recounted numerous opportunities that they had throughout their schooling years in China to learn about their homeland. This was done through the study of Chinese literature, Chinese history, and a Politics class where students became aware of their long history as a nation and the many accomplishments of the Chinese people. According to the students, this helped them develop a “love of their country” (Iris), to “understand and protect the homeland” (Jerry), and “a sense of pride in their powerful past” (Eva).

Some students also shared that while they had learned all of these important ideas of China, that this did not necessarily translate to being a good person or citizen because for the most part, as previously discussed, this knowledge was just learned to, “[get a] good grade on the test and get into a good college” (Crystal). Another student recounted that his experience in his Politics class was, “pretty much a brain-washing session,” because it only taught them “about how great communism is and this is important only for the reason that it is on the Gaokao” (David).
Conclusion

The students in this study have experienced radically different schooling experiences in China and the U.S. These experiences were foundational in the development of their personal and civic identity. For a majority of their formative years, the students have been educated in an environment that was highly structured and authoritative. School was experienced and perceived as a place for formal education in a structure that helped the students navigate the Chinese education system. These experiences created a culture and climate in the school and in the classroom where students had great reservation about participating in class activities for fear of reprisal or angering a teacher. It also inculcated them with a socialization that lacked trust and a sense of powerlessness.
Chapter 7

Conclusions and Implications

The previous three chapters provided analysis from the interviews with Chinese students at Veritas School. The research also addressed the following questions: 1) How do Chinese students at a private American high school conceptualize and understand their civic identities?, 2) How do their classroom experiences at the school contribute to their understanding and conceptualization of citizenship?, 3) How do the students perceive their past learning experiences in China compared to their current civic learning experiences in the school? Chapter four helped clarify how the students conceptualized citizenship and civic identity in the U.S., and in China. Chapter five provided insight as to how the students’ experiences at Veritas were formative in their development of citizenship and civic identity. Chapter six revealed the numerous formative experiences that shaped students’ notions of citizenship prior to arriving in the U.S..

This last chapter delves into the conclusions and implications from the data analysis of the previous chapters. The implications section addresses the inferences of this study for schools that enroll international students. It is also relevant for schools that desire to address the topic of education for citizenship, and how specific practices and school and classroom cultural norms influence
student engagement, civic engagement and ultimately the development of student civic identity.

**The Challenges of Citizenship Education and Developing Civic Identity**

The Chinese international students have been raised in a cultural and civic context that is significantly different than the one that they enter at Veritas. As a result of their previous experience, they have developed a civic identity that is also significantly different than the one that American students may consciously or unconsciously develop in their formative years. While both the student in the U.S. and the student in China may attain citizenship status by birth, other aspects of their citizenship and civic identity develop differently. Western-styled democracies generally adhere to the idea that one important aspect of being a citizen and an aspect of one’s civic identity, are the values that develop and influence the individual’s relationship to a local, state or national polity. Those values typically center around the rights and responsibilities of individuals and groups as they interface with government entities of various kinds. In the U.S., these political, personal, and economic rights are framed by the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights and are upheld and reinforced by a system of checks and balances between the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches of government. This is not so for students in China. While China does have a constitution and other documents that govern the rights and responsibilities of individuals and the government, there is no such focus on embracing individual rights, but rather a system that values and reinforces loyalty to the governing
body and establishes a system whereby a tightly held bureaucratic elite is established with the right to govern the masses.

Daniel Hart (2011) on the topic of civic identity writes that, “a person has identity in the sense that the individual can make judgments about the future based on his or her views concerning which qualities of the self would persist over time” (p. 772). As a result of this Chinese system, while it is significantly different from the U.S.’s democratic one, a Chinese civic identity develops. Throughout my interviews what emerged about their identity was a code of personal moral and ethical behavior that informed and governed their interpersonal behavior (friends and family) and a second code of behavior or value system that was developed to navigate interactions and relationships to those in authority both in school and out.

My study involves twelve teenagers, who by their very developmental nature, are in the process or creating and establishing their identities, including their civic identity. The students develop and embrace relationships with friends, peers, and acquaintances and the school is one of the significant places where these connections occur. The students love and honor their parents (depending on the day), and because they are not yet adults, generally have a minimal relationship with authority and government entities other than daily interactions with their teachers and school officials. In many ways this is not so very different from the lives of teenagers in the U.S. or elsewhere. Many teenagers are more consumed by their own interests than by their interest in politics, history, or
economics. What emerged from my research that appeared significantly different from what most U.S. students experience in school or out of school, were significant feelings of disenfranchisement from non-family member adults in school or elsewhere in society.

**Political Socialization May Exist in Different Contexts**

The students’ experiences in school in both contexts ground and reflect, their understanding and conceptualization of citizenship and civic identity. In most societies, schools play several very important roles in the lives of young people. Primarily, for most students, we hope that schools are places where students are formally educated using an organized, viable curriculum. A second significant role that schools play is that of political socialization. Schools are significant institutions in our communities where students learn not only knowledge, but other life skills such as working with others, listening, and playing fairly. It is in schools where students encounter a teacher and authority figure who is responsible for directing and facilitating not only the teaching learning process, but the social one as well. Almond and Verba (1963) and Gimpel, Lay and Schuknecht (2003) in their work with political socialization, posit that the first time a student may encounter an authority figure, other than a parent, is when a child enters school. All of these experiences in school are formative to a student’s development and have lasting implications beyond the school walls as to how students perceive the relationship between the individual and authority as well as social norms.
The students in my study exclusively attended Chinese public schools until they arrived at Veritas. My findings suggest that these students were socialized in a very different manner in school as compared to their American counterparts. In China, they were taught to respect and often to fear authority, to do what was asked of them, not to ask questions, and to be passive students. They were taught to be responsible students, to own and assume all responsibility for their success and to have little, if any, autonomy over their educational pathway. Their academic success was determined by their grades and scores on assessments that, throughout the process, sorted them by academic proficiency into schools that match their performance. In the Chinese system, the students see themselves as individuals in competition with one another for access to further educational experiences.

Their time at Veritas has been very different. While they exhibit a strong respect for authority and assume responsibility for their learning, they have experienced a very different structure and culture at school. The students have been invited to participate in their classes, to deliberate about sensitive issues and to think critically and to be reflective about their beliefs and opinions. They have been provided with opportunities to participate and engage in the life of the school through clubs, leadership councils, athletics, and co-curricular activities. They have participated in service learning experiences that have challenged their perceptions of who they are, who others are, and the value of “giving back” to community and society. The students’ descriptions of their journey at Veritas
indicate that they now see themselves as participants in the system and as a result have developed a voice and agency. This is a new experience for them, and one that many welcomed, but others approached more warily.

It is hard to imagine how the comparison between their school experiences in China and at Veritas could be more different. Yet, there is an interconnectedness and methodology that underpins the students’ experiences in both environments and prepares them to be citizens in both places. Sapiro (2004) speculates that political socialization may occur in many contexts and that people transmit different messages about government, politics, and citizenship to their citizens. If the students were to return to China, their past experiences in school and the political socialization they have learned there have prepared them to live as a citizen in that place. Likewise, if these students remain in the U.S. for college and beyond, their experiences at Veritas have also prepared them to engage more deeply in society and to become positive agents for deliberation, thoughtful exchanges of ideas, and change in their communities.

The emerging civic identity that the students describe about their experiences in China is one of fear of adults in authoritative positions, and yet compliance and a loyalty to those same adults who, to them, represent a government body. As such, they embraced this system of beliefs as their own despite their significant personal and private criticism. Their civic identity was also wrapped in a love, loyalty, and respect of their cultural homeland and to a
belief that in spite of their current circumstances and the current political situation in China, circumstances may improve in the future.

It may be speculated that what the students lack in China is the ability to develop civic competencies that would help them to change and shape their circumstances in future. It is here that their experiences in the U.S. at Veritas may be formative. Using the lens of Rubin (2007), Lawy (2014), Biesta, Lawy, and Kelly (2009), and Westheimer and Kahne (2004) and the voices of the students themselves in the context of school, we may begin to understand those characteristics in school that serve as accelerators or as inhibitors to the development of democratic citizenship skills and the formation of a different type of civic identity. We are also aware that researchers have suggested that civic identity is an outcome or byproduct of civic engagement and education for citizenship (Youniss, et al., 1997, Youniss, 2011). In other words, as Aristotle opined, “we are what we repeatedly do.”

**Active Participation in the School Community Fostered the Development of Citizenship Skills**

Engagement in the school community was formative to the student understanding and conceptualization of community, citizenship, and civic identity. Once in the Veritas School community, the students became very active and engaged in school. While not required, but strongly encouraged, all students participated in the student Ambassador Program that was established intentionally by the school to connect international students with other American
students. As cited in these findings, 10 of the 12 students became engaged in various aspects of the school where participation was clearly optional. These activities included student council, peer-to-peer leadership groups, interscholastic sports, music and the arts, and other clubs.

Student interviews revealed that this participation benefitted them personally in terms of enrichment, but the students also spoke about how they believed that their participation in these activities benefitted the school and other students. In this way, students developed a sense of public good and a civic mindedness that may extend to other areas of their life in their future. This idea was expressed clearly by Avril when she spoke of her own reflections about being a new student at Veritas and how she decided later to use the Ambassador Program to address some of the difficulties that she faced to make the experiences of new student less anxiety ridden. Eileen and Iris also expressed that when they became involved in leadership at the school there was a sense of empowerment and agency that emerged from those experiences. These ongoing opportunities allow the students to develop as “citizens-in-practice” as Lawy, Biesta, and Kelly (2009) attest.

When answering questions about becoming involved in addressing an issue of concern in the school, 10 of the students responded that they would find a way to address their concern. This concern for the well-being of the school community is characteristic of a citizen who has the right, but also a responsibility
to make a situation better when they are able to do so. It also demonstrates the accumulation of social capital to become an agent of change.

Lastly, the findings in this area highlight the importance to a school community of providing students with opportunities to demonstrate and lead in areas of interest, passion, and talent. Throughout the interview process, students repeatedly referenced the SOAR program as an example of where they could engage in inquiry and deliberation. Two students, Lavender and Jerry, expressed their pleasure at the ability to initiate a mini-course of interest where they were the founders and leaders. While two other students mentioned SOAR as a means to solve a problem, Jerry and Lavender were actually able to create a class about film and to begin a Model United Nations club. These successful experiences and other previously described student engagement opportunities may be predictive of future civic behavior (Theokas, Lerner, Lerner, & Phelps (2006).

If our identity or identities result because of actions that we repeatedly do, and if, as Kneffelkamp (2008) has suggested, civic identity may develop over time through engagement with others, as part of a holistic practice requiring critical introspection, and is something that is deliberately chosen and a repeatedly enacted part of the self, then these students may have started on the development of a civic identity that is lasting. Their adoption of not only personally responsible behaviors, but also participatory actions as identified by Westheimer and Kahne (2004), may guide them to become more engaged in
high school and beyond. It would be interesting to observe what course their paths may take in the future.

**Positive Culture and Climate Nurture Student Engagement**

The interview data from the study also indicate that the students’ experiences in the school, the classroom, and in extra-curricular activities, provide interesting insight as to how the students perceive their current environment. The students consistently described their experiences with authoritative adults at Veritas positively. By building a culture of trust in a classroom and in the school context, the international students were introduced to a new environment where their voices are encouraged and respected by authoritative adults. This environment enhanced student engagement and was created through an “open-classroom” schema that encouraged questioning, critical thinking, and perspective taking as supported by researchers (Almond & Verba (1963); Ehman (1980); Niemi & Hepburn (1995); Hess (2009); Hess (2011). The positive atmosphere was also aided by an overall focus on intentional community building in the school where the expectation for participation in community is nurtured by teachers, administrators and students.

The climate and culture of the school and classroom engendered a trust of the teachers and school authorities and this point is strongly supported by researchers (Flanagan, Stoppa, Syvertsen & Stout, 2010; Flanagan, Cumsille, Gill & Gallay, 2007; Flanagan, 2003). Veritas is a community-minded school and
this likely due to several factors including its religious orientation, the overall stated mission of the school, the demographics of the school, and the size of the school.

While the Reformed Calvinist religious perspective may be an important aspect of why a strong sense of community exists at Veritas, this alone could not account for the strong climate and cultural elements. What consistently emerged from interviews with students was that they felt valued as people while in Veritas. The actions of teachers and administrators were viewed positively and supportively, from how problems were addressed when the students went to an administrator, to how teaching occurred in classrooms. All students interviewed spoke positively about their teachers, who they felt were there to support not only their academic needs and aspirations, but also their personal growth. Students like Lavender and Jerry spoke of their teachers as mentors and as guides who facilitated their learning in and out of the classroom. Other students like Crystal and Tina spoke of the classroom environment that encouraged discussion and deliberation in class where they could develop new perspectives and develop and express their own thoughts on a topic or concept.

**Service Learning Nurtures the Development of Agency**

In addition to the establishment of positive school and classroom climate and culture that cultivated trust, student voice, and engagement, it was also evident that student agency was developed during the students’ service learning
experiences. In the words of the students themselves, these opportunities were impactful and were formative in their thinking and these experiences allowed them to develop perspective by “stepping into shoes” of those who they were serving and glean some understanding of the community context where they were serving.

The students’ service learning experiences facilitated the development of critical thinking skills, perspective taking, and reflection and reinforced the desire to serve again. The benefits of service learning are debated among researchers (Pompa, 2002; Robinson, 2000), but in the case of these students, their service learning experiences enhanced their development of citizenship dispositions and provided them with formative perspectives on their own lives. The reflections of the students illustrated that these experiences affected not only how they saw themselves, but also how they viewed others in the communities where they served. Chinese scholar Tong Huasheng (2012), in a study of college-aged Chinese students, affirms that Chinese students entering college have a sense of “civic consciousness” and a desire to serve, and she attested that colleges in China have recently begun to establish programs that harness this interest in service. If we accept Tong’s (2012) notion that Chinese students may have a developing civic-consciousness, then their experiences at Veritas provided them with the opportunity to put this consciousness into action. Kelsie’s admission that her experience taught her not to judge others and the need to exhibit a concern for others outside her circle illustrates the thoughtful reflection that is hoped for
when students are engaged in service learning. Likewise, Tina revealed that she felt valuable because of her experience and that she was struck by watching others serve without getting anything in return. Eileen realized that there were inequities among people, and that even in an affluent country such as the U.S., that poor people are present and that we can help alleviate some of their need, even on a temporary basis.

The students embraced the formative opportunity to give back and participate in the school community. The cumulative effect of these experiences appears to be a desire to become participatory citizens and to use their newfound agency to shape their context in ways that fit their revised values and beliefs as they pertain to a community culture. While it was clear from the data, that the students did not have this opportunity while in China, when given the opportunity, their experiences and learning in the context of Veritas manifested in a desire to be participatory members in the Veritas community. Many students who did so evidenced the fruit of their input and labor.

The students’ experiences and reflections indicated that service learning made a real impact on their conception of citizenship and civic identity by engaging and immersing them in an experience that shifted their mindset about themselves and others. While it might not be possible to generalize this for all students or international or American, their reflections and critical introspection regarding the issues with which they were presented compelled them to face their own sense of self and place in a community. Tina’s comments about her
participation and perception that American students were perhaps more inclined to address social justice issues within the community was remarkable considering the relatively limited amount of time (three years) that she had been in the U.S.. The experiences that these students had through service learning demonstrated to them that their actions could make a difference and had some positive affect on others in the community.

**A Culture of Compliance and Obedience Inhibit Student Agency**

A school and classroom culture of compliance and obedience, such as the students experienced in their schools in China, created a distrust of teachers and school authorities and diminish individual students' agency. There was both a fear of the power that the teacher and school officials had over the future of the student and family, but also a fear of being embarrassed or rebuked for not paying attention or being judged for what was said in class. Teachers and school authorities were rarely to be questioned and were to be approached with great respect and deference. The impact of this culture and climate promoted passivity among the students in all things except studying.

The students described how they felt powerless in this system and how they were not encouraged to give their own thoughts about an idea or concept that was presented by a teacher. Eileen commented that rather than offering her own thoughts or opinions about a historical figure, such as whether the historical figure’s decision was wise or in the best interests of the country, they were to
provide the teacher with the thoughts that the figure might have had. Avril also remarked that this type of classroom atmosphere often led students to cater to what they thought the teacher wanted to hear, rather than what they wanted to say.

The students revealed that classroom conversations in China about controversial topics were rare and not encouraged. The students indicated that the teacher may have feared that he or she might get in trouble with the school or Party officials if something controversial or sensitive was discussed. This atmosphere of distrust from school officials and teachers facilitated student passivity and created a lack of voice in the classroom. It also discouraged the development of student agency and the development of social capital from which students could have the capacity to express personal opinions or suggest that an action be taken to address an issue. The students got ahead in class by studying hard, memorizing what they needed to for an exam, and keeping their heads down and out of any trouble.

Proponents of deliberative democracy concepts in schools (Hess, 2009; Hess & Avery, 2008; McAvoy & Hess, 2013; Parker, 2003; Torney-Purta, 2002) argue that schools and classrooms should nurture an environment where students may develop their skills and dispositions, such as the appreciation of other points of view, weighing evidence, and seeing each other as equals, to live an engaged life in a deliberative democracy. In order to accomplish this end, an “open” classroom environment where students can discuss or deliberate “open”
questions that are often political in nature, must be established. In this study, as told by the students, we see clearly two types of school and classroom environments. The open environment nurtured skills and dispositions that promoted further discussion and action, and also created a perception of trust in the adults that worked in the school. The closed classroom environment in their previous schooling experiences, as described by the students, nurtured the opposite.

**Implications**

International students desire to achieve success in their U.S. high school experience and will often go to college in the U.S., but the skills and dispositions that garnered success in one country do not always equal success in a new context.

There are some implicit expectations that often challenge Chinese students. For example, students may be expected to engage in discussion and debate. Teachers expect that if a student doesn’t understand, he or she will ask clarifying questions. Students may be required to work collaboratively in a group. This may be a challenge as Chinese students may not have experience engaging in these activities in an educational setting, and may require direct instruction on how to do so successfully.

A gradual release of responsibility is best when helping international Chinese students manage their autonomy in and out of school. Chinese
students, whose days are completely driven by a prescribed academic program
directed toward one standardized test while in China, may need scaffolding to
navigate the choices afforded to a typical American teenager. Choices about
course selections as well as co-curricular activities can be overwhelming. Some
students may choose not to engage at all and will continue to focus exclusively
on their academic work. Others, without the heavily structured demands, may
choose to waste their new-found freedom on gaming or other leisure activities.
All students will benefit from a clear understanding of an American approach to
high school and college education that values a well-rounded individual who has
developed the whole person.

If schools want international Chinese students to become engaged,
civically or otherwise, in the life of the school, structured, scaffolded opportunities
for them to participate are best. At Veritas, it was clear that service learning was
an important part of the students’ experience. Some of the projects were done in
small groups, which gave the students a comfortable exposure to volunteer
work. Once students gained confidence, they moved onto more challenging
environments, including both individual and international service
projects. Additionally, several of the students began their work in student
government as part of the International Student Leadership Team before moving
into broader student government opportunities.

The International Consultants For Education and Fairs (ICEF) Monitor
recently indicated that 70-80% (ICEF, 2016) of Chinese students return to China
after their education overseas. Some of these students return with the world on their backs (sea turtles) navigating the cultural and economic terrain of finding employment in China and re-engaging in Chinese society. They are decidedly different from their Chinese educated counterparts due to the influence of western culture. Others return to be washed up on the shore (seaweed) unable to find a use for their western education and removed from their past Chinese lives. I believe the experiences that the students who attended Veritas, have prepared them to enter society in either the U.S. or China or another nation and these students are prepared with new found agency that may enable them to be effective citizens where ever they land.

Suggestions for Future Research

The number of international students that are studying in the U.S. and other western democracies around the world is steadily increasing. My research was a small study that involved only 12 students in one private school. It may be interesting to see if a similar study could be done in other schools with international students examining the affect of classroom and school climate and culture and service learning on the development of civic identity. It may also be of interest to study students longitudinally to observe whether or not their emerging civic identity continues to be expressed in college and when they either return to their home country or the country or countries where they settle down.
APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol and Questions

As you are aware, I am a graduate student in the doctoral program at the University of Pennsylvania and I am working on my dissertation. I am studying international students at Veritas* (a pseudonym) and their experiences.

I have asked to talk with you because you are an international student from China and have been at Veritas for at least one year. Speaking and talking with you will help me understand and learn more about international student experiences at Veritas. You are allowed to choose not to participate in this interview and that will have no impact on your standing in school. Participation is fully voluntary.

This is a confidential conversation and my goal today is to learn about you and how you see yourself as a student at Veritas. What we talk about is only to help me understand about you, your experiences in China with regard to your citizenship education and what your experiences here at Veritas have been and how you interpret and think about those experiences. There are no right or wrong answers; this project is about you and what you think and what you have experienced as a young person. You will not be identified in any way in my research and if I use any of the information that you tell me, you will be given a pseudonym in my paper.

Do you have any questions about me or the study before we begin?

*The first question is the primary question and the other bullets represent possible follow-up questions.

Questions:

• Tell me about how you came to attend school at Veritas. Why did your family want you to attend school in the U.S.?
  o Why did you/your parents choose Veritas?
  o What do you hope to gain from this experience?

• Describe your schooling experience in China before you came to the U.S. as a student.
  o What were your classes like there? What did you learn about?
  o What are your teachers like there? Who was your favorite teacher? Why?
  o How are your classes here the same or different from your classes at home?
  o Who is your favorite teacher in China? Why?
Tell me about being an international student at Veritas?
  
  What are some important things you have learned about yourself since you have been a student here?
  
  Now that you have been at Veritas what is it/will it be like to go back home? How do you feel?
  
  When you are in one place, what do you miss about the other?
  
  How has being a student here influenced your relationships with your friends and family back home?
  
  Who is your favorite teacher here? Why?

The focus of my research is on citizenship, so I want to ask you a few questions about your thoughts on citizenship- there are no right answers! I really want to hear your thoughts about citizenship.

What does it mean to be a citizen?
  
  How did your schooling experiences in China prepare you to be a citizen?
  
  What do you think it means to be a good citizen in the U. S. ?

What does a good citizen do?

Is being a good citizen different in China than in the U.S.?

How would you contact or talk a government official in China? What kinds of topics or issues would you contact/talk to them about?

How would you contact or talk with a government official in the U.S? What kinds of topics or issues would you talk about?

If you identified a problem in your school, town or city in China and wanted to solve it, how would you go about doing that? In the U.S.?
  
  If you noticed that a local business was dumping harmful chemicals into the stream near where you live and wanted to do something about it, how would you approach the problem? In China, In the U.S.?
  
  If you decided that you wanted to start a recycling program for your school how would you approach the problem? In China? In the U.S.?

Tell me about your classes at your former school
  
  Were there any classes where you had opportunities for discussion? If so, which one(s)?
  
  Were controversial issues discussed in class? Can you give me some examples?
  
  Describe your experiences here at Veritas in classes?

Can you tell me about any activities that you are involved with at Veritas?
  
  What have been some lessons you have learned as a result of being a part of those experiences?
As a student in China, what did you learn about the United States?
  o  What have you learned about the democratic system of government in the U.S. since you have been a student at Veritas?
  o  How do you think schools prepare American students to be citizens of the U.S.?
  o  What have your experiences been like here in this regard?
• Is there anything else that you wanted to share or be asked during this interview?

Research Questions
1. How do Chinese students’ in a private American Secondary School conceptualize and understand their civic identities?

2. How do their experiences at Veritas contribute to that understanding and conceptualization?

3. How do these students perceive their past civic learning experiences in China compared their current ones at Veritas?
APPENDIX B

Focus Group Questions:

What things do you have choice about at Veritas?

• Does it feel empowering to have choices?
• How is that fostered here?
• How does it affect how you see yourself here as a student?
• Could you point to a specific experience that you have had here that is an example of how a choice contributed or added to your identity.
• Do you think that your school experiences here give you more responsibility than your friends at home?
• How are those things done in China?

Tell me about how you are active participants in your education?

• How have your service learning experiences, Faith In Action projects participation in clubs and sports etc. (in/out of school) had on you?
• Have they been useful in understanding community?
• How does this participation affect other parts of your life? Future part of your life? College? Your life back in China?
• Are you different than you would have been if you stayed in your school in China? If so, how?

In your classes or in school at Veritas, if something happened to you that was unfair how would you respond?

• What would you do?
• Is this different than the experiences that you have had back home? How?
• How do you perceive the responses from authorities and teachers towards your opinions and desire to voice your ideas and opinions?
• Is there a difference between how boys and girls are perceived in this light at Veritas? China?
Research Protocol

Letter of Informed Consent for Students

Date: ______________

Let me introduce myself. My name is Richard Kuder and I am a doctoral student at the University of Pennsylvania interested in studying the experiences of Chinese students who attend Veritas High School (a pseudonym) in New Jersey. The title of my study is: Emerging Civic Identity: Understanding the experiences of Chinese International Students in a Private American Secondary School and Their Development of Civic Identity.

Specifically, the purpose of my research is to document the lived experiences of Chinese students at Veritas High School. Using the lens of citizenship education and civic identity development, I will be researching how your experiences at Veritas shape the development of your civic identity.

Participation in this study is voluntary and consent can be discontinued at any time. I am required by the university to secure permission for your participation. If you choose to participate, you will be sharing your experiences with me. Your participation in this study would involve:

- Complete confidentiality and anonymity regarding the information shared and provided. There will be no identifiable reference in the data to any specific district, school, and principal. Any information obtained will be considered confidential and will be used solely for research purposes in fulfillment of my dissertation.
- Face to face interviews (Approximately 1-2 hours)
- Permission to audiotape interviews (You will be entitled to review the transcripts and negotiate changes)
- The possible collection of artifacts from teachers at the school
I sincerely appreciate your time, and hope that you will allow me to document your experience. There is no anticipated risk on your behalf for participation in this study.

You may withdraw from the study at any time by speaking with me, and all data collected will be returned immediately.

Completion of the consent form will indicate permission to use the data obtained in the study.

Research Protocol

Letter of Consent

Participant’s Signature: _____________________________ Date: __________

Host family Signature: ______________________________ Date: __________

Researcher’s Signature: ____________________________ Date: __________

For further information regarding this study, please contact:

Richard D. Kuder
204 Totowa Road
Wayne, NJ 07470
(201) 956-5127
rkuder@gmail.com

Dr. Sigal Ben-Porath
University of Pennsylvania
Graduate School of Education
3700 Walnut Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104
APPENDIX D

School Consent Form

Richard D. Kuder
204 Totowa Road
Wayne, NJ 07470

April 27, 2015

XXX. XXXX XXXXXXX
Head of School
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Re: School Consent Form

Dear XXX.XXXXXX

My name is Richard Kuder, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Pennsylvania. I am seeking permission to conduct a qualitative study at your school that endeavors to understand the experiences of International Chinese students and how their experiences at Veritas High School (a pseudonym) may shape their thinking about citizenship and their development of civic identity. Successful defense of this study will fulfill the dissertation requirement for my Ed.D in Education Leadership.

My study involves interviewing 12 students from China who are matriculated students at your school. In order to understand the depth and breadth of the students’ experiences, I also intend to conduct several focus groups and observe the students in classrooms. Data collection procedures will non-intrusive and respectful of all participants’ time.

During the study, I will use pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of participants and your school. All audio recordings, written and transcribed notes and electronic records in connection with this study will be stored in a secured location following the completion of the study. They will only be accessible to me. All participants will be asked to sign a consent form and will be able to withdraw from participation at any time.

I believe that participating students will benefit from the opportunities to reflect on their experiences at Veritas and that the study will provide insightful information to you as Head of School. Enclosed with this document is letter
that grants me permission to conduct the study at *Veritas*. For your information, I have also enclosed a copy of the consent form that I will be asking the students to sign. You will notice that I am asking the individual student and a member of the host family to provide approval. If you are in agreement with the letter and terms please sign where appropriate and send back to me. Please do not hesitate to contact me at rkuder@gmail.com if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Richard Kuder

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**Letter of School Consent**

To whom it may concern:

I, XXX. XXXX XXXXXXX, Executive Director and Head of School at *Veritas* School, grant permission for Richard Kuder to conduct a study of/with International Chinese students at *Veritas* School. I understand that our participation is completely voluntary and that we may, at any time withdraw consent for this study. I also understand that Mr. Kuder will be asking for consent from each of the student participants and that their participation is also voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time.

Signature: ________________________________

Date:________________________
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